ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

HUMOUR IN PICTUREBOOKS: AN EXAMINATION OF ITS CONSTRUCTION AND EMERGENCE THROUGH CREATIVE PRACTICE

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A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Anglia Ruskin University for the degree of PhD.

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'Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind'

E.B and K.S White (1941)

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ABSTRACT

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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The aim of this research was to investigate how picturebook makers create humour through creative practice. It was motivated by a gap in our existing knowledge concerning the processes behind the creation of humour and comic effect in a picturebook from the maker's perspective.

As this research seeks to explore this subject from the point of view of the picturebook maker, it has been primarily led by my practice. A series of picturebook case studies were created in the real-world context of the publishing industry for the purpose of this research. The practice employed in making these was analysed and reflected upon using Schön's (1983) approach to reflective practice. The knowledge gained from this was triangulated with semi-structured interviews with other makers concerning their approaches to creating humorous picturebooks. This provided insight into the way in which they use their practice to create comic content and contextualised the knowledge gained through practice-based research.

This research found that comic devices similar to those utilised in other forms of comedy are used to create humour in picturebooks. However, these devices are employed using parameters unique to the picturebook form, such as the combination of word and image, the use of space to indicate time and the turning of the page.

This research concludes that there is an intersection of conscious and unconscious practice within my practice when humour emerges during the making of a picturebook, though it often initially emerges unconsciously as a by-product of practice. There are actions that I can engage in as a maker to promote the emergence of humour, such as what has been termed by this research as 'creative play'. These findings relate to my practice, but there is evidence to suggest that similar approaches exist in the practice of other makers.

In addition, this research identified the benefits of using the synthesis of word and image found in picturebooks to communicate research findings. This takes the form of a pictorial essay which simultaneously demonstrates and explains the application of comic devices in picturebooks.

Keywords: Humour, comedy, picturebooks, children's book illustration, practice research.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This research seeks an understanding of how humour is created in picturebooks. Specifically, it examines where, how and why humour emerges during the creative practice undertaken in making a picturebook. To obtain this practice-specific knowledge, the primary method of investigation takes the form of practice research. Methods of reflective practice were applied to critically analyse my practice as a picturebook maker and obtain new knowledge.

This thesis aims to make an original contribution to knowledge by situating this research from the perspective of the practitioner, primarily through the reflective analysis of my own practice. There is little known about how makers create humour through practice and this perspective provides a unique opportunity to examine this. Similarly, there is minimal research into how conducting that practice in the context of the publishing industry, making a picturebook for publication, affects humour creation. The practice undertaken for this research is situated within the publishing industry and therefore aims to address this gap in our knowledge.

1.1 Research Focus

To examine how humour in picturebooks is created, this thesis addresses a series of questions:

1. What is humour in the context of a picturebook?
2. What devices can be employed within the form of the picturebook to create humour?
3. What actions does the picturebook maker take that allow humour to emerge through practice?
4. How does creating a picturebook in the context of the publishing industry affect humour creation?

Chapter 2, which determines what humour in picturebooks is, addresses question 1. Chapter 4 delivers a demonstration and explanation of the comic devices that create humour in picturebooks, addressing question 2. Chapter 5 responds to questions 3 and 4, discussing how humour is created through practice and how the professional context of that practice affects the humour.

1.2 The Thesis

This thesis is presented in two parts: the written exegesis and a collection of four published picturebooks, *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm*, *Steven Seagull: Action Hero*, *The Doughnut of Doom* and *Mr Bunny's Chocolate Factory*. The picturebooks are the outcome of the practice undertaken in order to examine humour creation. It is important to view these picturebooks, as they demonstrate how comic devices have been deployed within the form of the picturebook to create humour. All four books were created in the context of the publishing industry and so are presented as published, commercial books. Documentation and analysis of the practice involved in making the picturebooks can be found in the written exegesis, which is divided into 6 chapters, the first of which is this introduction. The subsequent chapters are as follows:

Chapter 2 outlines a methodology for undertaking this research, based on Schön's theory of reflective practice. In addition, it provides context for the use of practice research and explains why it is the most appropriate framework of investigation for this research.

Chapter 3 discusses the research context in two parts. In the first part it examines the academic context, covering scholarly research into both picturebooks and humour theories, and the contemporary literary context, which discusses how humour manifests in contemporary picturebooks. In the second part, the personal context is examined to provide an understanding of how the practice in which this research is situated has developed. The professional context is then addressed in a discussion of the existing scholarly research regarding creating picturebooks within the publishing industry and the significance of creating work in this context. An examination of these contexts highlights the gap in our existing knowledge. The thesis goes on to explain how this research proposed to fill that gap.

Chapter 4 is the Pictorial Essay, which is written and illustrated in the manner of a picturebook. It is narrative, using characters, setting, word-image relationship, compositions, colour and pacing to demonstrate what comic devices can be used in the form of the picturebook, while providing an explanation of their function.

Chapter 5 takes the form of an analysis of practice, reflecting upon how humour emerged through the practice employed in creating the four picturebooks. It collects together the information in the critical analyses of each picturebook (found in appendices 1,2,3 and 4), then triangulates this with interviews conducted with other makers of humorous picturebooks and other contextual sources. It reflects upon how humour is created through practice, at what point in that practice different forms of humour emerge and how working within the publishing industry affects humour creation.

Chapter 6 offers conclusions based on the analysis in chapters 4 and 5. It discusses who might benefit from this research and suggests avenues for future research.

Appendices 1,2,3 and 4 are critical analyses of the practice undertaken to make the four picturebooks created for this research. Written shortly after each book's completion, they take the form of reflection-on-action, collecting together information from the reflective journals with manifestations and processes of practice used to create the books. These include rough sketches from the development of ideas, colour tests, experiments, correspondence with publishers, larger development drawings, rough dummy books, final artwork and the published books themselves. The knowledge gained through writing these critical analyses forms a significant aspect of the overall analysis of practice in chapter 5.

Appendices 5,6,7,8 and 9 contain the full transcripts of, and correspondence with, the makers of humorous picturebooks interviewed as part of this research. The knowledge gained through these interviews contributes to the analysis in chapter 5.

1.3 Terminology

It has been necessary to establish appropriate terminology for this thesis due to the flexible use of some of the following terms or the expansive range of existing definitions.

Comic Amusement: In this research, comic amusement shall be defined as the feeling elicited by a successful instance of humour.

Humour: This research follows Carroll's (2014, p.5) definition of humour, defining it as 'the object that causes a state of comic amusement'. Within the context of a picturebook, this could be an amusing character, a funny situation, wordplay, a visual pun etc.

Maker: Used to describe a writer and illustrator of picturebooks. The term was adopted by Salisbury and Styles (2012), because "a suitable term for the artist-author has not been found yet."

Picturebook: Used to mean the same as 'picture book' or 'picture-book'. I have chosen this form to reflect the interdependent nature of word and image within a picturebook. This form has been widely adopted by scholars and follows the precedent of use set by other researchers within my research group, such as Palmer (2016), Manolessou (2012) and Tzomaka (2017).
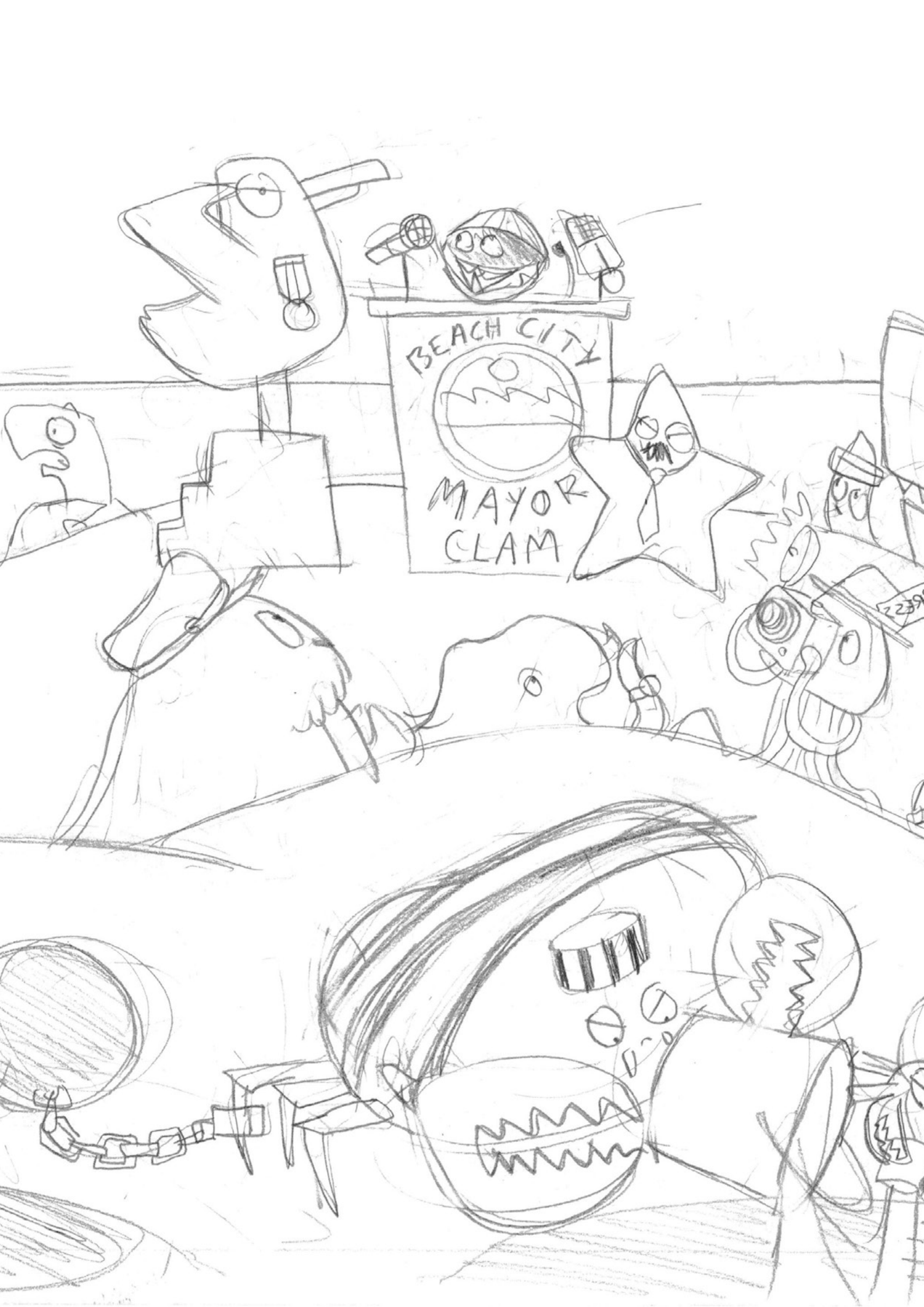
Chapter 2. Methodology

…he outset of this research, I identified that I was able to make picturebooks that elicit comic …usement from a reader. I knew that humour emerged through the activities involved in the …ative practice used to make a picturebook, but I was unable to describe how these activities …ated humour. My knowledge was entirely instinctive.

…challenge when designing this research was to find appropriate methods to demystify that …tinctive knowledge to reach an understanding of how humour in picturebooks can be created …ough practice.

2.1 Practice Research in Art and Design

This research requires an understanding of creative practice, specifically its role in humour creation. It is due to the significance of practice within this research that my search for appropriate methodologies led me to the field of practice research.

In the following section, I shall explore the context of practice research to position my own research within it and to identify effective methodologies.

2.1.1 What is Practice Research within Art and Design?

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (n.d.) provides a definition of practice research which arose as a result of the extensive debate concerning the nature of research in art and design (Gray and Malins 2004). AHRC guidelines describe this as follows:

- It must define a series of research questions and explain the reason for seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to those questions.

- It must specify a research context for the questions, why it is important that these particular questions should be addressed and what particular contribution this project will make to the advancement of creativity, insight, knowledge and understanding in this area.

- It must specify the research methods for addressing and answering the research questions. You should also explain the rationale for your chosen research methods and why you think they provide the most appropriate means by which to address the research questions.

The AHRC (n.d.) goes on to suggest that an integral part of the research would be a creative output or practice undertaken, but this would have to be accompanied by "documentation of the research process, as well as some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and as a record of your critical reflection."

This definition clearly states what should be included within the research and how findings should be communicated, but it does not suggest how new knowledge can be generated through practice and what methodologies can be employed to achieve this. To understand this, the wider context of practice research must be examined.

In his essay 'Research in Art and Design', Frayling (1993) suggests that artists and designers instinctively conduct a form of research through their practice and therefore it can be an appropriate vehicle through which to conduct more formal research. Frayling provides some clarity as to how the research integral to practice can be formalised. He suggests there are three approaches: *research into art and design*, *research through art and design* and *research for art and design*.

Yee (2010) clearly distils these categories, defining research *into* practice as research where practice is the *object* of the study. Research *through* practice concerns research where practice is the vehicle for the research, and a means by which to communicate the result. Research *for* practice aims to communicate the research embodied in a piece of design. Yee suggests that these categories are not mutually exclusive.

I believe the research presented here covers two of Frayling's categories. It is research *through* practice because it is through conducting creative practice that I gained new knowledge, along with using it as a method of communicating my results. It is also research *for* practice because the end product of that practice, the picturebooks, embody the thinking to some extent.

These ideas about practice research can provide some direction when implementing practical methodologies. Frayling (1993, p.5) suggests that research into practice would entail some activities common to art and design practice such as materials research, development work and the keeping of sketchbooks, but it should also involve 'action research', which Frayling describes as:

> …Where a research diary tells, in a step-by-step way, of a practical experiment in the studios, and the resulting report aims to contextualise it. Both the diary and the report are there to communicate the results, which is what separates research from the gathering of reference materials.

It is Frayling's suggestion that the gathering of reference materials is a common part of artistic practice, but what distinguishes practice research from creative practice is when the researcher takes a methodical approach in reflecting on and contextualising practice, which allows them to analyse and communicate their findings.

Practice research in art and design is often broken down into two distinct types: practice-led and practice-based (Yee 2010, Candy 2006, Gray and Malins 2004). Understanding these types can provide context for the kind of knowledge the researcher intends to generate and so inform the methodologies needed to approach it.

Though there is some debate about the exact definitions of practice-based or practice-led research, Candy (2006, p.1) presents the difference between the two clearly, suggesting that:

1. If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is **practice-based.**
2. If the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is **practice-led**.

In relation to these definitions, it seems appropriate to position this research as practice-led, because it concerns how humour is created through the practice involved in making a picturebook. My objective is not only to explore what kind of humour is found within picturebooks and conduct an external examination of the mechanics that bring it about, but to lead to a new understanding of practice. Through practice, I seek to gain insight into how humour is created from the point of view of the maker.

However, when one regards Candy's (2006, p.1) more in-depth descriptions she suggests that "[i]n a doctoral thesis, the results of practice-led research may be fully described in text form without the inclusion of a creative work".

In contrast to Candy (ibid), to gain an understanding of how humour is created through practice, I believe it is imperative to present and analyse creative outcomes. This requires the inclusion of the products of practice, such as sketchbook work, developmental drawings, experiments with materials, thumbnails, roughs etc. and the presentation of the completed books. This is because these materials provide valuable insights into how humour emerges and develops through practice, along with how it manifests in the final outcome, the picturebook itself.

Therefore, it might be more appropriate to position this research within practice-based research. Candy (ibid) suggests:

> In a doctoral thesis, claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes.

Though a written exegesis would be imperative to communicate the analysis of practice and so the knowledge gained from creative practice and its outcomes, for the reasons previously stated a 'direct reference to the outcome' would be essential to gain a full understanding. The artefact itself, the picturebook, does not present the entirety of the contribution to knowledge, but it is an essential factor in understanding the new knowledge of practice uncovered in creating it.

Therefore, I am left with a contradiction. Seemingly, the methods employed to conduct my research to "claim originality and contribution to knowledge" (Candy 2006, p.1) are firmly rooted in practice-based research, while the purpose of the research, to lead 'primarily to new understandings about practice', seems obviously practice-led.

At this point, I found it helpful to consider Yee (2010), who suggests that art practice PhDs are inherently practice-led because they are derived from practice and so they will contribute to our knowledge of practice. Yee describes practice-based research as a subcategory of practice-led where practice is the basis of investigation. Smith and Dean (2009) also suggest that these terms can be used more loosely, encompassing the significance of the creative output itself and its theorisation and documentation for the purpose of expanding our knowledge of practice.

By examining the context in this section it has led me to understand there are several important factors that the methodology must address if it is to be considered practice research:

- The issues or problems that the research intends to address should be defined. This point has already been addressed in chapter 1.
- The context in which the research is situated must be understood and it must be shown how it fills a gap in our existing knowledge. This will be addressed in the chapter 3.
- A rigorous record of the practice must be kept, which provides material for analysis.
- Methods to analyse the creative practice must be selected. The rationale for these methods must be understood and the reasons why they are appropriate must be communicated.
- A written exegesis must be completed to explain and consolidate the knowledge gained. It must be presented in an intelligible manner with the artefacts resulting from practice, so that a full understanding of the research can be gained.

I will explain how I addressed the remaining points in the rest of this chapter.

2.1.2 Why has Practice Research been Selected for this Research?

Conducting and analysing practice provides us with unique advantages. Indeed, McNiff (2013, p.xiii) states that creative practice is itself a method of knowing and problem-solving and we marginalise ourselves if we do not embrace these methods as a vehicle for research. In turn, Sullivan (2010, p.71) suggests that studying artists to understand their processes is a common approach used to investigate creativity. This often manifests in less formal outcomes such as Quentin Blake's (2013) *Words and Pictures,* which takes the form of a reflection on his practice. It reveals insights not evident from just examining his books. Similarly, in *Shirley Hughes - A Life Drawing* (2002), Hughes creates an autobiographical record of how her practice has developed over the course of her career, so that we can see how various events have influenced her practice.

We also find more rigorous enquiries that arguably take the form of 'research through practice' and 'research for practice' (Frayling 1993). In *Picture This: How Pictures Work* (1991), Molly Bang uses her practice to create a series of illustrations that demonstrate how the construction of imagery can change how it communicates and functions narratively. Similarly, in Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (2001), he uses his practice to analyse and articulate the principles of how a comic works.

Along with this, practice research is an established methodology when conducting doctoral research in art and design. Examples include Black's PhD *Illumination through illustration: positioning illustration as practice-led research* (2014), which uses practice research through

illustration as the method of enquiry and also the area of study. In his thesis, *A materialist and intertextual examination of the process of writing a work of children's literature* (1997), former children's laureate Michael Rosen uses practice research to examine how he came to write a series of children's poems. Through this process, he discovers how a maker's autobiography, intertextual influences and the feedback they get can influence their creative outcomes.

A field of practice research specific to the area of children's illustration has emerged from the Centre for Children's Book Studies at Anglia Ruskin University, including doctoral research from Manolessou (2012), Palmer (2016) and Tzomaka (2017). In all three, the primary mode of research was the researcher's own practice. Through its examination, analyses and contextualisation these researchers were able to make significant contributions to our existing knowledge of picturebooks, comics and illustration. This is arguably because practice research allows the researcher to access a type of knowledge that other approaches to research do not.

Barrett and Bolt (2007, p.2) highlight the potential of practice research as a way of generating "personally situated knowledge", knowledge emerging from one's individual practice, and making it external and articulable in a way it would not usually be. They go on to suggest that this can reveal "philosophical, social and cultural context for critical intervention and applications of knowledge outcomes". They suggest that it is through practice that we can access this unique strand of 'personally situated knowledge' and so it presents an effective vehicle for its research.

There are also benefits to the practitioner in assuming the dual role of researcher. From the informed perspective of the researcher/practitioner, we can identify researchable problems relating to practice that a non-practitioner may not (Gray and Malins 2004). Indeed, it was from my own position as a practitioner that I identified that I was able to create humorous picturebooks, but not how this humour was created. Smith and Dean (2009) go a step further in suggesting that the specialised knowledge that practitioners have and the processes they engage in when making art lead to unique and specialised research insights. In effect, the practitioner comes readily equipped with some of the skills required to conduct research, so it would seem suitable to deploy these skills when investigating practice, in the form of practice research.

It is because this research seeks to access the knowledge unique to practice, and due to the precedent of practice research as an effective mode of scholarly enquiry to obtain such knowledge, that it seems an appropriate methodology to employ.

2.1.3 Other Methodologies Considered

Along with established methods associated with practice research, I also considered the relevance of research methods used in autoethnography.

Ellis et al (2011) describe autoethnography as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno). Anderson (2010, p.23) expands on this to suggest that autoethnography requires the researcher to be:

(1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.

[Th]ere are parallels with the approach taken in this research as I, as researcher-practitioner, am [a] member of the research setting as a maker of picturebooks and I am "visible as such a mem[ber in] [p]ublished texts" (Anderson 2010, p.23) through my published works.

[Ho]wever, where autoethnographic approaches differ from this research is that they seek [un]derstanding of a cultural experience or social phenomena (Ellis et al 2011, Anderson 2010), [wh]ereas this research seeks understanding of practice. There are opportunities for future resear[ch] [ide]ntified in this research where autoethnography could be an appropriate method. For instance [qu]estions such as how does the culture of the UK publishing industry affect whether certain form[s of] [h]umour in picturebooks are perceived as acceptable. These questions are however beyond th[e] [sco]pe of this research. Therefore, in this instance it is appropriate to pursue art practice methods [of] research, which are tailored to obtaining an understanding of practice.

Reflection-in-action and Reflection-on-action:
A Framework for Gaining Knowledge Through Practice

[In t]his chapter, I have mentioned the idea of gaining a new understanding or new knowledge as [a pur]pose of undertaking practice research. I identified that it would be essential to find methods th[at] [wo]uld allow me to analyse my practice and so create this new knowledge. In this next section, I [wi]ll explain my framework for conducting this analysis.

[Pre]viously, I stated that my knowledge of how to create humorous picturebooks was entirely [ins]tinctive. I was unable to describe how I did it. This phenomenon does not appear to be exclus[ive] [to m]y own practice. Creative practitioners are often unable to describe why an outcome is [su]ccessful or what exactly caused it to be so. This is what Polanyi (1966) describes as "we can [kn]ow more than we can say". He goes on to term this phenomenon "tacit knowing".

[To a]chieve the objective of communicable and generalisable research through understanding ho[w] [hum]our is created in the process of making a picturebook, it is necessary to find a way to articula[te] [suc]h tacit knowledge. Donald Schön's reflective approach, described in *The Reflective Practition[er:]* *[Ho]w Professionals Think in Action* (1983), suggests a possible epistemology of practice that can [be] utilised for this.

[Sch]ön (1983, p.54-55) suggests that our ordinary practical knowledge is implicit and tacit in our [pat]terns of action. We have a *feel* for things. Often, we cannot describe these procedures and [som]etimes we are not even aware of them: they can be spontaneous. We simply find ourselves

performing them. We may never have had the ability to articulate this knowledge. Or we may have once been aware of the understanding of how to perform these procedures, but subsequently internalised this knowledge and lost the ability to articulate it. Schön terms this type of knowing *knowing-in-action.* When I unconsciously create humour through the process of making a picturebook, I believe this is an example of *knowing-in-action.*

Schön recognises that sometimes "we think what we are doing", we "learn by doing". This is termed *reflecting-in-action* and described as "not only that we can think about doing but that we can think about something while doing it". This involves being aware of the results your practice yields and making adjustments while still performing the action. The practitioner is able to consider their patterns of action, identifying the 'feel', or tacit knowledge, associated with it and responding accordingly. This dynamically creates new knowledge of how to approach practice while actively engaged in it. It is practice as knowledge creation.

Reflection that occurs within action can take several forms. The practitioner can consider the tacit norms and appreciations which underpin a judgement. Strategies and theories implicit in a pattern of behaviour can be analysed. The 'feeling' for a situation which has led to particular actions can be appreciated and analysed (Schön 1983, p.63).

I recognise this phenomenon from my own practice. When designing a character through drawing in my sketchbook, I 'feel' if it is humorous or not. If it is not, I make adjustments to its design and 'feel' that I engage in a process of trial and error to improve it. In doing so, I find new ways of creating humour, but that 'feel' is still tacit: I cannot articulate it.

Taking a more formal and systematic approach to gaining new knowledge about an aspect of practice could be one way of making this knowledge articulable. This can be done through *reflecting-on-action,* which involves reflecting on practice retrospectively. Schön (1983, p.62) does suggest that reflection-in-action can take place over minutes, hours, days or months depending on the "action present", the period of time that "action can still make a difference to the situation". Reflecting-on-action differs in that it is retrospective, taking place after the action present, seeking objectivity and distance. Gray and Malins (2004, p.22) assert that it is an essential research skill in that it allows us to review, evaluate and analyse, but also allows the space to make connections to contexts external to practice, such as the work of other makers or theory from other fields.

Distance in reflective practice can be an important factor in creating additional knowledge. While conducting her research, Manolessou (2012, p.46) found reflection-on-action an important method because it allowed the time and space to consider her tacit knowing and create a "more conscious and articulate understanding". Manolessou suggests that being removed from the act of making can provide clarity in understanding the practitioner's motives, evaluating outcomes and reframing problems.

This distance is something I found essential when reflecting upon my own practice. When I tried to reflect deeply on the tacit knowledge that I used to create humour while still in the midst of action, I found it inhibiting. This uncomfortable phenomenon can be common to many creative practitioners

when simultaneously reflecting and engaging in practice (Daichendt 2012, p.95). Instead of providing insight into how humour was created, it interfered with the tacit knowledge and made me unable to deploy it effectively. In my reflective journal on 18/09/14 I comment that:

> I became overly self-conscious. What I was doing probably became a little pretentious and the humour itself was just too knowing. After realising that I got a bit paralysed and couldn't face doing any of it.

This suggested to me that the knowledge of humour creation needed to be tacit during the 'action present', a phenomenon that I discuss further later in this thesis. This was an interesting finding in itself, but to gain any additional knowledge, it was essential that I find other ways to reflect. The way I overcame this was through the distance that reflecting-on-action offered. I would keep a detailed log of the practice used to create a humorous picturebook. This provided a record of the reflection-in-action I employed, but I would avoid analysing this further until the book was completed. Then I would assess the log and, as Gray and Malins (2004, p.22) suggest, review, evaluate and analyse the information. This allowed me to reflect upon and interpret the tacit knowledge recorded in the log, thereby employing reflection-on-action. In this way, I could make such knowledge articulable and gain new insight while avoiding the inhibiting effect of excessively conscious reflection-in-action.

Reflection-on-action can provide understanding that even the most experienced of practitioners cannot process through purely engaging in practice. It is Schön's (1983, p.61) belief that knowing-in-practice will become increasingly tacit and spontaneous as the practice becomes more routine. Therefore, the practitioner will miss opportunities to consider her actions. Through reflection, the practitioner "can surface and criticise the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialised practice, and can make new sense of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience". Thus reflection-on-practice can lead to new knowledge that practice alone cannot.

Practice research is effective in cases that are unique and fall outside the categories of applied theory. Whenever a picturebook is created it is unique because of the individual creative approach or 'voice' brought by the practitioner creating it. The act of reflection as described by Schön allows the researcher to examine the knowledge gained through their unique practice and effectively identify which aspects are generalisable.

From examining the work of Schön, it has become apparent that I must engage in the practice of making a humorous picturebook in order to learn about humour creation in picturebooks. This allowed me to engage in reflection-in-practice and develop new tacit knowledge about how to achieve humorous outcomes. To attempt to make that new tacit knowledge articulable and find additional insight, I needed to engage in reflection-on-action. Reflection-on-action can provide the method of analysis that Frayling (1993) believes distinguishes practice research from practice. It forms my framework of analysis to create new communicable knowledge through practice.

2.3 'Pick and Mix' Methods

If reflective practice was to be my framework, I needed practical methods through which I could conduct both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. However, in a studio-based enquiry, there is not a prescribed set of methods through which to achieve this (McNiff 2013). This is because practice forms the basis of the research methods, so they should be identified through, and change in reaction to, the progress of that practice (Barrett 2007). This idea is supported by Newbury (1996, p.10) who states: "research should not simply be about the application of predefined methods, but should involve the development of methodology itself". This has been my motivation in taking a reactive approach to identifying methods, reflecting upon them and adding additional methods to counter issues as they arose. This has resulted in a varied lexicon of methods, which Yee (2010) suggests is not uncommon in practice research in art and design and has termed "pick and mix" methods.

Yee (2010, section 4.4.2) suggests that art practice methodology is an assemblage which often combines not just methods of enquiry through creative practice, but can also incorporate those from the social sciences, humanities, and hard sciences to derive a suitable model of enquiry. She believes this approach was initially made necessary due to the lack of an established research framework for art and design research, but argues that it is now an established paradigm in itself. 'Pick and mix' allows for methodological innovation to emerge from the way a researcher combines established research methods with practice research methods. I shall go on to describe my own 'pick and mix' methods and how I implemented them.

2.4 Vehicles for Reflection

Having established that the framework for creating new knowledge through practice will come through reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, it then became important to identify vehicles through which to conduct this reflection. If the strength of the reflective process is its ability to explain the tacit, nonverbal and often unconscious, we must carefully select sources that can shed light on such phenomena (Daichendt 2012, p.95). In the course of this research, I was able to create and find sources to reflect upon and methods that facilitated the act of reflection.

2.4.1 Collection of the Physical Manifestations of Practice

These are the outcomes created through the practice of creating a picturebook. These do not constitute the final outcome, the picturebook itself, but the wealth of work that must be produced in order to reach that finished outcome. This includes:

- Sketchbooks
- Development drawings
- Artwork experiments
- Written notes

- Emails with publishers and colleagues
- Thumbnail drawings to plan sequences
- Dummy books and maquettes

In total, I created four picturebooks for the purpose of this research. It is from these projects that I collected all of the manifestations of practice, as described above, and kept a record of their creation. These sources provided evidence of the timeline of the book's development, how ideas changed, trends in thinking, where the focus changed, how problems were resolved and where issues remain. They make the practitioner's thinking visible and reveal the narrative of the project's development (Daichendt 2012). From these sources, we can see where reflection-in-action has taken place, what new knowledge this has produced and how it came about. It has been my experience that new knowledge can be obtained not just through their initial production (reflection-in-action) but also through their retrospective analysis (reflection-on-action). These processes have provided evidence that shows where humour emerged, how it happened and how it developed.

To gain maximum understanding of these manifestations of practice, it became important to retain everything produced in the course of making a book. I retained all the physical products - such as drawings, experimental artwork, notes and dummy books - and organised them chronologically. Digital sources, such as emails, were archived and organised by date. This made the process of reflection-on-action easier to undertake, because the narrative of the practice, how and when events occurred, was clear.

2.4.2 Reflective Journal

Throughout the period in which I was making picturebooks for the purpose of this research, I kept a reflective journal. This is equivalent to what Frayling (1993) terms a 'research diary'. He asserts that it goes beyond the usual actions of practice. As a result, it provides a significant tool for conducting practice research (Daichendt 2012, Gray and Malins 2004). A reflective journal takes the forms of a 'store' of information and a space for reflection that does not have to be purely written. It can take the form of a range of media (Gray and Malins 2004, p.59). It may contain:

- A timeline of events
- Visual and written documentation of work in progress
- Experiences in the studio and the practitioner's reaction to them
- Reflective writing on particular experiences
- The thought process behind certain actions that would otherwise remain unarticulated

(Daichendt 2012, Gray and Malins 2004)

It is important that the records in the journal are not just descriptive: to be reflective they must also seek to evaluate, summarise and critically analyse (Gray and Malins 2004, p.62).

My own journal-keeping embodied the requirements set out by Daichendt (2012) and Gray and

Malins (2004). As a result, it provided a place to conduct reflection-in-action, as its entries are created during the 'action present' (Schön 1983, p.62), the period of time in which the book is being created. This proved an effective method of problem-solving, because organising my thoughts through a written reflection allowed me to reframe problems and come to a new understanding of them, contributing to my knowledge of practice. Gray and Malins (2004) suggest that the reflective journal is at its most effective in allowing the maker to consider earlier reflection-in-action and analyse it in more depth, expand on it and elaborate ideas. They then go on to suggest that this can then be built upon through what they term *reflection-for-action.* This involves plotting the future directions of the practice, such as proposing solutions to problems, finding scope for improvement and identifying next steps, along with the reasoning that underpins them. These are activities that may occur ordinarily in creative practice through other methods, but the reflective journal provides a way of identifying and understanding these processes, which would otherwise happen unconsciously. It provides a valuable method of making tacit knowledge explicit.

2.4.3 Critical Analyses

Though he acknowledges that there is no single prescribed method for analysing the sources collected and created through practice, Daichendt (2012, p.100-101) suggests a way one could approach such analysis. I found the following an effective method of organising my thoughts regarding the sources and a way of facilitating reflection-on-action.

1. The researcher should begin by **focusing on the key questions, themes, events or concepts.** This allows her to review her objectives and identify concepts to look for as the sources are reviewed. It keeps the subject matter of the analysis focused. I decided that I would analyse each of the four book projects I documented individually. I would identify the timeline of the practice, what kinds of humour emerged, what activities caused that humour to emerge, were there any factors that affected my decision-making, what were the successes and what caused them, what were the failures and what caused them.
2. **Categorise information to identify patterns, connections and themes.** A coding system may be required to do this. While reviewing my reflective journals, I used a system of coloured tabs to identify pages that dealt with different themes in order to compare these across the four different book projects.
3. **Interpret the organised information.** The researcher must eventually relate the information back to her original objective and search for meaning, often through reflection, which leads to a 'high level of understanding' (Daichendt 2012, p.101). The researcher should consider summarising her findings, identifying themes and recognising patterns so that a new 'meaning or theory' might be identified. I approached this using Schön's (1983) reflection-on-action, which allowed me to discover where in the creative process different types of humour emerged and which techniques or methods facilitated this.
4. **Consider the final presentation of results**. Once it has taken place, the analysis must be presented in a way that communicates its findings. This idea is supported by the AHRC's assertion that practice research in art and design should include a textual analysis to support the researcher's position along with a record of their critical reflection. To achieve this, I gathered together the manifestations of practice for each book project and analysed

them using Schön's method. This was then organised into documents I termed 'Critical Analyses'.

The critical analyses (appendices 1,2,3 & 4) provided an opportunity to collate this information, to show the analysis that has been undertaken and the space to conduct retrospective reflection-on-action. They could be seen as a series of written case studies. They present not just my written analysis but also visual evidence of the products of practice that demonstrate the mechanics of certain types of humour and how they were created. Once the critical analyses were completed, I could compare the findings from each analysis to find patterns and relate them to additional contexts, such as interviews with other practitioners and secondary sources on humour-creation, to reach conclusions.

2.5 Additional Methodology

Due to the challenges of practice research, I found it necessary to implement additional methods to address problems that arose in the course of conducting this research.

2.5.1 Interviews with picturebook makers

When seeking to triangulate my methods to ensure trustworthiness (see 2.7), it became necessary to conduct interviews with other makers of humorous picturebooks. This came from a need to compare the findings from my practice to the experiences of other makers. I needed to gain insight into the thought processes and decision making that occurs during creative practice. It is not possible to obtain this information from an analysis of the picturebooks themselves or purely from other aspects of creative practice such as sketchbooks and development work. I used the reflective journal to record this decision making process in my own practice, but in the context of this research, I would have to find another method of obtaining this information.

I decided to undertake a series of semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann 2008, p.810). Through this approach, I could ask questions that encouraged the makers to reflect on their tacit knowledge and articulate how they use their own practice to create humorous content. I chose a qualitative interview approach because it seeks to "derive interpretations, not facts or laws, from respondent talk" (Warren 2001, p.90). This aided in giving the makers the freedom to describe their tacit knowledge instead of forcing them to respond to my own.

The reason for choosing a semi-structured interview was because it allows the researcher to set the agenda and area of discussion but allows for more spontaneous narratives and insights from the respondents. I was aware of the possibility that the makers might have an entirely different take on humour creation through their practice and I wanted to allow the opportunity for them to discuss their experience while keeping the interview focused. An additional advantage is that the researcher improves their technique as they conduct interviews and the semi-structured format allows them to fine tune the questions in response to their growing experience (Remenyi 2012, p.38). The questions posed were open-ended to allow the maker to respond in a way that allowed them to choose how to construct their descriptions and address topics meaningful to them (Roulston 2008). Care was taken to ensure the questions were posed purposely, so that the information received remained on topic and relevant. It would also avoid participants being unsure of how to respond and the need for lengthy clarification (Roulston 2008).

Makers were asked to participate based on the humorous nature of their existing body of work. If the maker's books demonstrated the use of comic devices and could be deemed to be humorous by apply theories of humour (discussed further in chapter 3) it was judged to be humorous and have the potential elicit comic amusement from a reader.

The initial interview served as a pilot and was conducted face to face and recorded using a dictaphone. Pre-prepared questions were used as starting points but, in response to the semi-structured form, the discussion was allowed to deviate from these to follow spontaneous insights. After the interview was concluded, it was transcribed.

It quickly became apparent that most makers were not willing or available to be interviewed face to face. Some felt that conducting a telephone or Skype interview would be time-consuming or awkward. Often interviewers must bend to the requirements of their interviewees to elicit the required information because otherwise it can lead to respondents failing to attend or finding other ways to avoid participating in the interview (Warren 2001, p.90). As a result, I made alterations to my interview method.

It transpired that the most effective method of encouraging makers to be involved and allow them to incorporate the interview into their schedules would be to conduct virtual interviews. Makers were sent an introductory email asking them to participate in an interview and informing them of the purpose of the research. Once the maker's consent was obtained, they were sent a series of questions informed by their picturebooks, relating to the way in which they had approached creating humour through elements of their practice. The makers then responded via email and in some cases I sent them additional follow up questions to try to achieve the dialogue of the semi-structured interview.

The disadvantage of the virtual interview is that it only allows for asynchronous responses, so it is difficult to create a two-way dialogue, despite asking follow-up questions for clarification. The advantage was that it allows respondents the opportunity to reflect on their responses (Turney 2008, p.925), which means that they can deliver considered answers and monitor the information they are prepared to share, "providing a noncoercive discursive environment". In this research, it also allowed easy access to visual evidence of the subjects discussed, in the form of the makers' products of practice, which provided insightful additional evidence for analysis. The makers could simply take a photo of the activity they were talking about and send it with the email.

To address ethical concerns, every maker interviewed was provided with a participant information sheet (appendix 10). The purpose of this document was to explain to the makers

the nature of the research and the role which he or she was being invited to play in that research (Remenyi 2012, p.66). This ensured that the makers where fully aware of the purpose of the research, their part in it and that they were free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If they then agreed to participate, they were sent a consent form to ensure informed consent had been obtained.

2.5.2 Communicating Humour: The Pictorial Essay

Both Frayling (1993) and the AHRC require that art practice research must include analysis or explanation to support its position. During the course of this research, I found it necessary to *demonstrate* rather than explain certain ideas for a reader to gain full understanding.

An essential aspect of this thesis is that I explain the mechanics of how humour is created within the context of a picturebook and how these mechanics are put in place during practice. This is because it must be made obvious what types of humour are often utilised in the picturebook and how the characteristics of the picturebook facilitate their delivery. Then it can be explained how they come about during creative practice. To understand humour's creation, I believe it is important to first understand its mechanics.

The difficulty lies in the fact that, arguably, many of us will intuitively understand that nothing kills a joke quite like explaining it. As E.B and K.S White (1941, p.16a) said "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind". Knowledge concerning how certain types of humour work could not be effectively communicated unless the reader was able to 'get' the joke, have the opportunity to experience the feeling of comic amusement. It is my experience as a picturebook maker that taking the humorous device or content out of its intended context dilutes or even destroys that effect. Humour in picturebooks is achieved through the careful deployment of the characteristics of the picturebook. These can include synthesis between word and image such as counterpoint, characterisation, timing and pacing and even the book as an artefact. In conducting this research, it is my experience that the aforementioned elements are essential to the delivery of the humour. If any factor is removed or altered it is unlikely to be successful.

Therefore, it seemed apparent that, to refer back to White & White (1941, p.16a), I would have to find a way of dissecting the frog while keeping it alive. I would have to *show* how humour works, keeping all the picturebook characteristics used to create it, instead of explaining it. This gave rise to the inclusion of what I have termed a pictorial essay in this thesis.

The pictorial essay seeks to demonstrate some of the types of humour found in picturebooks and how the characteristics of the picturebook are deployed in their creation. Therefore, it is fully pictorial and involves characters, setting and word/image interplay. The context and content of the narrative differ to the average picturebook in their sophistication because the intended audience here are adult academics instead of children and their carers. The mode of delivery remains the same, though.

There is an emerging field of sequential illustration being used to communicate scholarly discourse, though it rarely concentrates exclusively on picturebooks. Nick Sousanis' (2015) *Unflattening*, his doctoral thesis about how knowledge is constructed, is entirely communicated through sequential illustration in the form of a comic. It seeks to establish a paradigm of using illustration as a way of thinking, therefore the format of sequential illustration is essential to effectively communicate Sousanis's concepts (Wilkins & Herd 2015). The journal *Sequentials*, set up by the Trace Innovation Initiative at the University of Florida, similarly advocates the use of sequential illustration in creating articles and communicating scholarly concepts.

There are publications that use creative practice to demonstrate ideas about that creative practice. The aforementioned *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 2001) demonstrates and explains ideas about how comics work through the medium of the comic. In *Picture This: How Pictures Work,* Bang (1991) demonstrates ideas about how altering imagery can change a readers response to it, using a series of images created specifically for that purpose, accompanied by a written analysis.

These examples show how I can use the characteristics of the practice in question to demonstrate something about it to the reader, instead of explaining it textually. I believe this provides me with a more immediate way of communicating my findings and provide the reader with the experience of humour key to gaining a full understanding of it.

2.6 Situating the Practice

2.6.1 The Publishing Industry

In chapter 3, I establish the gap in our knowledge relating to the influence of the publishing industry on creating humour in picturebooks through practice. To address this gap, I situated the practice conducted for this research within the publishing industry, with the intention that the outcomes should be published.

The practice undertaken for the PhDs of Palmer (2016), Manolessou (2012) and Tzomaka (2017) occurred outside the constraints of the publishing industry, so it is not possible to see how its influence could have altered their research. Manolessou (2012, p.18) makes a point of saying that her research takes place before any commercial considerations arise so that she could freely explore the process as 'authorial illustration'. This situation allows the maker's learning through practice to drive the development of the project. I intend to focus on a different location of enquiry to reflect, as Bader (1976, p.1) describes, the 'commercial' aspect of picturebooks. It is unusual that a picturebook project should be brought to fruition without the financial patronage and mentorship of a publisher, yet I am not aware of any practice research located in this context.

Therefore, the practice I undertook for the purpose of this research was conducted in conjunction with a publisher. The books created were contracted in the same manner as a normal published picturebook and went on to be sold commercially after completion. The book concepts were presented to the publishers once much of the development stage was complete, but before the

narratives were created. From this point onwards the publisher had input on all aspects of the book, including the theme and concepts, character design and behaviour, the sequence, the text, the compositions and details of the spreads, how the artwork is executed, the format of the book, the paper it is printed on and where it is distributed. Many of the aforementioned aspects are significant in the creation of humour which, in turn, demonstrates the influence a publisher can exert over comic effect.

I worked closely with editors and designers with whom I communicated directly. They offered feedback and suggestions or mandated changes. Other members of the publishing team, such as sales and marketing, also offered feedback, but I did not communicate with them directly. Their input would be relayed by the editor or art director. I kept records of all communications with the publisher and reflected on their influence in the reflective journals and in the critical analyses. This provided the opportunity to understand how making a book in these conditions affected humour creation.

Since so many books, both my previous work and that of the contextual examples I examine, are created in the context of the publishing industry, situating the research in that context could make the findings more transferable to the practice of others. However, it is important to acknowledge that the publishing industry is not homogenous, and different attitudes pervade in different houses, especially cross-culturally. Therefore, it should be noted that this research concerns the British publishing industry and, though common attitudes and practices have been identified in this research, it is reasonable to expect makers' experiences will differ.

2.6.2 Picturebooks

In addition to limiting the practice to books created within the context of the publishing industry, I have decided to situate this practice in the context of creating picturebooks. There are two reasons for this.

It quickly became necessary to limit the scope of this research. Illustrated children's books encompass a vast variety of forms, including board books, novelty books, illustrated non-fiction, highly illustrated middle grade fiction, illustrated fiction, comics and picturebooks. These forms present the maker with slightly differing sets of tools they can use to create humorous content. Therefore, to cover all these areas would expand the breadth of the work to such an extent that it would be challenging to make a meaningful contribution to knowledge in the time allowed to complete the research.

In addition, as this research was to be situated in the context of the publishing industry, it would have to focus on forms that publishers wanted me to produce and felt would be successful in a commercial setting. At the time that this research was conducted, my professional practice was limited to that of picturebooks.

2.7 Ensuring Trustworthiness

I have established how the methodology for this research is informed by practice research and facilitated by reflective practice, but there are still questions around its application that I must address.

Contrary to other established research paradigms, the academic community in art and design does not advocate a specific set of research methods. This difference can lead to questions about the validity of the research even when it may be the most appropriate method of answering the research question (McNiff 2013, p.111-112).

At this point, it is appropriate to consider Schön's argument for "rigour or relevance" (p.42, 1983). He suggests there is a "high ground" where practitioners can use "research-based theory" familiar to existing research paradigms, but these tend to have less relevance or application in the real world of practice, so they confine the researcher to a 'narrowly technical practice'. There is also the "swampy lowland" where the issues addressed are of the "greatest human concern", but familiar research-based theory cannot be applied. As a result, the researcher must apply different methods of enquiry that involve "experience, trial and error, intuition and muddling through". The 'rigour' that positivist paradigms prescribes is simply not appropriate to researching the unique, fluctuating and individual situations of creative practice. Indeed, Schön (1983, p.50) suggests that practice is well equipped to deal with situations of "uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict", such as those found in art practice, because of its reactionary nature. To ensure relevance, I must enter these swampy lowlands, but I must be sure that this research is compelling in its assertions. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.290) suggest this can be achieved by ensuring *trustworthiness*.

Trustworthiness is the way in which the researcher persuades her audience that the findings of her enquiry are worth their attention (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.290). Lincoln and Guba suggest that more traditional ways of ensuring trustworthiness, such as those used within the positivist paradigm found in scientific research, are inappropriate in other contexts, so they put forward alternative methods. I found it necessary to implement two of these methods:

- **Prolonged Engagement.** This suggests that the researcher should be exposed to the 'culture' of the situation that is being investigating in order to gain enough familiarity with their context to be able to identify misinformation introduced by oneself or external respondents (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.301). If the researcher's context is creative practice and they are themselves a practitioner, it could be said that this demonstrates prolonged engagement. To ensure that my prolonged engagement is not limited to my own practice, I found it necessary to conduct an in-depth assessment of other sources relating to the practice of other picturebook-makers, research into picture books and theories of humour. This is demonstrated in the contextual chapter of this thesis. I believe the combination of these two approaches to prolonged engagement equipped me with enough knowledge to understand the scope and intricacies of the 'culture' (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.290) that I am studying.

- **Triangulation of Methods**. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.305) acknowledge that there are various forms of triangulation, but that a "triangulation of methods" is the most appropriate outside a positivist paradigm. They suggest that this would involve implementing several methods of collecting information on the same subject matter to see if the findings of one method supports the other, therefore augmenting the validity of the findings. The 'pick and mix' (Yee 2010) nature of practice research naturally lends itself to such triangulation. To test the findings from my practice investigation, I chose to triangulate it with the contextual research I discussed in relation to prolonged engagement, as well as interviews with other practitioners. These allowed me a direct insight into their practice, not accessible through examining their creative outcomes or products of practice, and allowed me to compare their methods for creating humour to my own, identifying similarities and differences. The use of sources external to my own practice helped to ensure objectivity. This is because the use of different information generated in different ways from varying perspectives helps eliminate the bias that might arise from each method (Gray and Malins 2004, p.138).

2.8 Challenges of Humour Research

We establish in chapter 3 that there is a subjective aspect to humour, an individual's sense of humour, which can be affected by the context of humour, individual preferences and their personal and cultural background (Critchley, Simon and Simon 2011, p.67; McGraw and Warner 2014, p.95).

This presented me with a challenge when conducting this research: how can we establish what is humorous when it is so specific to the individual? Equally, it is possible to see when a humorist intended to be funny without finding it so. To refocus this issue back to the purpose of this research, it does not intend to rate how funny a piece of humour might be, but to understand how it emerged through the creative practice employed in creating a picturebook. To do this I must have a method to decide what constitutes humour, while being mindful that there is no standard for what makes something funny that will meet with universal agreement. I know when I personally find comic amusement in something, but it would be impractical and unhelpful in answering my research question to seek a compelling overview of whether the general population agrees with me, or to try and establish a way of measuring how funny a particular joke is.

At this point I found it useful to refer to the extensive research, from a variety of fields, that has been conducted on humour and the theories that have arisen from this. These include Relief Theory, Superiority Theory, Incongruity Theory and Benign Violation Theory and are discussed in chapter 3. These theories have identified characteristics that an instance of humour might embody to cause comic amusement. For the purpose of this research, when examining the work of other makers, if an aspect of a picturebook displays these characteristics in a manner that could be considered to cause comic amusement, I will class it as humour. I believe this provides a more objective view of humour in picturebooks than using my own culturally and personally specific sense of humour to judge what constitutes humour. I will not try to establish whether it is a "good joke" or a "bad joke", because it is my belief that the subjective nature of comedy will make it impossible to do so definitively.

When reflecting on my practice, both in-action and on-action, if an element elicits comic amusement from me, or I see it had the potential to do so and failed, I will consider this humour, if not necessarily successful humour. This is the method I instinctively use within my practice to identify and assess the humour I create. If I am to examine faithfully how I use my practice to create humour, I believe it is important to adopt this approach.

Chapter 3. Research Context

3.1 Introduction

As my primary research tool is my creative practice, it is important to understand the different contexts in which that practice is situated. The academic context of picturebooks underpins our theoretical understanding of how the various characteristics of a picturebook work and how they can elicit comic amusement from the reader. Similarly, the academic context of humour provides us with theories that explain what humour is and why we find certain things funny. The contemporary literary context - how humour is deployed within modern picturebooks - underpins both the makers' and the readers' understanding of the types of humour that can be included in the form. These contexts will provide an understanding of what constitutes humour in the context of a picturebook.

The personal context, the biographical experiences relating to my development as a person as well as a maker, has shaped the nature of my practice. Understanding its development lends context to the perspective of the practitioner, why humour is approached in a certain manner and the motivations for conducting this research. The professional context describes the existing scholarship concerning the publishing industry and its influence.

A comprehensive understanding of these contexts is essential in analysing the knowledge obtained through practice and drawing conclusions from it. In this chapter, I shall endeavour to describe the contexts and demonstrate the gap in our existing knowledge that this research proposes to fill.

3.2 Academic and Literary Context

3.2.1 Picturebook Research and Theory

A picturebook could be defined as an illustrated book which relies upon the interdependence between word and image to convey a sequence. Bader (1976, p.1) perhaps gives the most comprehensive definition:

> A picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document: and foremost an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page. On its own terms its possibilities are limitless.

There are queries that can be raised about the Bader definition. For instance, do picturebooks have to be for a child? Ommundsen (2014, p.17-32) demonstrates that there are picturebooks intended for adults. Does a picturebook have to be commercial? It is difficult to comprehend that a picturebook stops being a picturebook if it is not produced for commercial purposes. Though this

is not in my view a defining characteristic, I acknowledge that many picturebooks are produced in the context of the publishing industry and are therefore considered commercial. I believe that this influences their form and content, which I will discuss later in this thesis.

Other scholars highlight the significance of the "interdependence of pictures and words" described in Bader's definition. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001, p.1) state that "[t]he unique character of picturebooks as an art form is based on the combination of two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal". This is supported by Nodelman (1990, p.222) who writes: "[t]he text and illustrations of a book have an ironic relationship to each other: the words tell us what the pictures do not show, and the pictures show us what the words do not tell". Lewis (2001, p.36) takes a similar tack, but instead of irony he uses the term "mutual interanimation" and states that "a picture book's 'story' is never to be found in the words alone, nor in the pictures". The "interdependence of pictures and words" is not purely a defining feature of picturebooks, it is also a key element in comics. Therefore, I would propose that the key element of the Bader definition is the "interdependence of pictures and words" in combination with "the drama of the turning page".

These definitions are provided by researchers in the areas of education and literary criticism but are supported by those working within art practice. Salisbury (2007, p.9) describes picturebooks as "normally regarded as suitable for three to seven-year-olds, it is a book whose content and meaning is communicated primarily through pictures, working in tandem with a few supporting words". He also draws attention to the word-image relationship, commenting that "in a picturebook it is often the case that neither the words nor the pictures would make much sense if consumed in isolation" and describes their relationship as "complex, subtle, ironic or subversive".

Much of the existing research into picturebooks comes from the perspective of education, literacy, semiotics, literary criticism, children's literature, media studies, and cultural studies (Manolessou 2011). Salisbury (2008, p.25) suggest that such research is produced by "those interested in the picturebook as a tool for the educational development of the child". During the course of my research, it has been my observation that this is still often the case, even twelve years on.

A wealth of such research concerns children responding to picturebooks: Arizpe & Styles (2015), Evans (2009) and Styles and Watson (1996) to mention a few. As the focus of my research concerns how picturebooks are created, not the reader's response to them, the existing scholarship that is more relevant is that which provides invaluable insight into the characteristics of the picturebook and their potential as a method of communication.

In *How Picturebooks Work,* Nikolajeva & Scott (2001) discuss a series of such characteristics, including setting, characterisation, narrative perspective, time, movement and counterpoint, providing valuable analysis of how these elements can be used to communicate. Nodelman (1990) and Doonan (1993, p.12-15) consider how the physicality of the book affects its communication, examining the use of composition, colour, visual language (or 'style') and the format of the book.

Though their research does not come from the perspective of the maker, the characteristics discussed are tools I recognise and deploy in my practice in the creation of humour. It is rare,

ugh, that these characteristics are discussed in relation to humour. This lack of formal resear humour in children's books is perhaps surprising, given the extensive, widely available and ebrated range of funny books. Children's author and academic Michael Rosen believes the sons for this are political and ideological. Rosen (2014, para.8) states:

> Over the last few hundred years, for various religious, educational, social and intellectual justifications for children's literature, the funny book doesn't fit the bill. It is full of latent danger, full of the potential to be trivial, distracting, pointless, subversive, debasing and dirty.

s historical perception of the purpose of children's books could explain why funny books are ialized. The earliest illustrated children's books tended to be religious, moralistic or instructive ature. Salisbury (2004, p.8) identifies the earliest as being *Kunst and Lehrbuchlein,* published Frankfurt in 1580 and described as "[a] book of art and instruction for young people, wherein y be discovered all manner of merry or agreeable drawings". This trend continued into the h Century with *Orbis Pictus*, created in 1658 by the Bishop Comenius, which Salisbury (ibid) igests was for the purpose of making learning Latin less tedious.

unlikely that many of such early illustrated children's books would be interpreted as funny ause of their heavily moralistic nature. This could suggest that humour was perceived as a -essential, even undesirable, inclusion in the life of a child. Humour researcher John Morreal 06) states that 95% of writings of a Christian nature are disapproving of humour and if many limited number of books for children were being produced with religious purposes in mind, th ators may have actively avoided humour.

s moralistic trend continued into the 18th century with Mary Ann Kilner's *The Adventures of a cushion* (1780) and *Memoirs of a Peg-Top* (1790), early examples of a children's book featuri nimate objects as protagonists. These books may be intensely moral, but they do begin to pla ortance on reading being pleasurable and amusing. The British Library (n.d, para.2) notes th explained by the author, the stories aimed 'to blend the hints of instruction with incidents of a using nature'".

nour in children's books became more prevalent in the 19th century, with books that were ended to be funny without the pretense of being moral or instructive. Walter Crane's *The surd ABC* (1874) features humour ranging from parodies of traditional tales, incongruity throu hropomorphism and exaggerated characterisation. Edward Lear created the incongruously ny *Book of Nonsense* in 1896, featuring slapstick and exaggeration in the illustrations.

showing children meeting horrific fates due to their bad behaviour. The stories are gruesome by modern standards, but at the time of publication "the very exaggeration of the children's fates, both in the stories and the accompanying illustrations, was intended for comic rather than frightening effect" (Reed 2014, para. 6). In fact, *Struwwelpeter* is a satire, written "as a reaction against books which he thought were overly moralistic or blandly accepting of social norms" (ibid.). This

awareness of, and reference to, its context could be likened to the postmodern picturebooks we see today.

Humour in children's books continued to become more prevalent. It continuously evolved, yet retained staple forms of humour, such as exaggeration and slapstick as seen in *The Slant Book* (Newell 1910), incongruous anthropomorphism in books such as *The Story of Babar* (de Brunhoff 1931) and *Crocodile Tears* (Francois 1956). As Dr. Suess' books reached their pinnacle of production mid-century, we see a rise in surreal, absurd and chaotic humour, as found in *Books* (McCain and Alcorn 1962) and *The Day The Cow Sneezed* (Flora 1957). From the 1970s onwards, we see a rise in parody, often of genres or folktales traditionally found in children's book, in books such as *Father Christmas* (Briggs 1974), *Princess Smartypants* (Cole 1988) and *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (Scieszka and Smith 1993).

Today, an expansive range of humorous books is being published. We see parody in *Goldilocks and the Three Dinosaurs* (Willems 2012) and *Super Happy Magic Forest* (Long 2015). Toilet humour is regularly employed in books such as *Poo Bum* (Blake 2013) and *The Great Dog Bottom Swap* (Bently and Matsuoka 2010). The use of humorous counterpoint between text and image is prevalent in books such as *No!* (Altes 2011) and *Sam and Dave Dig a Hole* (Barnett and Klassen 2015). We can see observational comedy in *The Day the Crayons Quit* (Daywalt and Jeffers 2013). There has been a rise in self-referential books breaking the fourth wall of picturebooks for comic effect, such as *This book Ate My Dog* (Byrne 2014) and *Limelight Larry* (Hodgkinson 2011).

Awards such as the *Roald Dahl Funny Prize* and *The Lollies* (n.d), along with the *This Book is Funny* (2019) movement, celebrate and promote funny books. A recent survey of 2,558 parents and children ages 6-17 conducted by Scholastic (2015, para.3) into "what kids want in books" revealed that when children choose a book, the most popular reason for their selection is: "it makes me laugh". Despite this popular appeal, critics are still inclined to favour books with a more serious outlook. Of the previous six Greenaway Medal winners to date, only *This Is Not My Hat* (Klassen 2014) could be considered humorous. Others deal with somber or serious subjects such as the struggle of coal mining communities (Smith 2018) and historical non-fiction (Grill 2014). McIntyre characterises the situation well when she says: "humour doesn't tend to get reviews or media coverage; the books that win awards tend to be books about sad things" (appendix 8, p.331). Despite this trivialisation, humorous children's books have increased in prevalence since the 1700s, which demonstrates the strength of their appeal and presents a timely opportunity for their study and appreciation.

There is a lack of research into humour in children's books. This is perhaps due to aforementioned perception of triviality attached to humorous children's books, causing them to be seen as a less desirable subject for research. Johnson's analysis of the nature of comedy in picturebooks (1996) is a rare exception. Johnson acknowledges the importance of humour, saying it is perhaps 'one of the most widely loved and demanded features of all children's books' (p.54). Johnson analyses how different forms of comedy are achieved in picturebooks through the same characteristics referenced in the work of Nikolajeva & Scott (2001), Nodelman (1990) and Doonan (1993). Johnson analyses the work of Anthony Brown, identifying how Brown uses facial expressions

in *Willy the Wimp* (1985) to convey ironic meaning in contrast to the text, along with the use of caricature, slapstick and the ridiculous. Johnson goes on to discuss the parodic world of Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, identifying how they mix genres to create parody and use "exemplars of different visual, textual and graphic techniques" to achieve maximum comic effect.

Though this is an insightful analysis of how humour can be achieved through the medium of the picturebook, it is from the perspective of the reader, not the maker. It does not take into account the maker's reasons for including comedy and how it came about through the creative process.

Much of the scholarship relating to picturebooks and humour focuses on how children respond to humour and what they find funny. It is not the purpose of this research to establish what children find funny but, if the sources discussed argue that there are certain types of humour that children are less likely to understand or do not find amusing, it raises a question: why do makers feel compelled to include such humour in their work? I myself include many instances of parody in my work in the knowledge that they are more likely to be appreciated by an adult audience. I will outline the existing research concerning the types of humour most appreciated by children here, in an effort to provide context for chapter 5, where I discuss why my practice includes humour that might not be understood by a younger reader.

In *Laugh Lines: Exploring Humour in Children's Literature - from an education perspective*, Kerry (1993, p.9) suggests that the main types of humour that appeal to children are exaggeration, human predicaments, surprise, ridicule, slapstick, defiance, the absurd, violence, verbal humour and incongruity.

In *Books in the Life of a Child,* Saxby (1997, p.308) acknowledges the significance of humour in children's literacy and agrees with Kerry's ideas concerning the types of humour that appeal to children. He expands on that lexicon to include distortion of reality and the impossible, caricature, eccentrics, irony, parody and satire. Saxby (1997, p.316) builds on this further when he suggests that, though there are some forms of humour that appeal to a wide range of readers, children do pass through different stages in their appreciation of humour. He suggests that sense of humour parallels emotional development, with 2 to 7 year olds more susceptible to humour concerning "physical functions of the body" (p.317) and "slapstick humour, physical clowning and accidents" (p.318). 7 to 9 year olds are said to appreciate "practical jokes - especially when they misfire" and 9 to 11 year olds enjoy "jokes, riddles, puns, knock-knock jokes" that have a tendency to be clichéd, along with "non-conformists" who violate social rules.

My experience as a maker leads me to believe that these ideas about children's humour are broadly correct, but I am cautious of generalisation. It is also my experience that the sense of humour of two 7-year-old children can vary as wildly as two 30-year-old adults. Along with this, I am inclined to think that the appeal of the types of humour listed above are not limited to a child's sense of humour but, in some instances, extend to adults. Kerry (1993, p.8) recognises that a child's appreciation of humour is not necessarily the same as an adult's, though she does acknowledge that there are some instances of humour where there is overall appeal across age groups. She goes on to say that a difference in appreciation of humour is not as simple as an age

barrier:

> Yet differences in appreciation and understanding of humour are not linked solely to a common age range, for children of the same age will not all laugh at the same things. Other factors such as intellectual ability, past experiences and the level of sophistication of comic material will influence the individual child's response.

This could relate to an individual's differing 'sense of humour', which I shall discuss later in this chapter in the context of theories of humour. The significance of "intellectual ability, past experiences and the level of sophistication" mentioned by Kerry is perhaps demonstrated well when examining children's appreciation of parody. There seems to be an unease about whether children of picturebook age can comprehend it.

Jordan (1996) raises the question of whether children of perceived picturebook age can comprehend parody and refers to the research of Carol Fox. Johnson comments that the children in Fox's study often make use of traditional stories, particularly fairy tales, when writing their own stories, which demonstrates a knowledge of them as reference point. "The children's narratives contain jokes, they parody and make fun of certain characters" (Jordan 1996, p.59), which suggests that they are familiar with the concept of appropriating and changing existing elements for comic effect.

Although there is much discussion about what types of humour children comprehend and enjoy, far less attention has been given to studying how much the maker intends the child reader to understand, or who the comedy is actually directed towards. This leads academics to make assumptions:

> Although today's children may be more proficient decoders of parody, it is obvious that authors and illustrators of the often quite sophisticated children's books currently on the market do not expect young readers and viewers to possess all of the codes necessary to understand all of the parody allusions in their texts. (Beckett 2001, p.176)

Beckett assumes the makers intent but, though they may appear obvious in this context, we do not know what their motivations may have been, because it was not part of Beckett's inquiry to ask the makers. Such discussions do not give us insight into the authorial process - an example of a gap in our existing knowledge.

In addition, Beckett is assuming authorial intent: that makers do not necessarily intend young readers to comprehend parody. This contradicts my experiences as a maker. It is my experience that the best strategy for allowing humour, such as parody, to emerge is to avoid consciously considering the reader when engaged in practice. Parody often emerges unconsciously, and I retain it if it amuses me. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 5. I believe this demonstrates a gap in our knowledge concerning makers' intensions when including humour and how conscious that decision-making is.

The discussion around which types of humour are appropriate for which age groups, and why humour should be included in a picturebook, is a pervading question within my own practice. Much of the research concerning what children find humorous mentioned in this chapter reflects my own observations as a maker, but the way in which I acquired this knowledge and decide to deploy it differs dramatically. I will discuss this further in relation to my own practice in chapter 5, to understand how I acquired this same knowledge through creative practice and why I, as a maker, use certain types of humour.

3.2.2 Research from the Practitioner's Perspective

Salisbury (2008, p.25) tells us that much research into picturebooks has come from those working in the field of education and involves examining the picturebook in its final form "as a finished artefact— looking at it from the outside in". He goes on to tell us that the maker is heard primarily through interviews and the picturebooks themselves. This might explain why formal research from the perspective of such makers remains fairly limited: my enquiries have not uncovered any that investigate the creation of humour by examining the practice of these makers.

Lewis (2001, p.61) highlights the importance of understanding the maker's process, commenting that we need to look at what picturebook-makers do to understand the picturebook. Lewis then goes on to focus his analysis on the finished products. This leaves open the opportunity to investigate the majority of the makers' process, of their thinking, experimentation and generation of knowledge.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, there is a growing area of doctoral research examining the practice of creating picturebooks. Other kinds of literature also document and seek to explain the creative process. These take the form of less formal publications such as educational how-to books, interviews with makers and autobiographical works. These works offer anecdotal insight into the maker's practice.

How-to books

These books are often written by makers for a readership who wish to learn how to illustrate children's books. They provide an overview of practical methods that inform the practice of making an illustrated children's book. Examples include *Illustrating Children's Picture Books* (Withrow & Withrow 2009) and *Illustrating Children's Books* (Ursell 2013). These books take a similar approach to their contents as well as their titles, presenting a collected set of accepted practices used when creating children's books. These practices are augmented by interviews with practitioners and case studies of subjects such as an individual's approach to a particular medium. Whilst these books are about practice and explain the basis of picturebook-making, they do not provide an in-depth examination of practice, such as tracking the process of making a picturebook from beginning to end. They provide a clear, linear approach to practice that does not reflect the messier and more reactive approach that many makers, in reality, may take. They do not examine the decision-making process or motivations of a maker.

Interviews with makers

The advantage of such interviews is that they allow us to understand what is occurring in the minds of the makers when undertake practice.

Show Me A Story: Why Picturebooks Matter (Marcus 2012) collates a series of interviews with picturebook makers. It explores how the makers' autobiographical experiences influence their practice and provides insight into their motivations. The interview with Mo Willems (p.265) provides insight into how his experiences influence him to include humour in his work. Similarly, *Artists of the Page: Interviews with Children's Book Illustrators* (Marantz & Marantz 1992) presents interviews with makers in an effort to demystify the work of those makers whose practice was not already well documented. The makers are asked about their autobiographical experiences, their workplaces and methods, and the publication process.

Maurice Sendak's *Caldecott & Co* (1989) includes a collection of his writings about the work of other makers, but also reflection on some of his own work and approaches to practice. This shows an understanding of picturebooks from the perspective of a practitioner, instead of that of an academic or educator, along with an informal reflection on Sendak's own practice.

Documentation of makers reflecting on their own practice can be found in the publication of Caldecott Medal winners' acceptance speeches. In Jon Klassen's (2013) speech he provides insight into his practice, such as how his method of cover design might differ from a graphic designer's. Jerry Pinkney details in his speech how his childhood experiences affect his practice, influencing the content and composition of the imagery in *The Lion and the Mouse* (Association for Library Service to Children, & Horn Book, Inc. 2011).

Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Story Telling (Salisbury and Styles 2012) combines interviews with makers with academic discussion and commentary, exploring picturebooks from both an educational perspective and that of the maker. It describes the nature of working as a professional picturebook maker in the publishing industry by explaining the publishing process and interviewing people from the industry. It also details the makers' processes by showing glimpses of their preparatory work, such as images from sketchbooks. The analysis of these can provide insight into how a particular element of a book has developed.

There are some instances of interviews conducted with makers specifically about the creation of humour. In *The Good, the Bad, and the Funny: Authors Talk Humor in Children's Books* (2011) makers discussed their motivations for including humour and how its creation is often unconscious on their part. This provides valuable insight into maker motivation, but it does not examine the physical manifestations of practice, such as sketchbooks or the finished books, therefore providing a single faceted examination.

Memoirs or autobiography of a specific practitioner

These works can provide a more comprehensive insight into the makers' thoughts, decision making process and motivations.

Quentin Blake's *Words and Pictures* (2001) provides insight into his work as a picturebook maker. Blake charts his personal development as an artist, as well as discussing why he makes certain decisions about aspects such as characterisation, sense of place, humour and text-image relationship in relation to specific books. Blake includes images of preparatory work for certain book projects along with some of his early work. These provide insight into his development as an illustrator and how he approaches creating a book. As this book charts around 50 years of practice, Blake is unable to go into huge detail about specific projects and it does not contextualise or consider the work in relation to that of other makers.

A Life Drawing (2002), by Shirley Hughes, is more of an autobiographical account of her life and developments as a maker. The inclusion of autobiographical elements, such as childhood influences, can show us how outside influences have shaped a maker's practice and puts the practice in some context. Similarly, *Playing the Shape Game* (Browne and Browne 2011) takes the form of an autobiography of the picturebook maker Antony Browne. It shows how his practice has developed over time and how life events have influenced it. Browne describes the thought processes associated with his practice, such as how he develops narrative ideas, so this book shows us aspects of his practice that would otherwise remain internal and unknown.

Theory books by makers

There are instances where makers have created theory books informed by their experience of creative practice. As previously described in chapter 2, In *Picture This: How Pictures Work* (Bang 1991) the images accompanying exegesis clearly show the principles that makers often employ when creating the illustrations for a picturebooks. Similarly, though it relates to comics, much of the content of *Understanding Comics* (McCloud 2001), applies to other methods of visual storytelling, including picturebooks.

Both Bang and McCloud's analyses of sequential images and visual storytelling explain the effect particular choices can have and can therefore help us theorise why a maker might make certain decisions. They also have the advantage of being informed by the practice of a maker, which is analysed to provide generalized principles. Like Bang and McCloud, my research has enabled me to identify general principles, but it differs in that it concentrates on a specific maker's practice, with the intention of examining the more instinctive and contextually specific decision-making of an individual maker.

Michael Rosen's *How to Make Children Laugh* (2018) is a rare instance where a practitioner, in this case a children's novelist and poet, has created a book of theory about how to create humour in children's books. It explains the general principles of Rosen's theory of humour, which concerns anxiety and relief. His theory is compelling and makes connections with both superiority theory and benign violation theory. Rosen also offers an analysis of how we can create humour through practice, informed by knowledge gained through his own practice. In this instance, the maker is a writer and performer, so the techniques discussed refer to constructing verbal humour and then performing the written outcomes. Though some of this knowledge is transferable to illustration, it does not cover the proposed area of research, which concerns how both written and visual humour are created though the practice of a children's book illustrator.

Practice research at doctoral level

Systematic and sustained inquiry into the creation of picturebooks can be found in practice research, taking the form of PhDs. Much of this kind of doctoral research relating specifically to picturebooks emerges from the Centre for Children's Book Illustration at Anglia Ruskin University. Examples of such sustained practice research can be seen in McConnell's *The Art of Children's Book Illustration: An Exploration of creative practice with particular reference to character, dramatic action and pictorial atmosphere* (2010), Manolessou's *A Practice-based investigation of animal character development in picturebook illustration* (2012), Palmer's *Understanding graphic narrative through the synthesis of comics and picturebooks* (2016) and Tzomaka's *A practice based investigation using design and illustration* (2017).

These inquiries based on practice research provide valuable practitioner insight and examine practice in an in-depth and context-specific manner. To my knowledge, no such study focuses directly on humour, nor do they tend to consider the practitioner-publisher relationship.

In this section, I have demonstrated the extent of research into humour in picturebooks from the perspective of the picturebook maker. Though knowledge into the practice of picturebook makers and humour in picturebooks exists, there has not been a systematic investigation into how the tools at a picturebook maker's disposal are used to humorous effect and there is no in-depth study into humour creation in an individual's practice from the perspective of that maker. This presents a gap in our existing knowledge.

3.2.3 Humour Research and Theories: What is humour?

What exactly can be classed as humorous can be hard to define, possibly because of one's individual facility or capacity to perceive or appreciate humour, or 'sense of humour' as it is often termed (Martin 2010, p.193). Despite the broad interpretation of what constitutes humour, for the purpose of this research, a definition of humour must be put in place, because it must be clear what exactly is being created when we discuss creating humour. Martin (2010, p.5) acknowledges that humour is often used as an all-encompassing term that "refers to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh, as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus". Warren and McGraw (2016, p.407) refine this idea, suggesting that humour is "a psychological response characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh".

For the purpose of this research, to effectively qualify humour in the context of picturebooks, I have found it appropriate to use a more specific definition. Carroll (2014, p.5) suggests that humour is the object that causes a state of comic amusement. Carroll defines comic amusement as the emotional state aimed at a certain object, such as a verbal joke or an amusing image, which causes us to experience enjoyment and levity. So, in the context of this research, examples of humour could take the form of an amusing character, a funny situation, wordplay, a visual pun etc, and the humour would be considered successful if it creates a feeling of comic amusement.

It is important to note that comic amusement is not guaranteed. An individual's sense of humour

will allow one person to find comic amusement instinctively in an instance of humour, but the same thing can leave another cold (McDonald 2012, p.12). Whether a person finds comic amusement in a certain kind of humour can be affected by various things, including the context of humour, individual preferences and their personal and cultural background (Critchley, Simon and Simon 2011, p.67; McGraw and Warner 2014, p.95). There are humour researchers who believe humour is a phenomenon so broad and multiform that it cannot be explained by a single integrated theory (Kirkman 2006; McDonald 2012, p.10). Despite this, many theories have been developed in various fields including philosophy, cultural studies, literary theory, psychoanalysis, and psychology (McDonald 2012). Three pivotal theories have emerged that provide an important basis for understanding humour: Relief Theory, Superiority Theory and Incongruity Theory (Shaw 2012, p.114).

3.2.4 Superiority Theory

There is a strain of humour that associates malice or abuse towards others with comic amusement. This idea was first articulated in the works of Plato and Aristotle (Carrol 2014, p.6). In Plato's *Philebus,* he suggests we laugh at people who lack self-awareness, while in *Poetics,* Aristotle links humour with a kind of invective abuse. It is from these early ideas that superiority theory arose.

Superiority theory stems from the concept that "sudden glory, a subjective satisfaction with ones' self over the infirmities or misfortunes of others" (Levin 1987, p.11) causes comic amusement. It was Thomas Hobbs who distilled this idea, introducing the term 'sudden glory' in his work *Leviathan*. He suggested that humour can come from the pleasure of another's misfortunes, which reinforce one's feelings of superiority to them. Undeniably, humour often comes at the expense of a character, particularly those who are "stupid, vain, greedy, cruel ruthless, dirty, lubricious and deficient in other respects" (Carroll 2014, p.9).

However, there are those who feel this theory is highly limiting. In many situations, humour does not come at another's expense and does not make us feel superior. In fact, we laugh at the witticisms of Oscar Wilde because they are clever in a way that many of us cannot replicate, so in effect, Wilde is superior to his audience. Lintott (2016, p.348) suggests that seeing superiority theory as the root of comic amusement is "wildly implausible" and suggests that it is better seen "as a way of describing a sort of comic amusement we may have to a certain kind of humor", but should not be seen as a catch-all theory.

I believe that superiority theory can explain why certain occurrences in children's books could be seen as humorous, particularly in the effect of both exaggerated characterisation and slapstick. Finding amusement in physical characteristics of a character that are exaggerated to the point of grotesquery can be explained by superiority theory. In Fritz Wegner's version of *Fattipuffs and Thinifers* (Maurois and Wegner 1972), exaggerating the central characters of the generals to absurd levels of thinness or obesity could be said to create this "subjective satisfaction with one's self", making the reader feel physically superior to them and ultimately leading to comic amusement. We could extend this explanation to the humorous nature of exaggerated emotions. In *The Slant Book* (1910) by Peter Newell, the exaggerated panic of the characters, and the loss

of dignity this incurs, could be said to make the reader feel superior to the characters through their superior control of their emotions.

Slapstick is a prevalent type of humour found in picturebooks and tends to result in acute misfortune for those it is directed at. In *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins 2009), comic amusement is caused by the painful physical misfortunes that befall the fox as he tries to conduct his dastardly plan. This could be said to create a sense of superiority at the fox's failure to fulfil his objective, to eat Rosie the chicken, as well as the painful incidents that befall him. In this instance, we also feel superior to Rosie because the text tells us she is oblivious to the danger she is in, but our ability to see the wider situation in the images provides us with a superior understanding of her predicament.

3.2.5 Relief Theory

This is also referred to as release theory (Carroll 2014, p.38). In *Theories of Humour*, Monro (1987, p.335) describes relief theory in the following manner: "Since humour often calls conventional social requirements into question, it may be regarded as affording us relief from the restraint of conforming to those requirements". This suggests that humour is a form of relief of nervous energy brought about by seeing accepted social boundaries flouted (McDonald 2012, p.64; Critchley, Simon and Simon 2011, p.3). Much of the theory that underpins relief theory is informed by Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). He suggests that humour is caused by a release of psychic energy. For instance, when humour concerns taboo subjects, it creates a release of the energy that would usually be used to repress those taboo feelings.

A range of humour in children's books utilises the breaking of taboos and could therefore be explained by relief theory. In Stephanie Blake's *Poo Bum* (2013), rule-breaking and disobeying authority figures are used as a source of humour. When instructed to do certain things, the rabbit protagonist always responds with the words 'Poo bum'. Arguably, the humour here comes from the way rabbit defies social expectations, so that comic amusement is caused by the relief of seeing these taboos broken.

In *Poo Bum* an additional element of relief is provided by the element of toilet humour, embodied by the words 'poo bum'. It could be said that young children have just learned that it is not appropriate to reveal or even talk about poos, bums, or anything to do with bodily functions. This book blatantly breaks that taboo. There are many instances of toilet humour in children's books and even the appearance of an object related to toilet humour or bodily functions can be a cause of comic amusement. In *Morris the Mankiest Monster* (Andreae and McIntyre 2010), humour is provided by demonstrating the worst examples of violating the social conventions associated with bodily functions, such as nose picking and the excavation of earwax.

Michael Rosen seemingly supports the ideas underpinning relief theory when he speaks about the anxiety children experience around using the toilet correctly. On the subject of urinating in the correct place, Rosen (2014, para.47) says "if I am relieved of that anxiety, if the focus of my anxiety is taken out of the context of shame and put into, let's say, the context of defiling the powerful, then this seems to become funny. I am relieved of the anxiety."

Eric Carle's *The Nonsense Show* (2016) presents the reader with a series of illogical situations often involving inversions of logical norms, such as a horse with a jockey's head and a jockey with a horse's head. Instances of nonsense like this could be seen as amusing because they provide relief from the constraints of everyday logic, from the realms of possibility that govern our lives, which in turn provokes comic amusement.

There are limitations to relief theory. As with most theories of humour, it does not explain all forms of humour. For instance, it does not provide an explanation for the "it's funny because it's true" phenomenon found in observational comedy, which I shall discuss in more detail in relation to incongruity. It also depends upon accepting a hydraulic theory of the mind, like Freud's, that some researchers have come to think of as dubious and outdated (Morreall 2009, p.23; Carroll 2014, p.38).

3.2.6 Incongruity Theory

This is the dominant theory of humour in the fields of philosophy and psychology (Morreall 2009, p.10) and is perhaps so widely accepted because it provides a generally effective way of analysing "the comic structures found in everyday life" (Carrol 2014, p.8).

This theory suggests that humour involves delighting in a departure from, contradiction to or violation of some regularity or norm (Shaw 2010, p.115; Carrol 2014, p.17; Morreall 2009, p.11; McDonald 2012, p.50) or something that is unreasonable, unexpected, illogical, exaggerated or inappropriate (McGhee 1970). James Beattie, one of the first philosophers to use the term 'incongruity' to describe the root of humour (Morreall 2009, p.12), suggests incongruity can take the form of two or more inconsistent or unsuitable concepts combined in the same situation, or an object which is so contrary to expectations it creates comic amusement (Beattie 1777).

Incongruity theory can explain why various aspects of a picturebooks can be considered amusing. A skilful and subtle example of humorous incongruity can be seen in Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* (2000). The incongruous nature of this huge, red, bizarre 'Thing' sat on a beach amidst a crowd of sunbathers, fetching a stick like a dog or discovering it likes to eat Christmas decorations is so surprising, illogical and unexpected it is subtly amusing. This is strengthened by the setting. It is comprised of recognisably suburban and inner-city environments, which is made incongruous in itself by the addition of excessive industrial elements, such as piping, instructive signage, lights and buttons that contrast with the aesthetics of the Thing.

When counterpoint, which is when the "words and images provide alternative information or contradict each other in some way" (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, p17), is found amusing, it can be explained by incongruity theory. In Marta Altes' *No!* (2011) the conflict between the dog's perception of his actions, as described in the text, with the quite different reality seen in the images creates an incongruous combination through their mutual contradiction. A character misperceiving their circumstances is an accepted form of incongruous humour (Carroll 2014, p. 24).

The incongruous combination of human characteristics with animals or inanimate objects could

explain why anthropomorphism can be a source of humour. In *Supertato* (Hendra & Linnet 2014), the fusion of the characteristics of a superhero with a potato is such an unexpected combination it creates incongruous humour. In addition, it incongruously combines an extraordinary concept (a superhero) with something mundane and everyday (a root vegetable), for additional humorous effect.

Parody and satire can be explained through incongruity theory. For example, McLaren's *Pigeon P.I.* (2017) incongruously fuses the usually adult tropes of detective noir with pigeon characters in the context of children's books, creating a parody and a triply incongruous situation. In *Morris Wants More* (Falière & Seigal 2017), American president Donald Trump is satirised in both appearance and attitude as his physical and emotional characteristics are transposed into the character of a demanding child.

It is important to note that while we find incongruity in many instances of humour, it is not necessarily the source of amusement. Configurational theories of incongruity suggest that the conflict cause by the incongruity must be resolved in some way to create comic amusement (McDonald 2012, p.59). For example, to say the words 'ninja doughnut' is incongruous but not necessarily amusing in itself. If you are shown an image of a ninja doughnut such as this (fig. 1)…

Fig. 1 Ninja Doughnut. Created for the purpose of this thesis by Elys Dolan (2019).

… you understand that it is an anthropomorphised, sentient doughnut who works as a ninja. This injects a certain amount of internal logical into the situation and it arguably moves from being purely random towards amusing. Conversely, this does not explain why we might be amused by nonsense, which relies on the lack of this internal logic.

There are additional limitations to incongruity theory. Carroll (2014, p.37) argues that determining what incongruity *is* presents a problem. Efforts to define incongruity have proved too limiting when attempting to elucidate the concept. When the definition is broadened to include a wide range of examples, it becomes so vague that it cannot reliably provide a refined theory of what elicits comic amusement. Carroll (2014, p.49) goes on to present the idea that this can be countered by supplementing the theory with elements from other theories. I believe this is what we see in Benign Violation Theory, which I shall discuss later.

Incongruity theory does not adequately explain the phenomenon of something being funny because it is true, or 'observational humour', as I shall term it for the purposes of this research. In his essay *Laughter,* Roger Scruton (1982, cited in McDonald 2012, p.57) suggests that certain types of humour depend on an excess of congruity. Michael McIntyre's observation humour provides an example of this. In one routine (2011), he draws attention to the way we unplug appliances when we go on holiday, but not the fridge: we trust the fridge. Drawing attention to an oddity that is obscure but still familiar to much of his audience causes comic amusement. It relies on an excess of congruity, on recognising a social norm instead of contradicting it.

A further limitation is that early versions of incongruity theory assumed that the perception of an incongruity is enough elicit a humorous reaction, but this is not always the case (Morreall 2009, p.12). Some situations can be incongruous but provoke reactions of fear, disgust or puzzlement (McGraw and Warner 2014, p.8). Again, benign violation theory expands on the ideas from incongruity theory but accounts for this limitation.

3.2.7 Benign Violation Theory

This is a relatively new theory of humour based on an obscure theory called N+V Theory, developed by Thomas Veatch (1998). Veatch suggests that humour occurs when a situation is perceived as being a violation of a subjective moral principle (V), but simultaneously perceived as being normal (N). McGraw and Warner (2014, p.9) observed that the flaw in this theory is that a situation does not have to be normal to elicit comic amusement. They proposed an alternative to this theory: that the situation should be 'benign' instead of 'normal'. They termed this 'benign violation theory'. McGraw and Warner (2014, p.10) suggest that:

> Humour only occurs when something seems wrong, unsettling or threatening (i.e., a violation), but simultaneously seems okay, acceptable, or safe (i.e., benign).

Benign violation theory (BVT) appears especially applicable to the humour found in picturebooks and can provide explanations for many of the examples I have previously mentioned. The examples of physical and emotional exaggerations I related to superiority theory could be seen as a violation of physical and emotional norm, but benign, since no harm befalls the object of exaggeration. In *The Slant Book,* exaggerated panic violates the social norm of controlled emotions, but it is benign because no harm befalls the baby. Slapstick can also be explained by BTV. In *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins 2006), physical norms are violated through the physical misfortune befalling the fox, but it could be seen as benign, as it does not result in serious injury to the character.

BVT can be used to explain the comedy in toilet humour, rule breaking and nonsense. The revelling in bodily taboos that toilet humour often utilises violates a social norm but, depending on your beliefs, it does not cause harm or serious offence, so can be seen as benign. The rule-breaking seen in *Poo Bum* (Blake 2013) violates a social norm but again does not cause serious harm, so can be seen as benign. The nonsense displayed in *The Nonsense Show* (Carle 2016) violates logical norms but, again, does not harm or offend the majority of readers, so is benign.

Finally, BVT can also explain instances of humour that could be attributed to incongruity theory. In *The Lost Thing* (Tan 2010), the appearance of the fantastical 'Thing' in a recognisable setting is a violation of a logical norm. As the thing is not harmful or distressing, it is benign. In instances of humorous counterpoint, the meaning of the images violates the meaning of the words. Yet, since they come together to create meaning, the violation is benign instead of confusing or vexatious. Anthropomorphism violates a logical norm because animals and inanimate objects do not usually display human characteristics. This is benign, providing these characteristics do not create distress or fear in the reader.

BVT provides a compelling explanation of observational humour, too. Such humour could be seen as pointing out a benign violation that already exists in our normal lives, instead of creating a new one. For instance, in the McIntyre example, not unplugging the fridge is a violation of logic because there is no reason it should be more trustworthy than any other appliance. It is benign because this illogical action does not cause harm or distress to anyone. McGraw, one of the authors of BVT, terms this the 'Seinfeld Strategy' (McGraw and Warner 2014, p.12).

The wide range of instances of humour in picturebooks that can be attributed to BVT makes it the most compelling explanation of why certain instances of humour can result in comic amusement. Within the wider context of humour research, BVT is relatively new and has not been accepted as a universal theory of humour. The established humour researcher Victor Raskin stated that BVT is flawed, as it is "a very loose and vague metaphor" (in McGraw and Warner 2014, p.13). I would suggest that the three main theories of humour demonstrate that specific theories will regularly exclude certain forms of humour, so it is likely that BVT fails to be a catch-all theory, but I would argue that it does provide a firm understanding of many instances of humour.

For the purposes of my research, the idea that something can be identified as humorous if it is a benign violation provides a functional framework for understanding how humour occurs in picturebooks. In addition, it can provide understanding as to why some attempts at humour are not funny. As my contextual research leads me to believe that humour is so varied that no one theory can adequately explain it, I shall apply a combination of the four theories discussed here in my efforts to identify what constitutes humour in picturebooks? To my knowledge, there has not been an attempt to link these theories to humour in picturebooks previously, but I believe it can provide insight into the means by which picturebooks create comic amusements in their readers.

In addition, using this framework to identify what constitutes an instance of humour assists in mitigating my own bias concerning what is, or is not, humorous. As stated previously in this chapter, what we find comic amusement in can be affected by the context of the humour, individual preferences and personal and cultural background (Critchley, Simon and Simon 2011, p.67; McGraw and Warner 2014, p.95). Therefore, it is likely that my own instinctive decisions about what is humorous are based on these factors. Though my own sense of humour led me to initially identify a picturesbook had the potential to be humorous, by then applying theories of humour to an instance of humour it allowed me to more objectively confirm its humorous potential, and so contribute to make the knowledge gained through research more generalisable and less researcher-specific.

It is through using theories of humour as a framework that I identified the works mentioned in this research as being humorous and having the potential to elicit comic amusement in a reader.

3.2.8 Established Comic Devices and Techniques

Along with theories of humour that seek to explain why something is funny, there is a range of literature describing comic devices and techniques in an attempt to explain how to be funny. These often explore the context of learning to write comedy and take the form of instructional 'how-to' books written by comic writers or performers.

Horton's *Laughing Out Loud* (2000), Byrnes' *Writing Comedy* (1999), and Brown's similarly titled *Writing Comedy* (2015) all describe and explain the use of various comic devices. The comedian Richard Herring (2008) wrote a series of articles on 'How to Write Comedy', which served a similar purpose. Many of the devices described in these sources, such as exaggeration, physical comedy, parody and bathos, are use in humorous picturebooks to provoke comic amusement. It is my experience as a practitioner that this knowledge is transferable to picturebooks. In chapter 4, I will describe those devices that are used within picturebooks and demonstrate how they can achieve comic amusement.

Guides like those above are concerned with writing comedy for stand-up, screen plays and radio, not picturebooks. Therefore, they do not discuss how the characteristics specific to picturebooks, such as the relationship between word and image and the page turn, can be used to facilitate existing devices and create new ones. Johnson's (1996) analysis of how comedy is achieved in picturebooks does make that link between the devices and how they are deployed in a picturebook, but these 'how to' books highlight a wider range of devices than Johnson (1996) discussed. This leads me to believe that there are still links to be made between established comic methods and how humour is achieved in picturebooks.

Through examining the context of humour research, I have been able to address my first research question: 'what is humour in the context of a picturebook?'. I have established a method of defining humour in picturebooks and an approach to identifying instances of humour through the use of Benign Violation Theory. This provides me with a framework to begin addressing my remaining research questions.

3.3 Personal and Professional Context

3.3.1 Personal Context

Because this research is rooted in my creative practice as a maker of picturebooks, an understanding of my practice and how it developed can provide context for the personal viewpoint from which the practice, and therefore the research, are conducted.

Upbringing and early education

When conducting this reflective writing on my development as a maker, I found that my autobiographical memories conform to various clichés. The first of these is that I viewed myself as a socially awkward outsider child. My justification for this is that my four siblings are either much older or have learning disabilities, which meant I felt separate from them, in a category of my own. At school, I found it a challenge to find my place, so I would often watch from the outside. I believe it was through these experiences that I saw a sideways view of the world. I inhabited it from a very slightly different perspective, so I felt I could see its absurdities and make unconventional connections. Eventually, I learned to voice these observations in a way that I found made others laugh.

This became my way of getting recognition and acceptance, as well as a form of attack and defence. Being able to twist a situation with an incongruous slant or observation could change my peers' perception of it. Humour was a way of grabbing people's attention and getting them to focus on my point, without seeming pretentious or pompous. I cannot say that learning to use humour in this manner was ever a conscious effort on my behalf. It was tacit process based on trial and error. It is perhaps not surprising that I should go through a similar tacit process of learning to use humour when developing my ability to communicate with readers through my books.

I never had an affinity for words. Being profoundly dyslexic, I had difficulty commanding the written word. Any success I now have has been a hard-fought battle. As a result of this, I gravitated to more visual ways of creating humour. This manifested in incidents such as satirical pictures of housemistresses drawn on the walls of study rooms for the amusements of my friends (this eventually resulted in a string of detentions and the ire of said housemistress for years to come, which only proved the success of the satire). Such early forays into the visual arts taught me that it is not always the subject you depict that creates the humour, but their posture and movement, what you choose to exaggerate, the kind of lines you use, and the location in which you situate your creations, that get the laugh.

During my childhood, I do not believe I was attracted to humorous books and media more than any other child. It was things that created detailed and believable alternative worlds that engaged me. I would consistently go back to Richard Scarry's *What Do People Do All Day* (1968) (fig. 2) and the detailed work of Alan Snow in *How Dogs Really Work* (1993) (fig. 3). I regularly re-watched the Star Wars original trilogy (1977), captivated by all the different planets and life forms. I would often ignore the central narrative and regard these worlds as a voyeur, rather like I regarded my own world, and make those same observations and connections that led to humour. I would use the
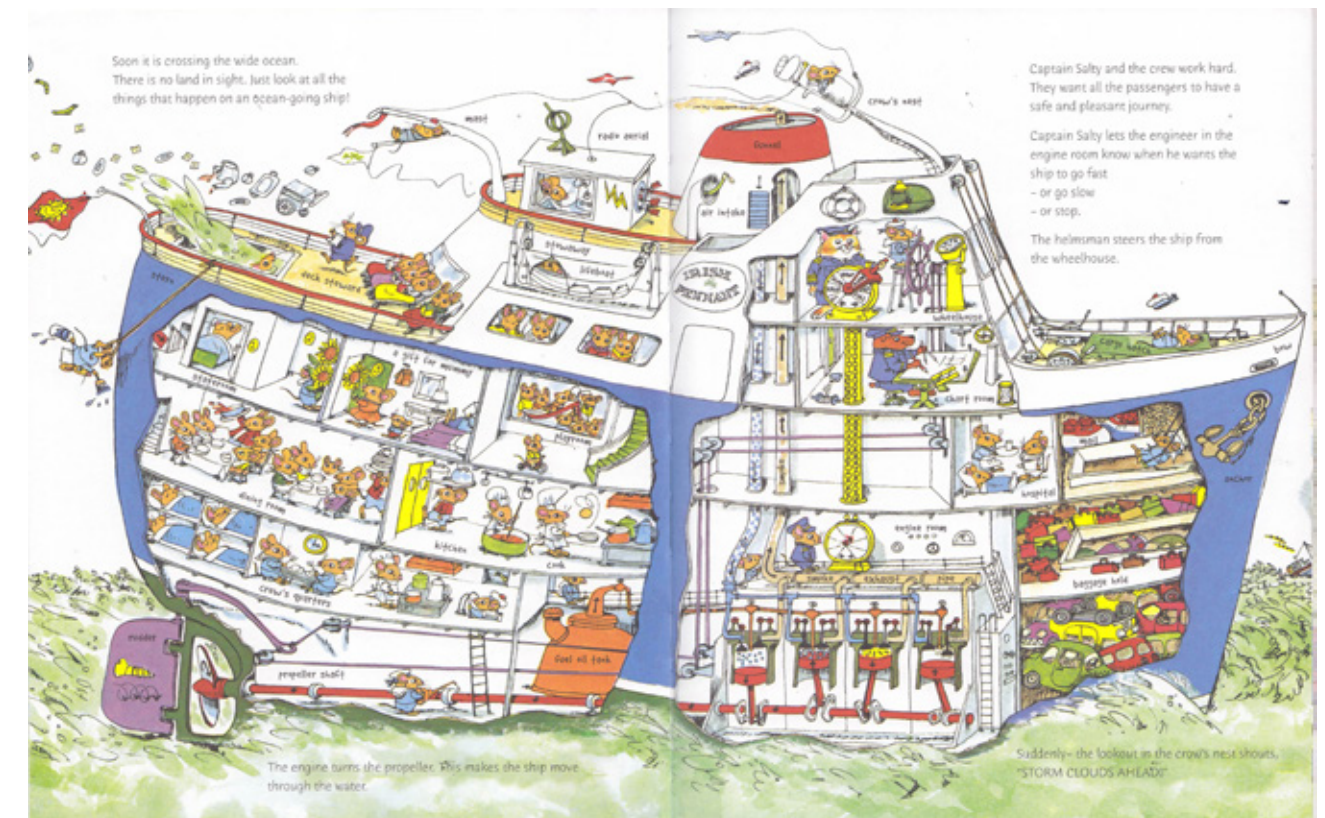

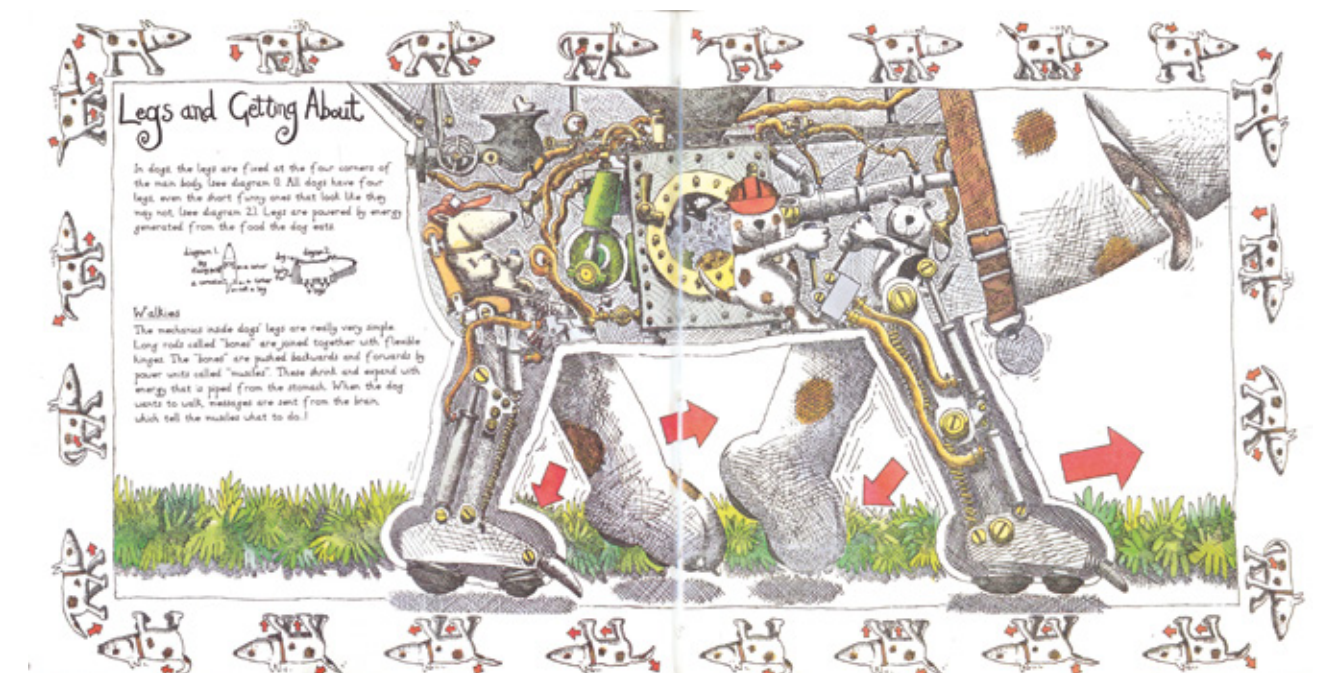Fig. 2 From *What Do People Do All Day?* by Richard Scarry (1968).

Fig. 3 From *How Dogs Really Work* by Alan Snow (1993).

component parts these worlds provided to create my own amusement.

Art Education

After school, I studied for a BA in Fine Art. During this time, I created narrative installations that had an absurd, satirical nature to them. It was made clear during my studies that the course was not impressed by such humour. This compelled me to change direction and study for a Masters in Children's Book Illustration. This is where my practice as a picturebook maker began.

During that time, I created my first picturebook, *Weasels* (Dolan 2013). This is a book about what weasels really do all day, which happens to be plotting world domination. Influenced by James Bond villains, this heavily detailed book manifested various types of humour including observational comedy (fig. 4), parody (fig. 5), incongruity (fig. 6), slapstick (fig. 7 electrocution) and bathos (fig. 8).

I had begun to create my own worlds and fill them with references and observations of everyday life and popular culture. When making *Weasels,* I did not actively decide to include humour, but I did choose not to try to make books that I thought other people, children, my peers, my tutors, might like. I decided to discard these concerns and create something that I enjoyed making. That is when the humour began to emerge.

Current practice

It was a struggle to find a publisher for *Weasels*. Reasons given by publishers included that children would not understand the concept. Eventually, in 2013, it was published and shortly after I followed it with another picturebook in a similar vein called *Nuts in Space* (2014). Like *Weasels, Nuts in Space* hinges on the creation of a detailed world and makes use of similar forms of humour as *Weasels* (fig. 9). Once these books were published, I saw how other people viewed them. *Weasels* was shortlisted for *The Roald Dahl Funny Prize 2013, the Waterstones Children's Book Prize 2014* and won the *Cambridgeshire Read it Again* award in the UK and *the Zena Sutherland Award* in the US. Each time, its humour was cited as a strength. *Nuts in Space* was described as 'funny enough to stand the test of many readings' (Alex O'Connell Times April 12th 2014) and 'combining in-jokes with adventure' (Sunday Times Nicolette Jones 29th June 2014). It had become obvious that it was not just me amused by the books I made: other people were too.

This led to a realisation on my part. I can be funny. Previously, this was not how I viewed myself. It is only subsequently, through the examination of my use of humour during this research, that I have realised the important part humour has played in my development as a maker of picturebooks and as a person. That initial realisation caused me to ask certain questions that eventually compelled me to conduct this research. If I do not consciously try to be funny in my books, how am I doing this? Where does it emerge from? What causes humour in a picturebook? Through this research, I hope to find some answers to those questions.

3.3.2 The Publishing Industry

This research was undertaken within the context of the UK publishing industry. It is my experience
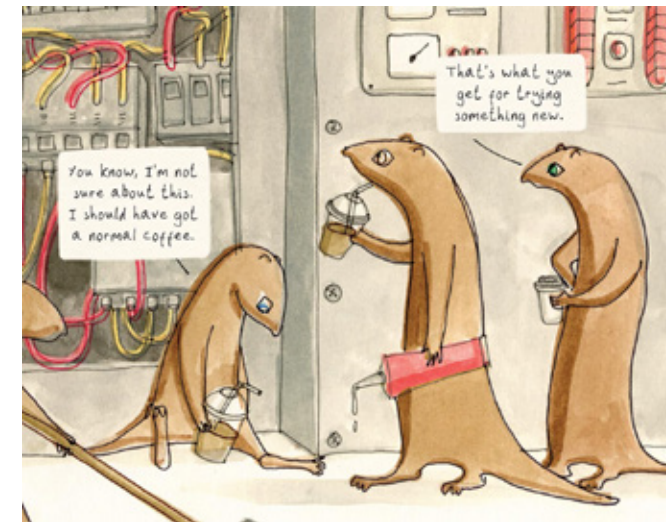

Fig. 4 From *Weasels* (Dolan 2013). Observation comedy concerning coffee.

Fig. 5 From *Weasels* (Dolan 2013). Parody of villains from Bond films.
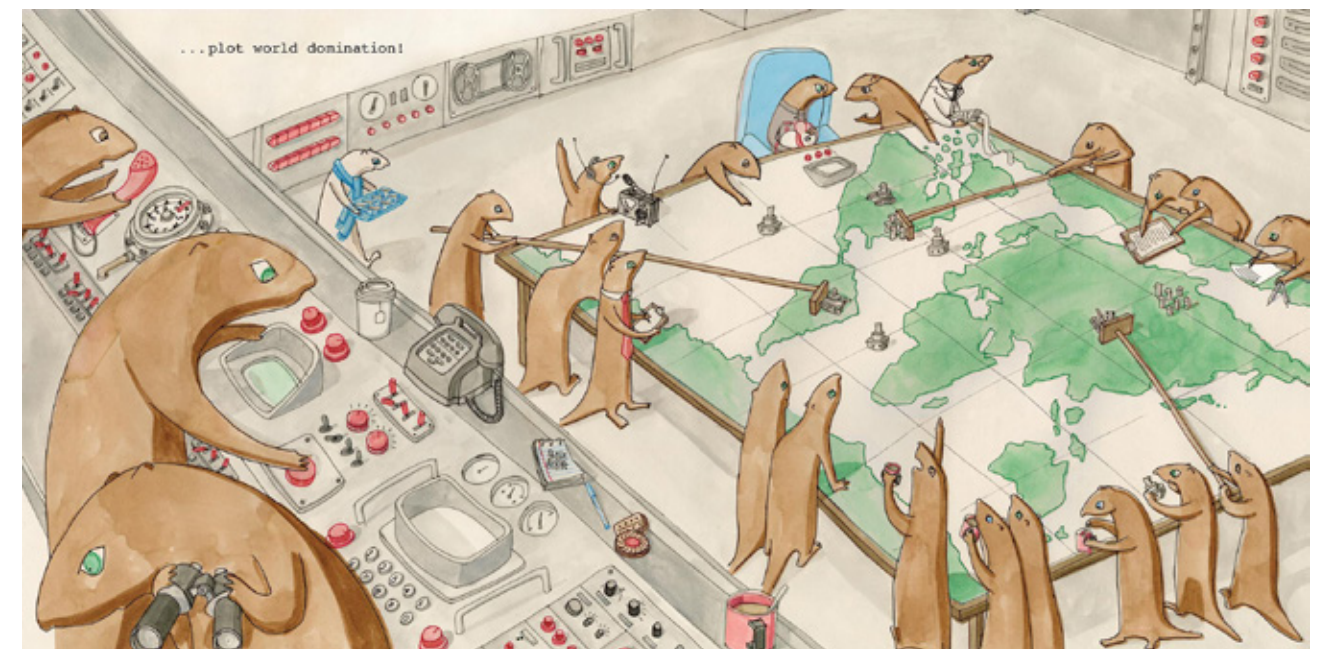

Fig. 6 From *Weasels* (Dolan 2013). Incongruity through weasels plotting world domination.

as a maker of picturebooks that decision-making can be heavily influenced by publisher feedback when working within this context. The maker works directly with a team of people, often including an editor who will provide feedback on the narrative, sequencing or textual elements of the book, and a designer who will aid with design, typography, composition and artwork. There will also be indirect influences such as the sales, marketing and publicity teams, who will feed back to the editor and the designer, who then make recommendations to the maker based on that feedback. This process can exert substantial change on the maker's original vision, and it is the context in which many picturebooks, humorous ones included, are created. Despite this, to my knowledge, little research seems to take this influence into account.

There are occasional instances where the relationship with the publisher within the process of making a picturebook has been analysed. The most comprehensive example of this that I have found is the chapter 'The Children's Publishing Industry' in Salisbury and Styles' *Children's Picturebooks* (2012, p.234-268). Salisbury and Styles acknowledge the power of the publishing industry, describing it as "a massive global industry" and pointing to the economic influence it wields. They consider the impact of the publisher and acknowledge that the picturebook maker "can expect meetings with a range of people who will have input into the development of the books" and that this can "involve changes to the characterisation, the overall structure of the sequence, use of colour - almost any aspect of the book's identity", which closely reflects my own experience.

Salisbury and Styles (2012, p.165) detail the stages of the process, from receiving a publishing contract all the way through to post publication. The working relationship with publishing staff is discussed, such as how the editors or designers might change a book, and publishing staff are interviewed to obtain their perspective. Salisbury and Styles (2012, p.174) include an interview with editor Helen MacKenzie Smith, where she notes publishers' aversion to risk-taking and how this influences the way they develop a book. She states: "[t]here is a tendency for one extraordinary book to emerge and then everyone follows the format until it's dead". This suggests that the publisher's influence can indeed be a negative one as well as a positive.

There are a few valuable insights into the impact a publisher can have on the outcome of a picturebook. Solomon (2003) briefly details the picturebook/designer relationship from his observational perspective as an art-director. He also touches on how other aspects of publishing, such as costs, foreign markets and co-editions sales, can affect the final picturebook.

Creating Picturebooks (Marantz and Marantz 1997) gathers together a series of interviews from various professions associated with children's books, including publishing. This provides information about the publisher-maker relationship, including how they selected books to publish, how economic concerns affect their work, their responsibilities and motivations. The information here is generalised, so it is not possible to see how the relationship described affects the creation of a specific book. As the book was published in 1997, we could assume that the publishing industry has undergone substantial changes in the intervening period, so some of the information may now be outdated.
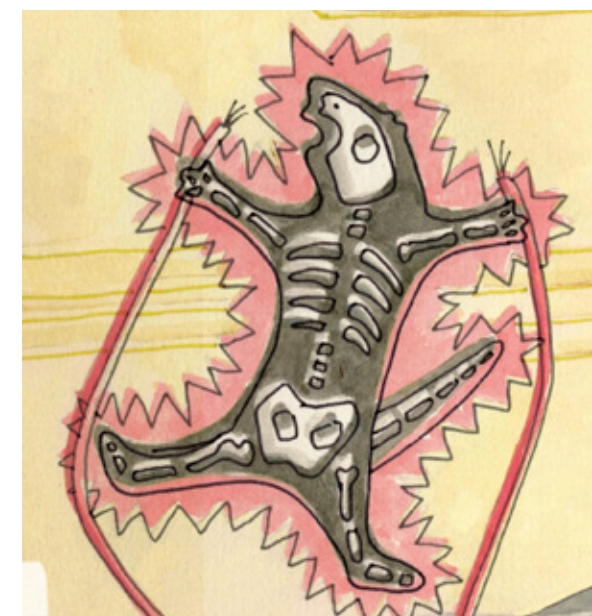

Fig. 7 From *Weasels* (Dolan 2013). Slapstick comedy.

Fig. 8 From *Weasels* (Dolan 2013). Bathotic humour arises from the ending of the story, where the reasons for the 'world domination machine' not working and all the chaos caused by this is due to it being unplugged.

Fig. 9 A double page spread from *Nuts in Space* (2014).

These sources acknowledge the importance of this publisher-maker relationship, but it is rare that the exact nature of a publisher's requested 'changes' has been explored through systematic research, or specifically in relationship to humour creation. Equally, I have not identified any research focusing on the publisher's input on a specific maker's practice and how they affect the final outcome. I believe this constitutes a gap in our knowledge.

3.4 The Gap in Our Knowledge

During this chapter, I have demonstrated both the breadth of humour research in other disciplines, which is a testament to the scholarly interest in the subject area, and the prevalence of humorous children's books, which demonstrates their popularity and significance. Despite this, humour in children's books rarely receives scholarly attention, perhaps because both humour and children's books can be perceived as trivial, especially so when the two come together.

By examining the research context, I have addressed my first research question, 'what is humour in the context of a picturebook?', but this examination has allowed me to identify three areas where a gap in our knowledge exists in relation to humour in picturebooks. These 3 areas form the basis for my remaining three research questions:

- Our understanding of how the form of the picturebook can be used to create a humorous effect. This gives rise to the question, what devices can be employed within the form of the picturebook to create humour?

- Our understanding of how and why humour emerges in picturebooks through the practice employed in making them. This gives rise to the question, what actions does the picturebook-maker take that allow humour to emerge through practice?

- Our understanding of how a publisher's input influences the nature of humour in picturebooks. This give rise to the question, how does creating a picturebook within the context of the publishing industry affect humour creation?

By investigating how humour manifests in picturebooks and how that humour is created through practice, I propose to fill these gaps in our existing knowledge and provide new insight into humour in picturebooks.

Using practice research, I intend to use my own practice as a picturebook-maker to gain experiential knowledge concerning how humour emerges when creating a picturebook in the context of the publishing industry. This will allow me to examine the devices I used to create humour in my picturebooks, see what actions I perform in my practice that give rise to humorous content, and reflect on why this occurs and in what way the publisher's influence affected the humour.

Chapter 4. The Pictorial Essay

This chapter takes the form of a pictorial essay. The purpose of the pictorial essay is to demonstrate types of humour found in picturebooks and how the characteristics of the picturebook are deployed in their execution. The content of this chapter has been informed by the critical analysis found in chapter 5. As discussed in chapter 2, it was deemed necessary to demonstrate these forms of humour, as opposed to purely analysing existing instances of such humour, to allow the reader the opportunity to experience comic amusement.

Therefore, this chapter is written and illustrated in the manner of a picturebook, using the convention of the form, such as characters, setting and word/image interplay. It is imperative that this chapter should be read as a picturebook would, with the reader considering both words and pictures together simultaneously and extracting meaning from their experience of the two working together.

Please continue to turn the pages and wait for your lecturer to arrive.

Ah! There you are!
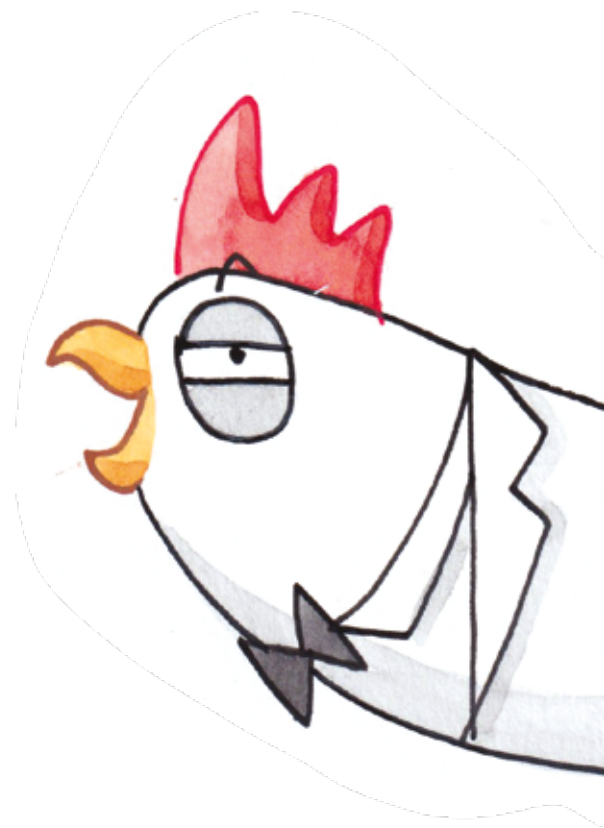
Good day.

I'm the Professor and today I shall be lecturing you on the more practical side of humour in picturebooks. I shall demonstrate some of the methods that picturebook-makers use to create humorous content.
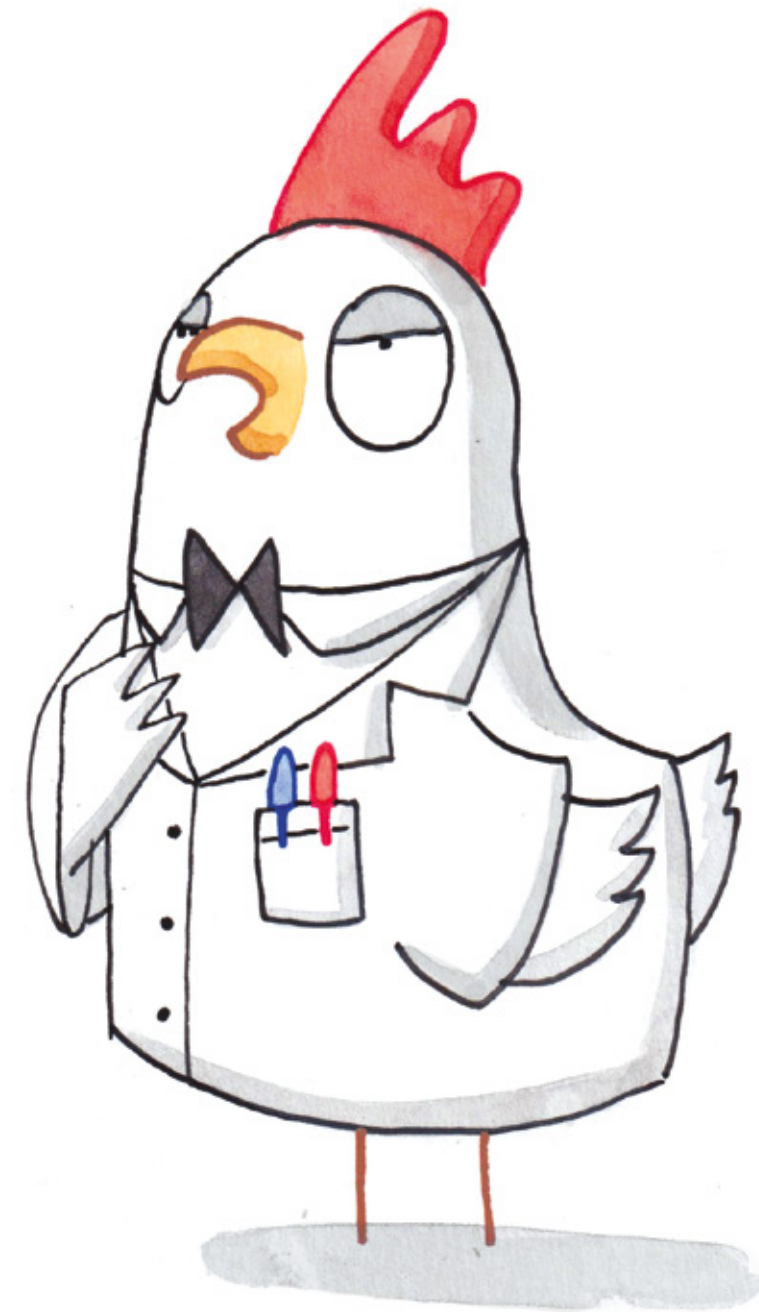
As you can see from my attire, I am a legitimate academic.

I'm going to demonstrate what I believe are the most prevalent types of humour found within picturebooks and analyse the mechanics through which they are delivered.
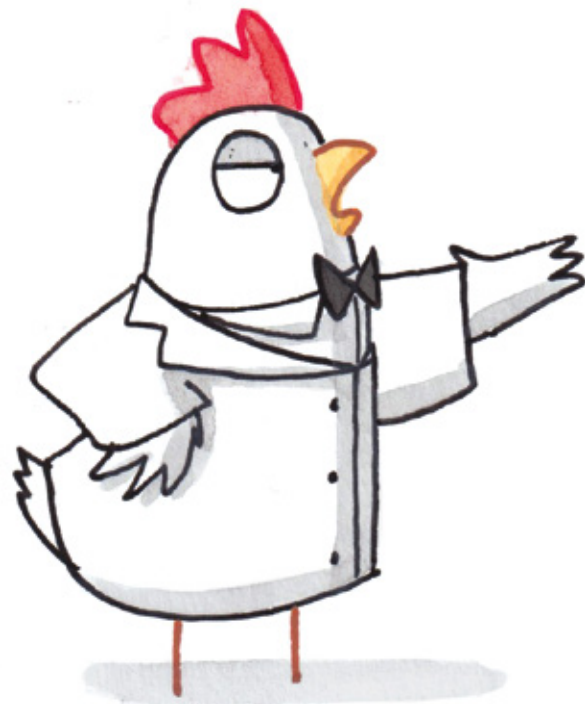
But first you must fill out this participant consent form.

a.r.u.
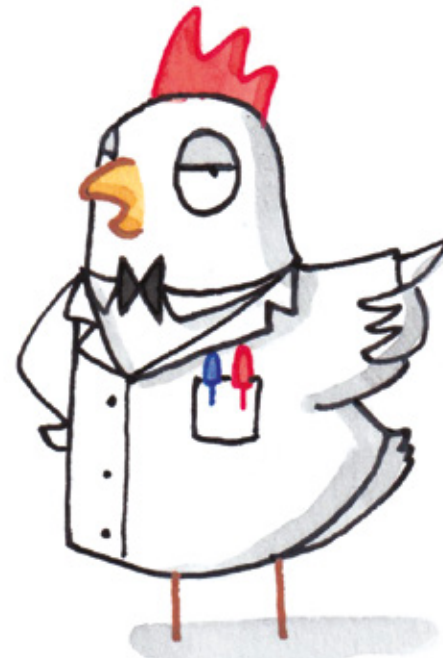
NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

DATE:

FORM NUMBER:

1.   Do you have a sense of humour? **Y / N**

2.   Do you have any medical conditions? **Y / N**

3.   Do you have any issues with poo? **Y / N**

4   Do you have any criminal convictions? **Y / N**

5.   Would you like any? **Y / N**

6.   Do you have a history of monkey bites? **Y / N**

7.   Are you wearing a bow tie? **Y / N**

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print)………………………… Signed……………………….

Date………………

PARTICIPANTS ARE FREE TO WITHDRAW AT ANY POINT WITHOUT GIVING A REASON EVEN THOUGH IT WOULD BE QUITE RUDE.

Now that you have completed the form please hand it to your Faculty Liaison Officer to the right.
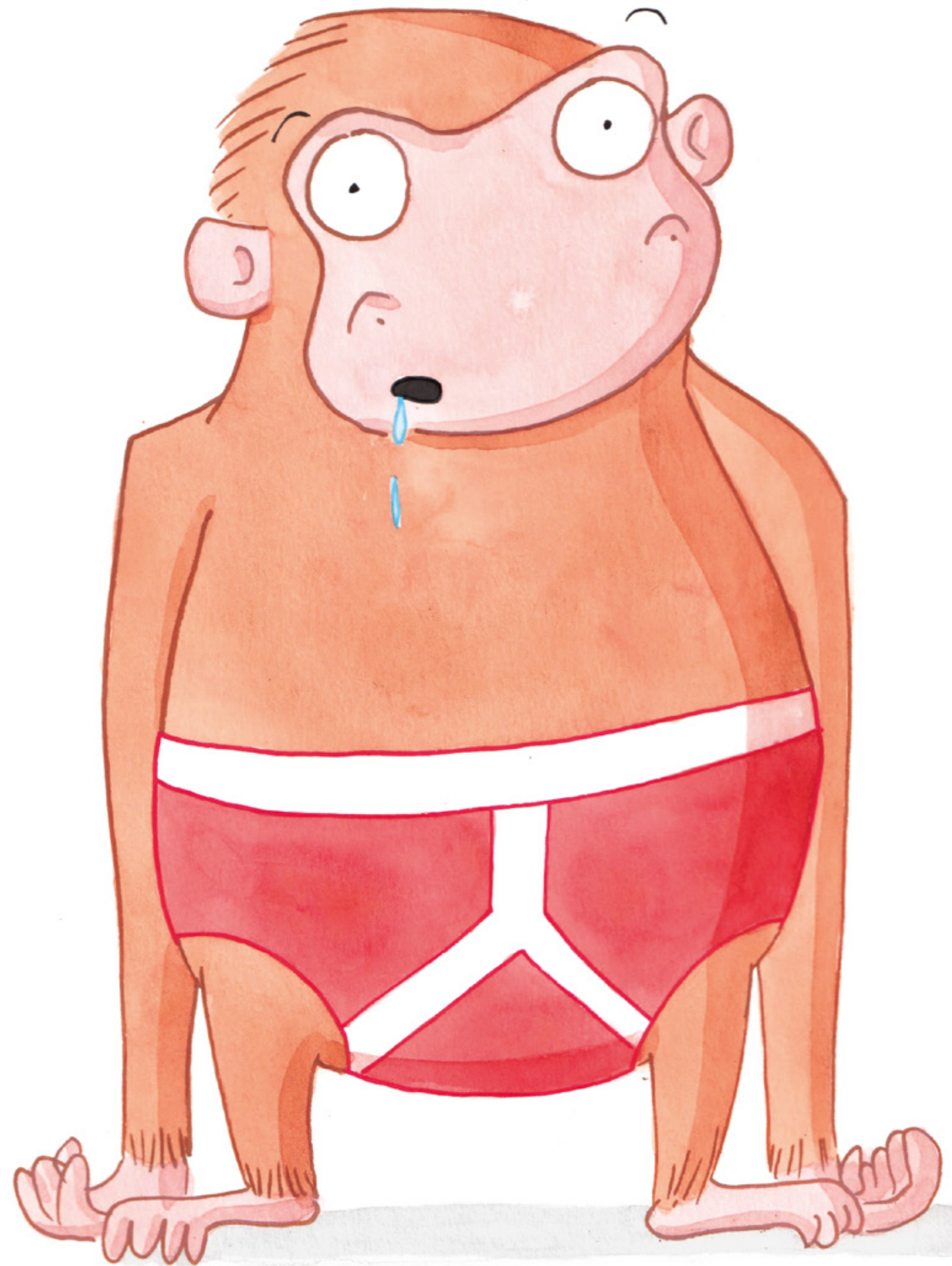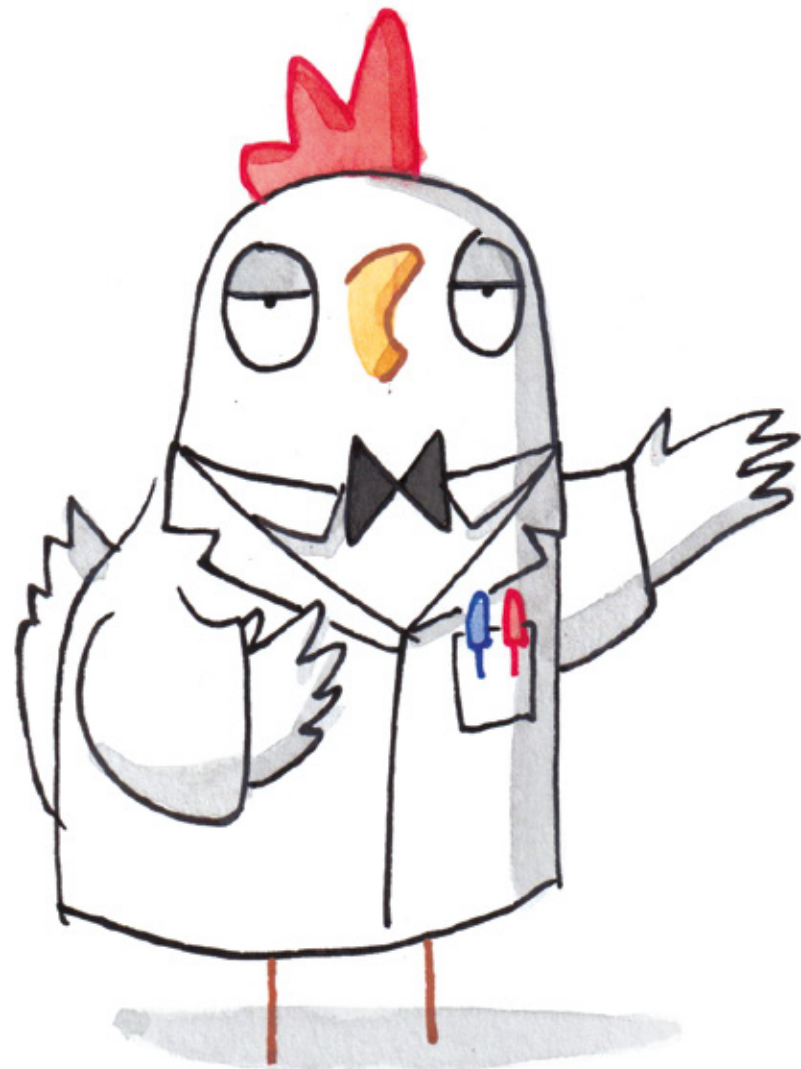
Conveniently, your Faculty Liaison Officer also happens to be my research assistant. Let me introduce you properly. This is Pants Monkey. He'll be assisting me with some of the demonstrations.

As you know, today I'm going to be explaining humour, or 'funny stuff' as we academics call it. The issue is, by analysing comedy it is said that you dramatically diminish its humorous effect, which you'll also already know if you read the earlier portions of this thesis.

For example, take Pants Monkey. If I tell you that...

'This monkey is funny because he's wearing pants and pants are funny because pants cover bums and bums are funny because bums are rude and rude things are funny...etc'

It's much less amusing than if you came to this realisation independently.
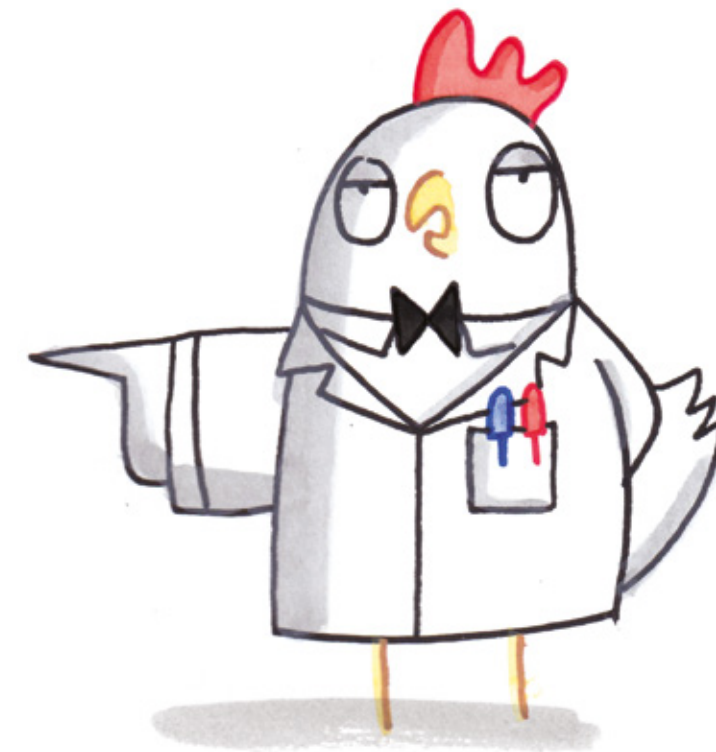
So, if you explain why something is funny or tell people what they should find funny it automatically becomes unfunny...

...no matter how hard you try.

Therefore, we can safely assume that this process is going to ruin some jokes for you. If you want to see these mechanisms used to their full effect do refer to the recommended reading I shall prescribe. Let us begin.

Exaggeration

This can apply to situations and settings but in picturebooks exaggeration is often used in characterisation. If elements of a character are exaggerated beyond audience expectations (Brown 2015, p.72) it often creates a humorous effect. Let me show you:

Hold my bow tie. This could get messy.

I could be implausibly tall.
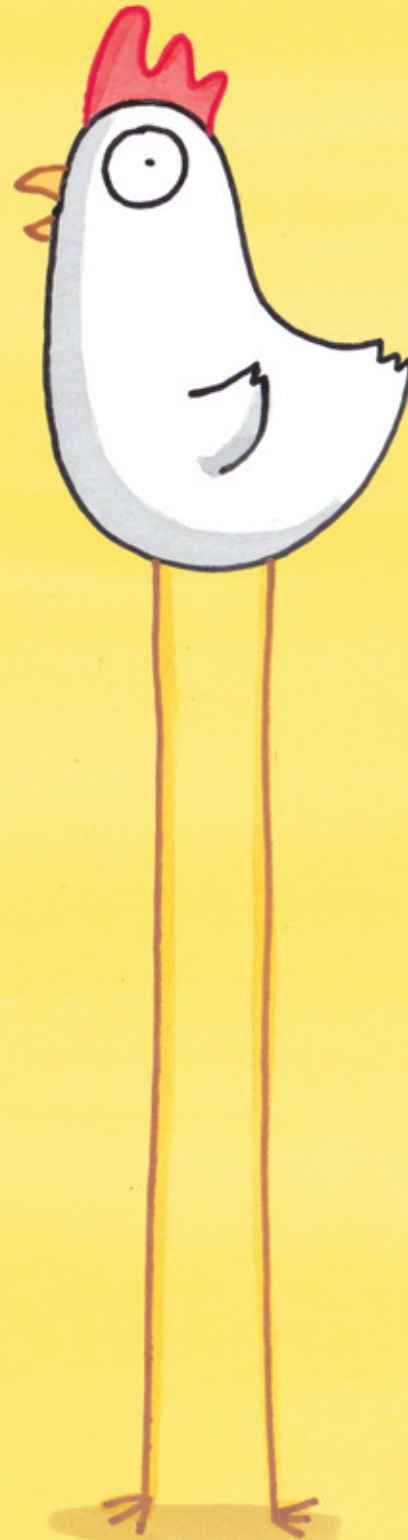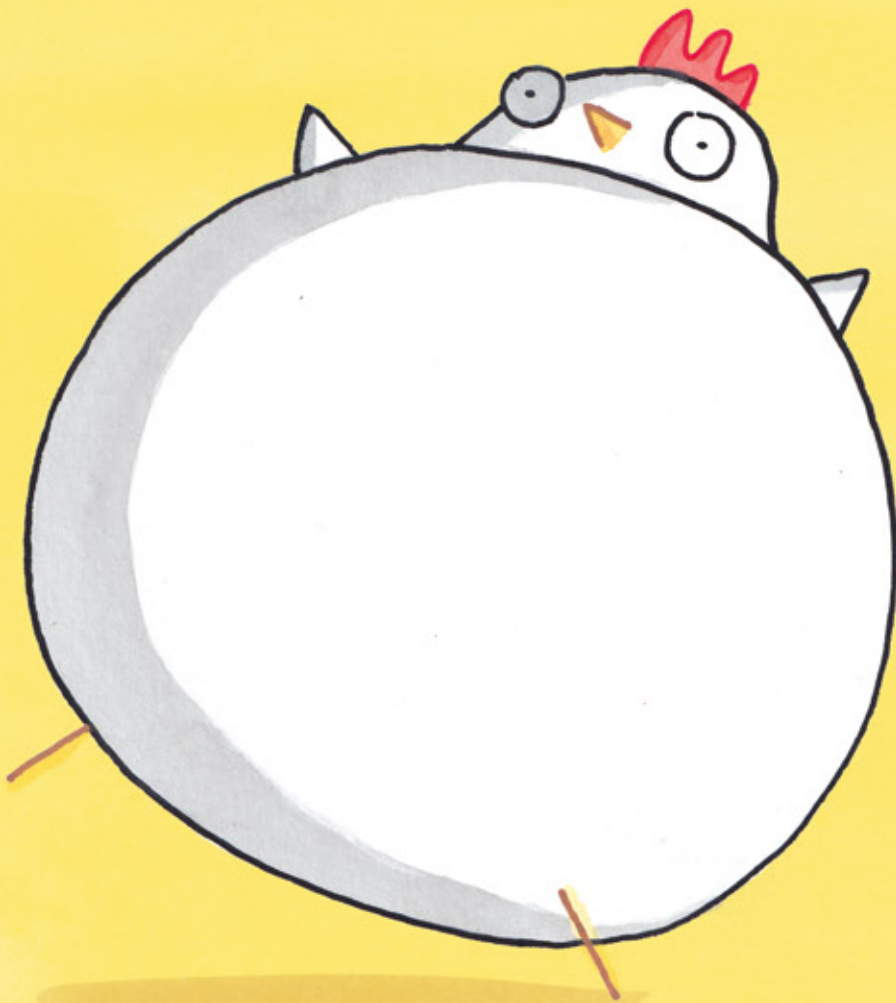
Or have absurd hair that no respectable academic would consider acceptable.

Or excessively round.

Thank you for your input Pants Monkey. That is applicable but perhaps not in keeping with the tone of this lecture. Now let us examine a different form of exaggeration through characterisation.

It's not just physical characteristics you can exaggerate for comic effect, you can also exaggerate reactions or emotions. This can be seen in books such as Ed Vere's *Grumpy Frog* (2017) or Mo Willems *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* (2005). Pants Monkey will now demonstrate some of his exaggerated feelings:
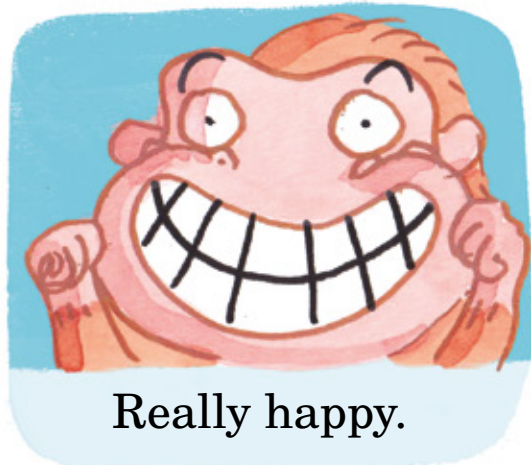
Really happy.
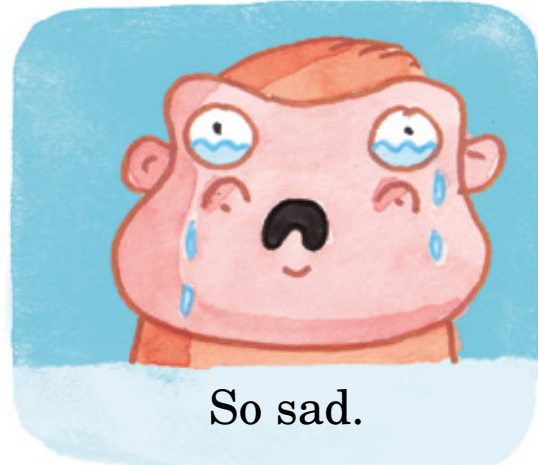
So sad.

Gormless
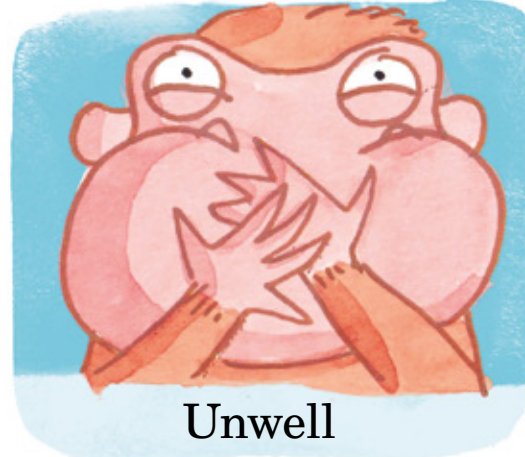
Unwell
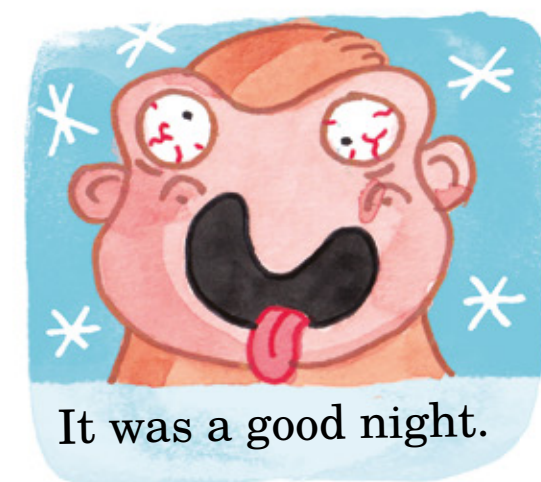
It was a good night.

...wait!

MONKEY! DON'T YOU DARE DO THAT AGAIN!
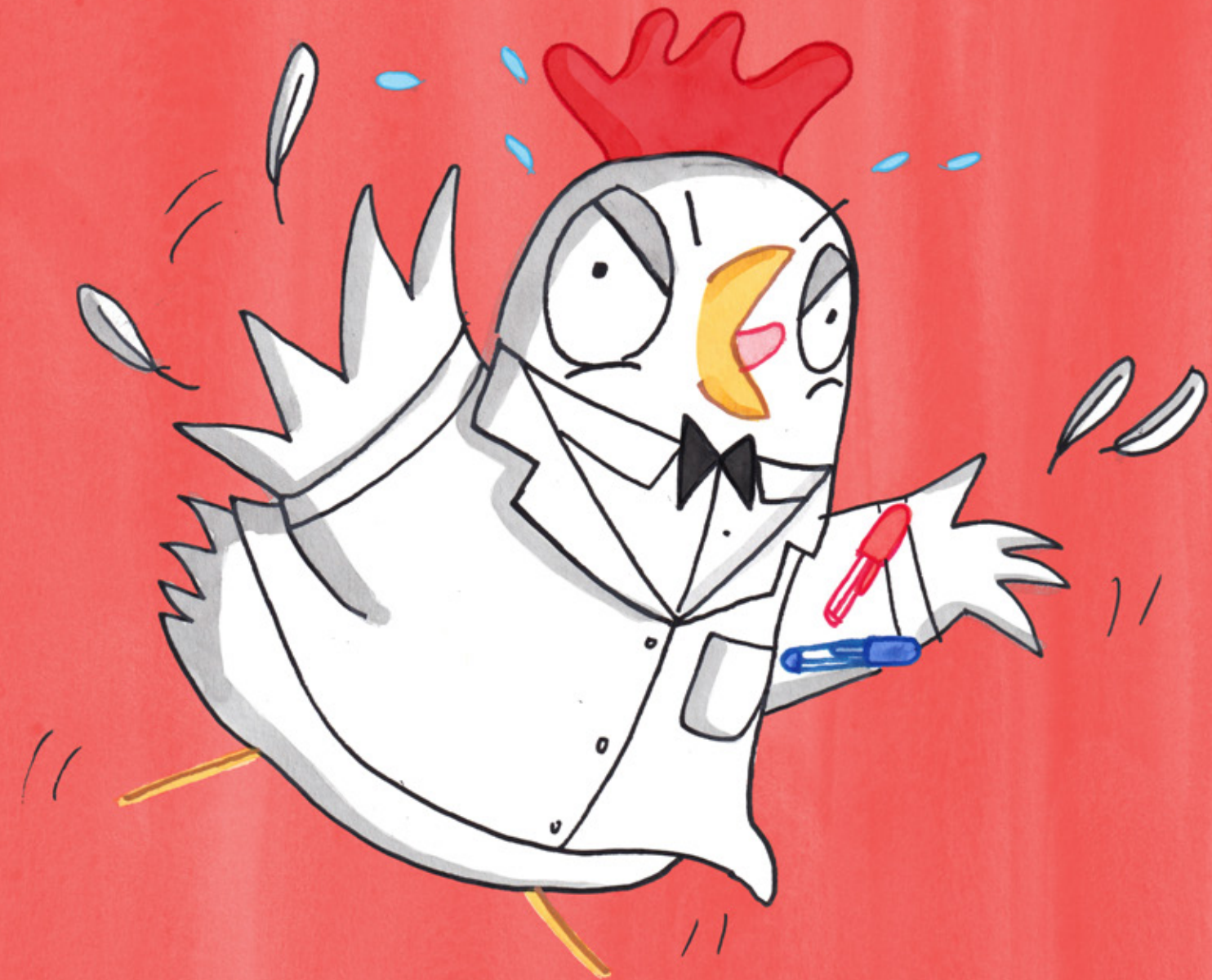
It is evident that emotional exaggeration can be applied to characters that embody self-possession and control. This break from and contrast to their typical behaviour intensifies comic effect.

Slapstick

We can define slapstick as a kind of physical comedy that relies upon violence, physical punishment and exaggerated misfortunes that are not truly life threatening (Brown 2015, p194; Weitz 2009, p.57). For example...

...getting hit in the face with a ladder....

...and then instantly getting kicked in the gonadal region....

...which causes your pants to fall down....

...then slipping on a banana skin....

...and then finally....

71

There is an extensive range of picturebooks that utilise slapstick humour, from *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins 1967) to *Splat* (Burgerman 2017).

But why would we find such acts amusing? We discussed Superiority Theory in chapter 3, which suggests that we find humour in a sense of superiority over the misfortunes of others (Levin 1987, p.11). Misfortune is a key element of slapstick. Alternatively, if we consider Benign Violation Theory the violation here is the threat to physical well-being and what makes it benign is its fictional nature.

For instance, if I were to kick a real monkey in the gonads it would be cruel, a malign violation. Pant monkey isn't real, he's a drawing, so it's fine because no one's really getting hurt.

Are they Pants Monkey?

Oh. I might need a moment to pull myself together.
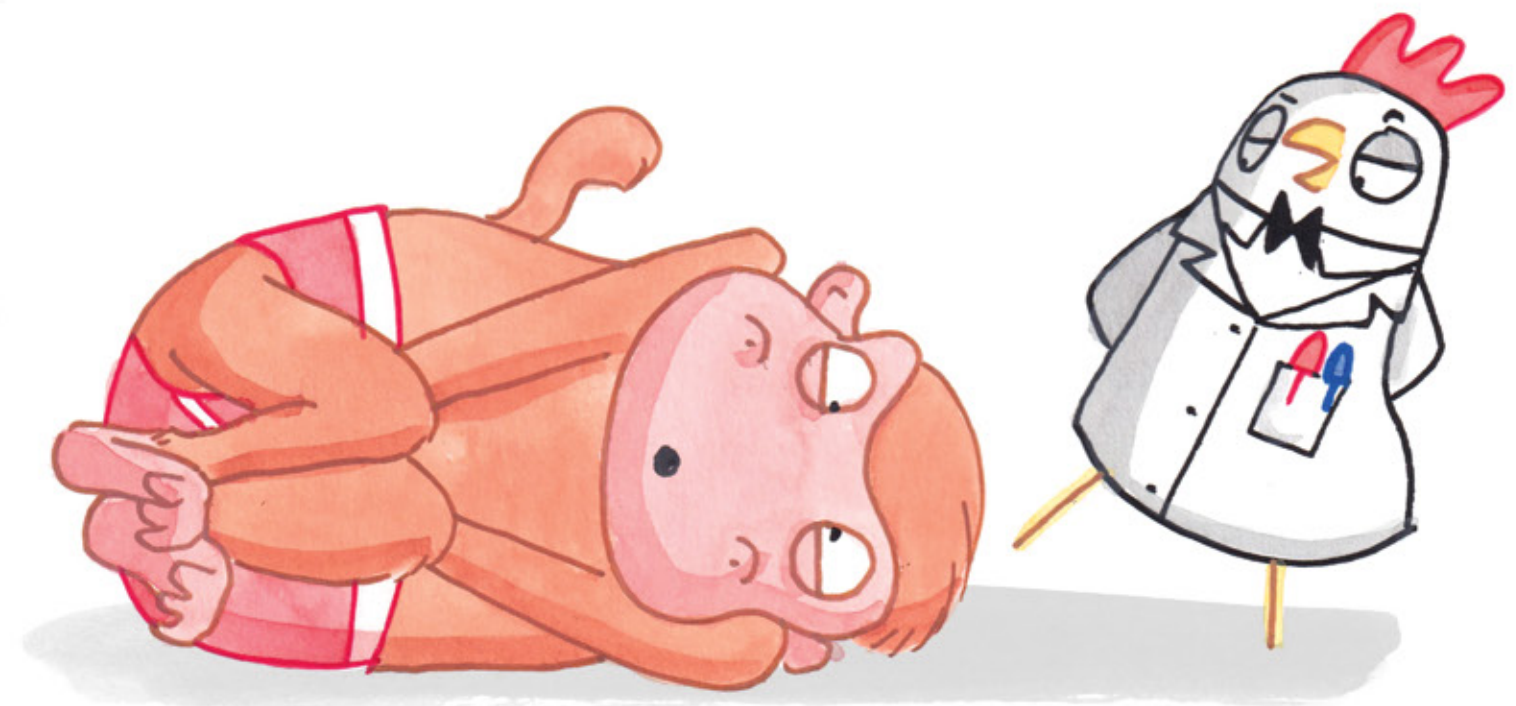
It could be said that such humour is highly dependant on the nature of the character. If the subject possesses a certain amount of emotional distance from the reader, it appears to help determine the effectiveness of the joke.

So, clearly it would be inappropriate to kick this child.

For instance, if I were to kick this adorable child in the face it would not be as funny. This could be because as a human the character bears more similarity to the reader, so seems more real or 'mimetic' (Nikolajeva 2003, p8). Therefore, the violation becomes malign as we empathise more with the character's distress and the humorous effect is diminished.

Now might be an fitting moment to discuss
breaking the rules.

Rule-Breaking

Yes that's a great idea! Let me demonstrate. I could do something like shout

ARSE!

In the middle of a PhD thesis!
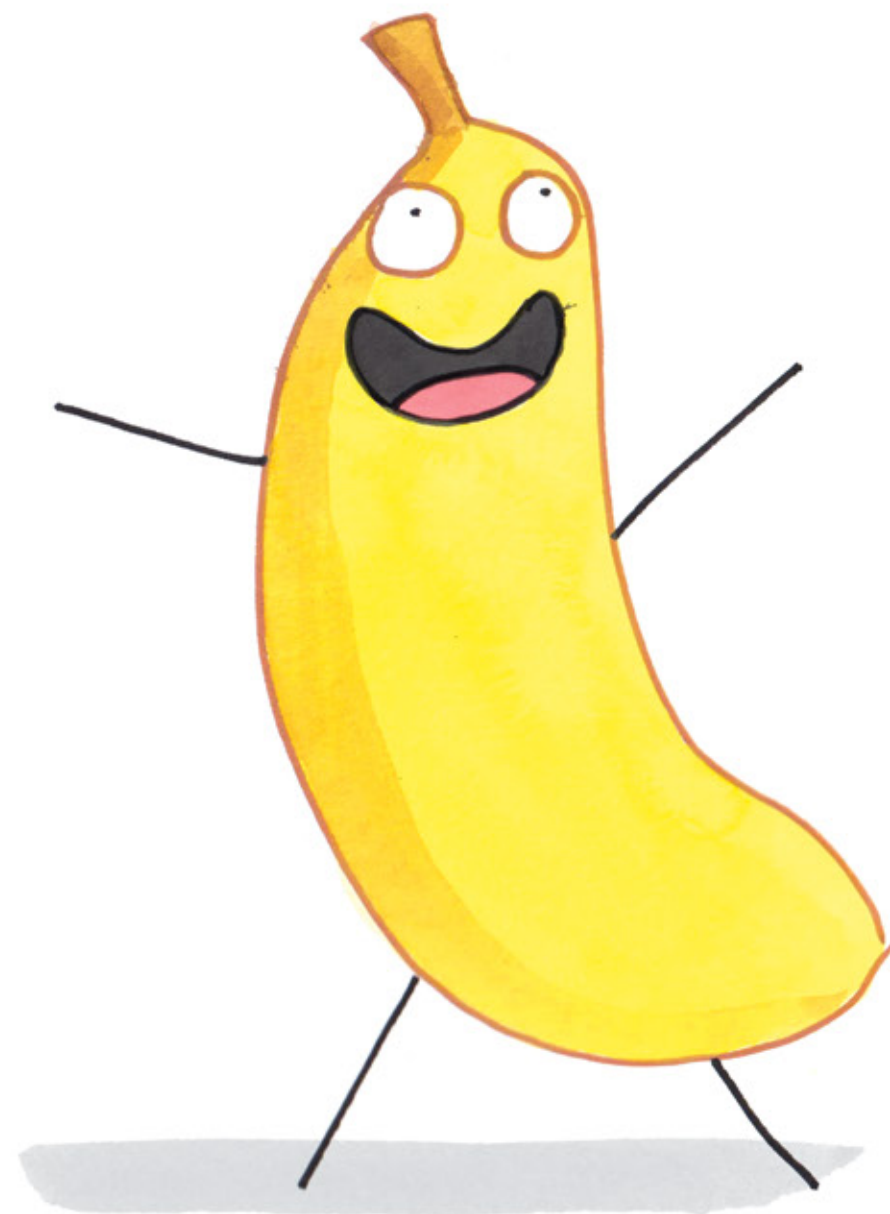
What right have you got to talk about humour? What's your publication history?

I'm Banana! Your monkey stepped on me earlier. I'm a well known graduate student and you can tell I'm fun-loving and hilarious because I speak in comic sans.
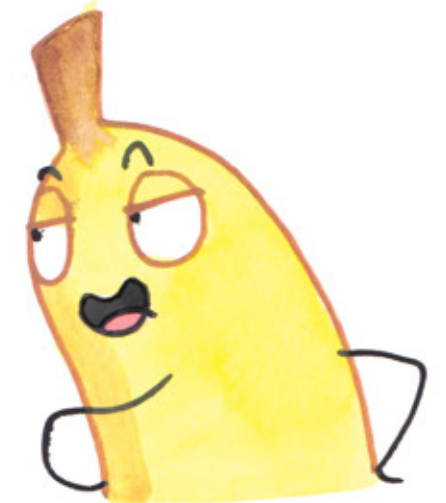
But... are you aware of the preconceptions associated with comic sans?

I'm a maverick who doesn't play by the rules. I defy conventions and laugh at authority, so I'm borderline unemployable.

Can you provide a compelling theory as to why any of this is humorous?

Relief Theory

Obviously.

Relief Theory suggests that we find it humorous when a convention is violated because this causes a release of tension or restraint (Monroe 1987). So when we break rules, which are social conventions in themselves, we find it amusing. This is the source of the humour in *Read the Book, Lemmings!* (Dyckman and Ohora 2018), where the lemmings continuously do the opposite of what they're told to.

Equally, the humorous nature of the violation of social conventions seen here could be explained by BVT. It is benign because there are no real-life consequences to my actions. This is a book and so the situation is fictional. So, there's no harm in breaking a few more rules...

Observe me as I STREAK!
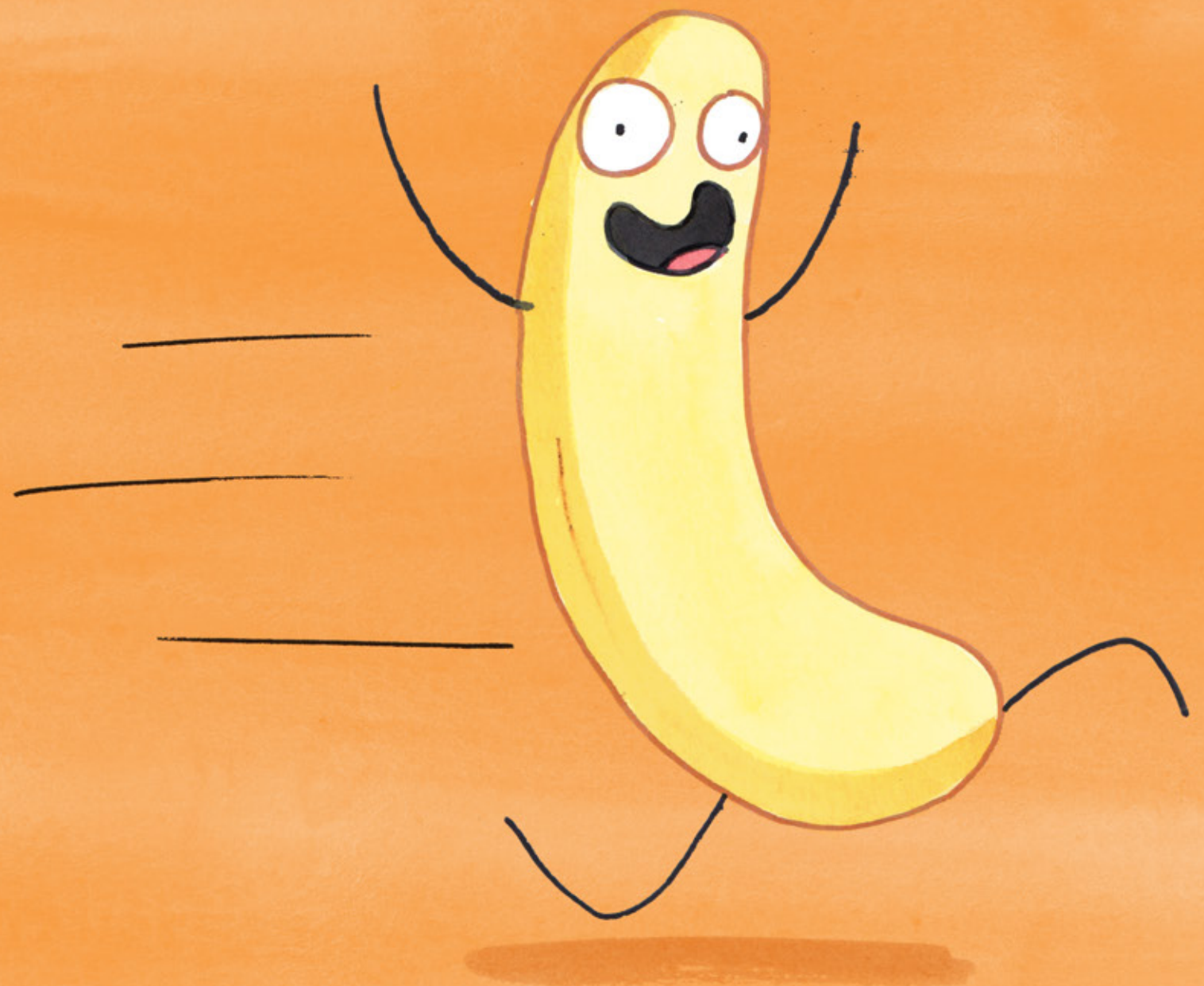
Banana, it is time for you to desist because you are undermining the structure of my lecture. In addition, I cannot stand your font choice.
I shall take over.

Do you know what makes rule breaking even funnier?

What?
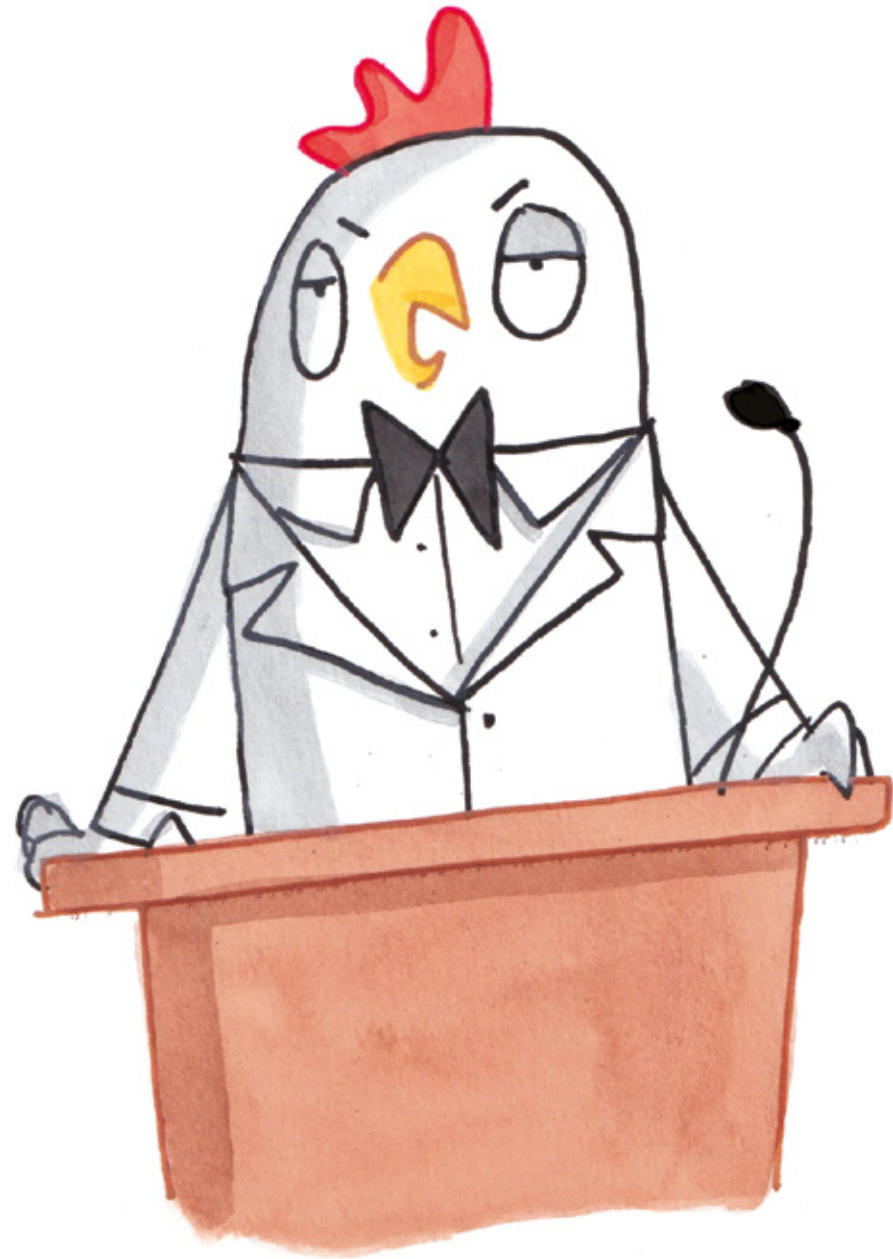
Rule breaking for humorous effect in picturebooks is common. This can take the form of breaking social conventions and taboos, such as in Stephanie Blake's *Poo Bum* (2013), or the violation of the physical conventions of the picturebook itself, as seen in Richard Byrne's *This Book Just Ate My Dog* (2015).

WHEN IT HAPPENS TO AUTHORITY FIGURES!

This situation could be seen as even funnier because it not only violates the social conventions of not throwing eggs at people, but also the convention that suggests we must show respect to authority figures such as teachers, parents, political leaders and, of course, professors.

Peter Brown does this in *My Teacher is a Monster!* (2016) when he characterises a school teacher as an over-exaggerated monster, benignly violating the perception of teachers having poise, authority and respect. This could also relate to Superiority Theory, as it can make the reader feel superior to authority figures who are more often our superiors.

Not convinced?
I'll just throw a few more.

Pants Monkey? Will you kindly remove this disruptive student from my classroom.

Oh dear.
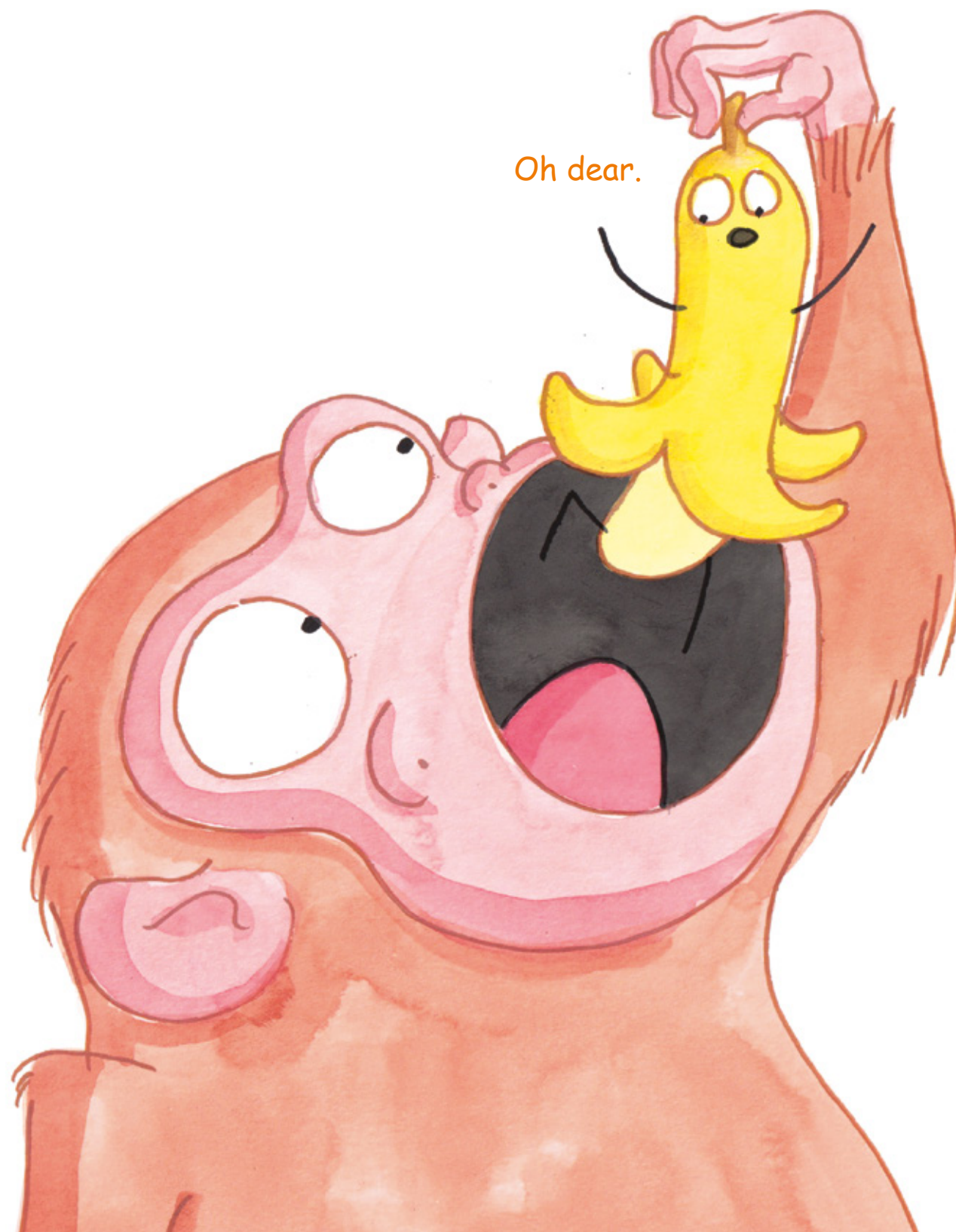
Thank you. I shall report him to his Head of Department when he comes out the other end. Though, after further consideration, I will concede that eating graduate students is a form of rule-breaking in itself, making this an effective demonstration.

Speaking of the other end, we should probably address toilet humour. Come with me.

Oh excellent. That must mean it's time for my bit.

Hi, I'm Poo. I'm a new faculty member
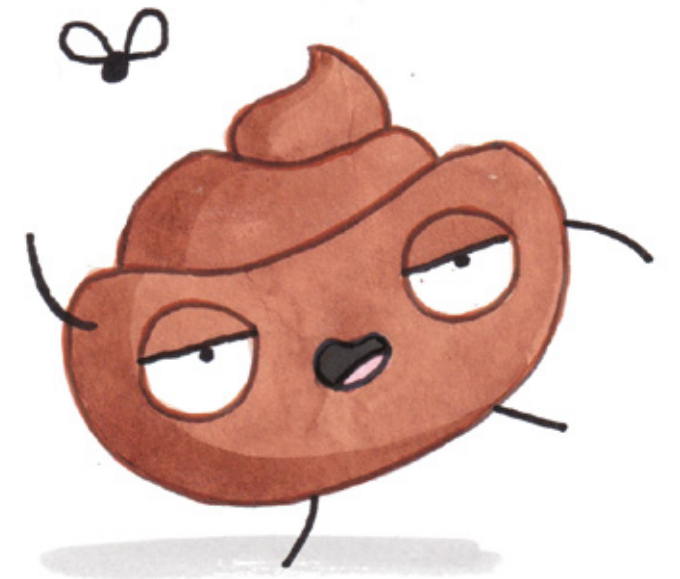
I'm one of those modern lecturers who everyone likes.
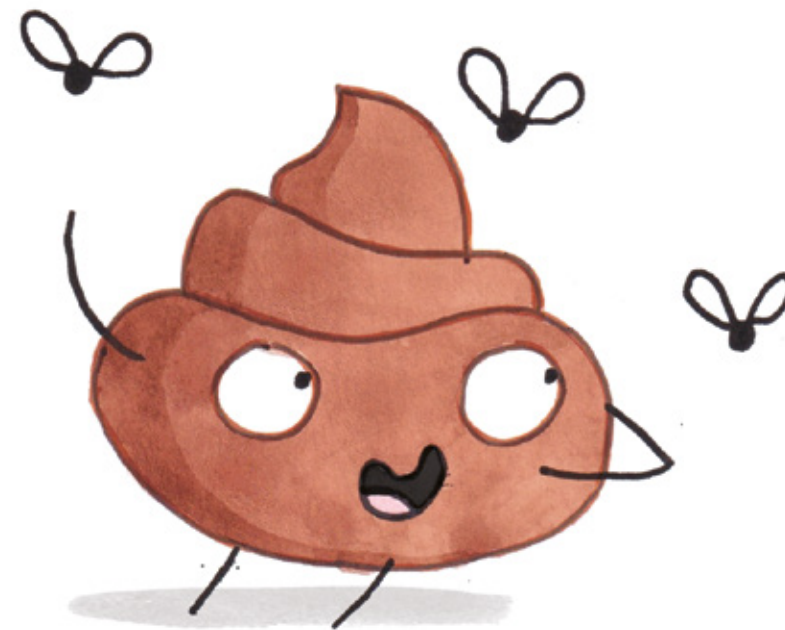
I don't even wear a tie.

WHO are you?
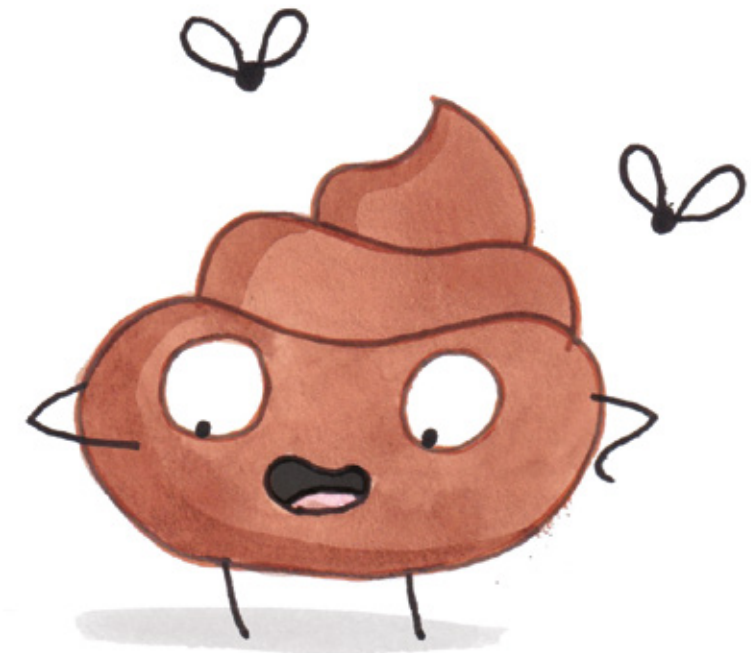
No... tie?

Toilet Humour

You'll find I'm quite the expert in my field. Byrne (1999) suggests that rudeness is an essential aspect of humour, so we simply must talk about toilet, or scatological humour. We could define it as humour that relies upon the use of bodily functions, effluents and taboo body parts. Examples include:

Poo, my good self. Also my cousin wee.

Hi there!

Things associated with these effluents like toilets...

... and pants.

Bodily revoltingness e.g. smelliness and nose picking.

Oh yes, vomit! Excellent output Professor.

Then there's taboo body parts like bums. You really have a talent, Pants Monkey!

Genitalia would come under this but may not be seen as age or culturally appropriate for a young readership.

I struggle to see why this is humourous.

Oh, but it is!

Yes Poo you're totally right.

So clever.

We agree with you wholeheartedly Poo!

Many picturebooks utilise toilet humour with varying degrees of subtlety. *The Little Mole Who Knew It Was None Of His Business* (Werner, H and Erlbruch, W. 1994) and *The Dinosaur Who Pooped A Planet* (Parsons, G and Fletcher, T. 2013), to mention only a couple.

Michael Rosen (2014, para.47) suggests that 'at the heart of a good deal of comedy is anxiety'. We experience anxiety around wee and similar bodily functions, concerning the shame around putting them in the right, or wrong, places. He suggests that if we take these things out of the context of shame and use it for different application, in this case for the serious business of comedy, we're relieved of that anxiety. This ties in closely with Relief Theory.

It also fits with BTV. Displaying taboo bodily functions violates a social convention but it does not cause serious harm. Though I admit Pants Monkey's gonadal region is perhaps a malign violation, which suggests that toilet humour can tread a fine line between malign and benign violation.

I find it funny.
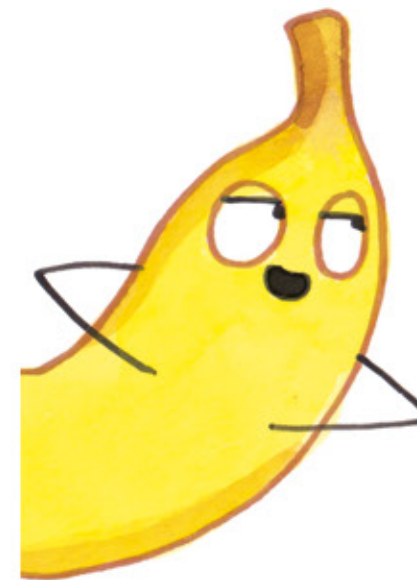
Where did you come from?

That monkey just used the toilet on the previous page.

This excess of scatological humour is objectionable and, more importantly, not consistent with my lesson plan. Is a junior lecturer such as yourself even aware of the origins of poo?

No...
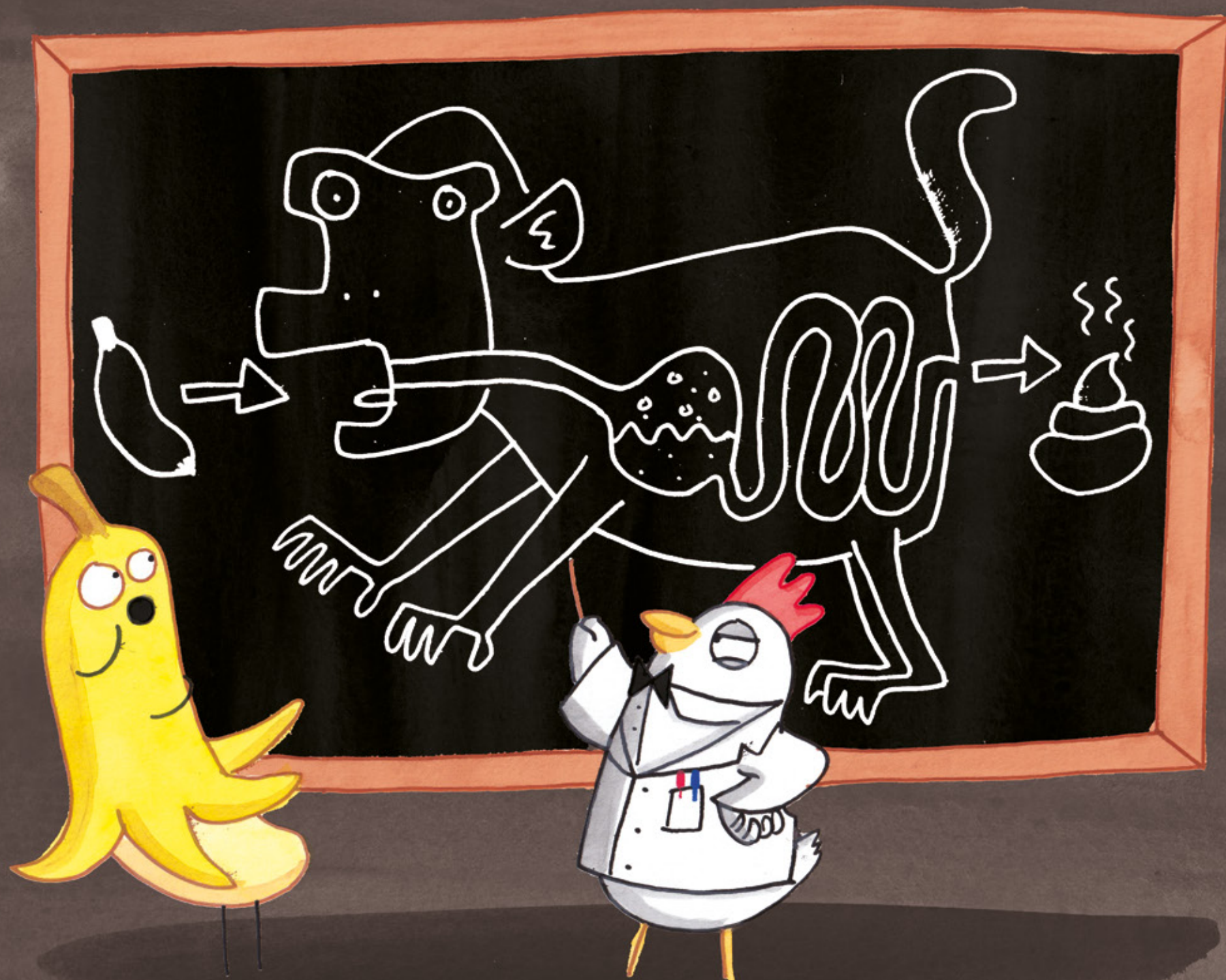
Excellent. Banana, I would strongly suggest that you also remove yourself due to your ability to inhibit learning.

Now that I have reasserted my scholarly superiority let us resume our studies. If you would turn to page...

BRIAN!

Oh no, it can't be. I thought he was on annual leave. It's... it's...

... THE DEAN!

TREMBLE BEFORE THE DEAN!

By the way, we've had some complaints from other staff members that your behaviour is inappropriate Brian. You had best step into my office.

Now Brian, this has to stop. Poo was in here in tears.

Your parody of academia has gone too far. That's not even to mention the anthropomorphism! It's all just far too incongruous.

Could you explain how it is incongruous, sir?

That should be obvious to a humour researcher. No wonder this department is in trouble. I am aware that humour can lie in the contrast caused by the juxtaposition of contrary elements (Rutkowski 2016), incongruity in other words. If those contrary elements relate to an existing style or genre and are presented in a manner of gentle mockery we can call that parody. I strongly suspect that's what's happening here, don't you, Brian?

And I think it's obvious what exactly is being parodied. Just look at my departmental staff.

Incongruity

Through anthropomorphisation.

Lecturer

It does not work.

TAP

Professor　　**I.T.**

We won't come out without a job code.

Estates

Don't mind me, I'm not here.
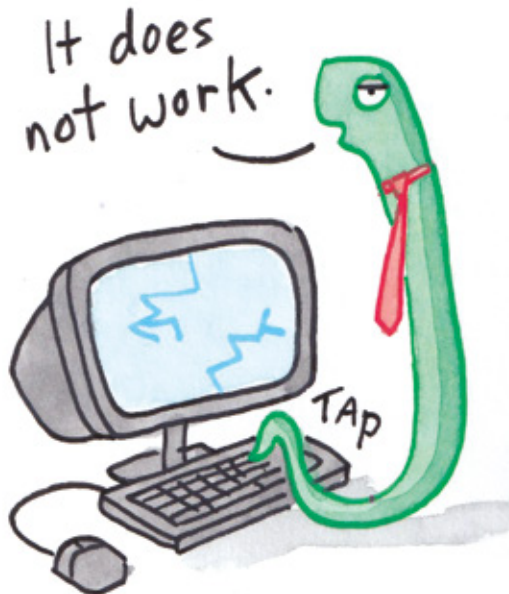
Professor Emeritus

Catering

We might have it as an e-book.

Subject Librarian

Admin

I'm ready.

Technician

NOPE.
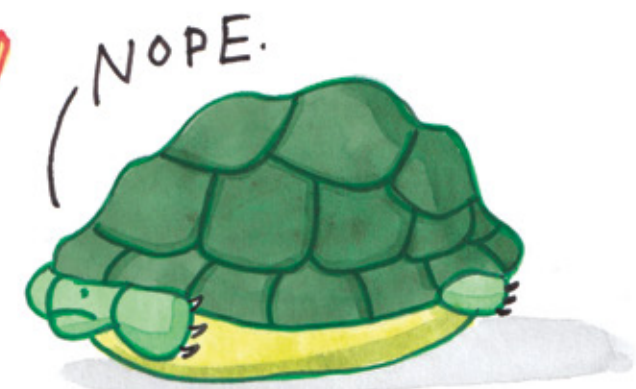
Course Leader

They're blatantly anthropomorphised, Brian.

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Now, this could be seen as humorous in itself. The combination of non-human characters in human situations is incongruous and, as previously stated, incongruous things can be amusing. This is made apparent in books like *The Adventures of the Dish and the Spoon* (Grey 2007) and *Kitchen Disco (*Foges and Murphy 2015).

But in this case, the humorous effect is taken a step further. It's clear that some of the conventions of academia are being combined with anthropomorphism, arguably a common feature of children's books, and both are presented in a ridiculous light. It's obviously mocking both academia and children's books. This entire situation is a parody, Brian, if not a satire! I've seen parody before in books such as *Pigeon P.I* (McLaren 2017) and *Super Happy Magic Forest* (Long 2015) so I know full well it occurs regularly in picturebooks, Brian.

And I don't think any of it's acceptable in the work place, do you?

I mean, for goodness sake Brian, you're a chicken in a bow tie and I'm a huge purple blob!

You realise I'll have to inform HR. Now finish your lecture, Brian, and we'll discuss this at your next appraisal.

The Rule of Three

Where was I? Ah. Brown (2015) suggests that there's something about the rhythm of threes that lends itself to comedy. Threes create a pattern of set-up, establishment and punchline. In picturebooks, we often see that punchline takes the form of a disruption, or, benign violation, of that pattern. The beginning of *Supertato* (Hendra & Linnet 2014) comes to mind but let us demonstrate. Observe Pants Monkey:

Monkey likes:
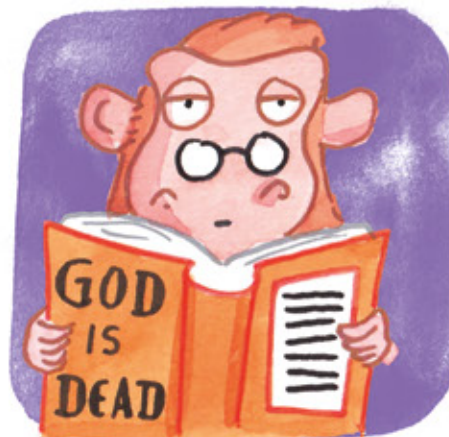
Banana.   Nose.   Nietzsche.

Note how he purports to like lowbrow things but then that pattern is benignly violated by an incongruous contrast, his love of Nietzche (which I believe he is lying about).

There are ways in which pacing can be utilised to deliver this disruption of a pattern with more impact. Allow me to demonstrate. Take the way I approach my job as an academic:

I do it with panache!

With vigour!

With **BOW TIES!**

Brian!

Comic Timing

Note the page turn and scale change between the set up and the violation. This is to create a change in the pacing.

Salisbury (2004, p.82) defines pacing as the rate at which the story unfolds and can be controlled by 'changing the viewpoint, varying the size of images and altering the actual design of the image on the page'. This is because, as McCloud (2001) states, when reading a visual narrative we perceive time spacially. It is by manipulating the amount of physical space dedicated to a particular moment, along with the space between such moments, that we can create the illusion of time passing.

The page turn is significant in that it creates a pause in the sequence as the reader turns it. We can utilise that pause to create both suspense and a reveal.

What I did here was use these tools of pacing for the purpose of creating favourable comic timing. The larger scale implies significance and invites the reader to linger on that moment. The pause and reveal of the page turn is equally important. This is because, as Batalion (2009) suggests, to intensify a comic affect we can place emphasis on the pause before the pay-off. The tension before the reveal of the punch line is often the key to a joke and so timing its build-up and eventual reveal is crucial.

This is a more dramatic way of delivering a rule of three violation than shown in 'Monkey Likes'. You can see other makers using page turns and scale changes to deliver jokes in *This Is Not My Hat* (Klassen 2014) and *Mrs Mole, I'm Home!* (Jarvis 2017).

On the subject of reveals, adding new and surprising information in a scene can create a humorous effect. Allow me to demonstrate:

Look, you seem like a very nice man but I just don't think it's going to work.

For some reason I just feel...

uncomfortable.

Does that make any sense?
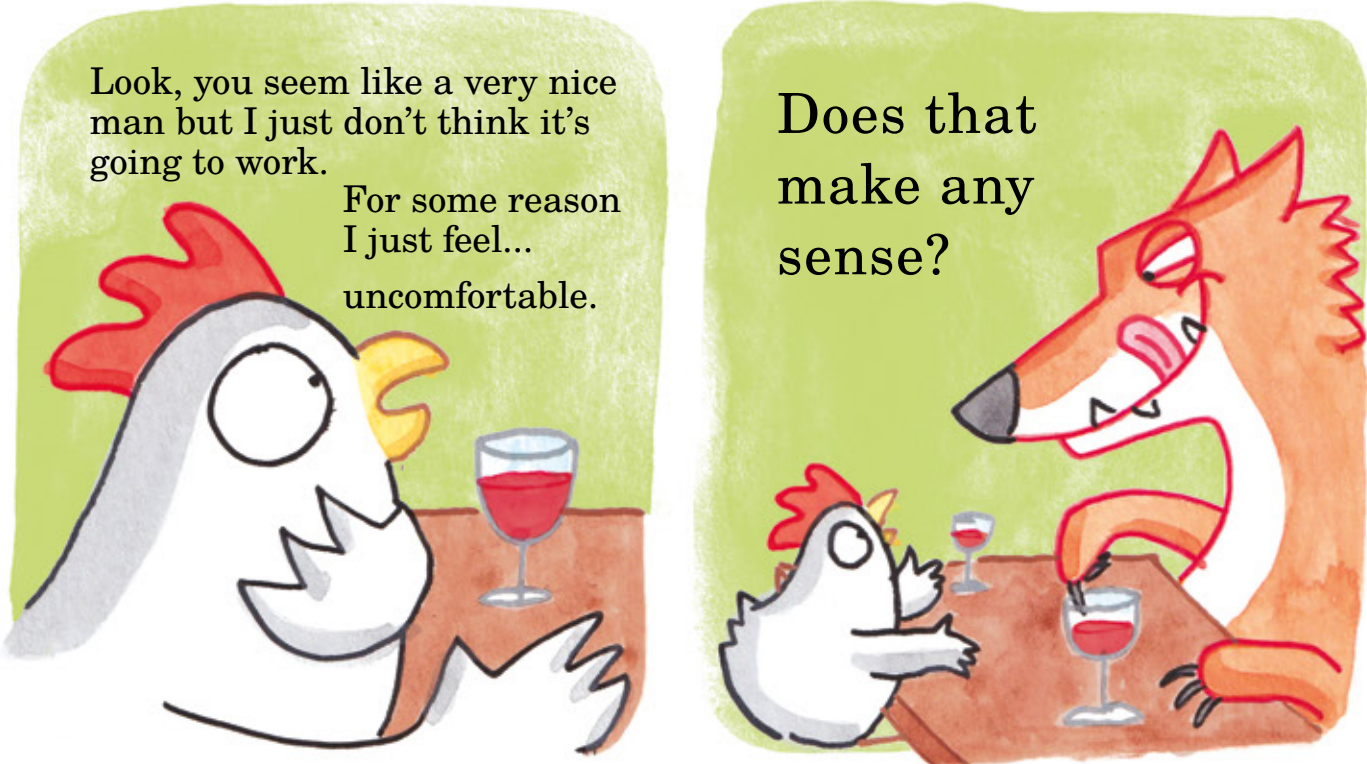
Contrasting information revealed to the reader by the change in viewpoint alters their preconceptions of situation in a surprising manner. This could be said to lead to a comic effect.

Brian, I need to speak to you!
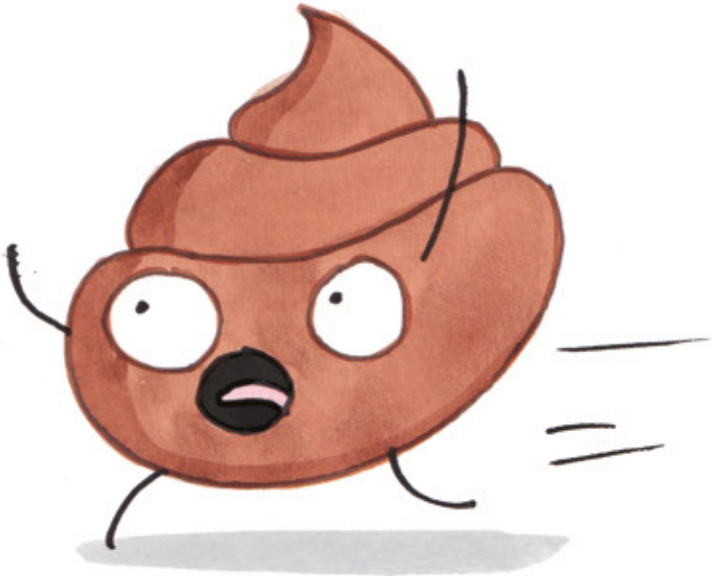
BRIAN!

The Vice Chancellor is coming!

She's... magnificent...

...a towering intellect...

...She scares me so much more than the Dean...

...she's ...here.

Gentlemen.

...

Nice bowtie Brian. Very professional.

....

By the way, I hope you enjoyed the bathetic page turn I used to make my entrance.
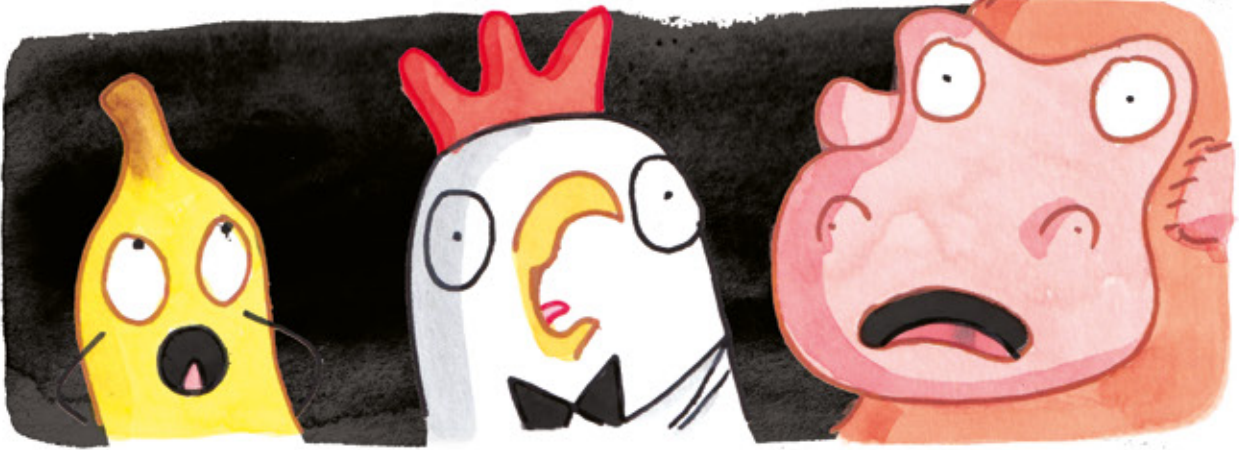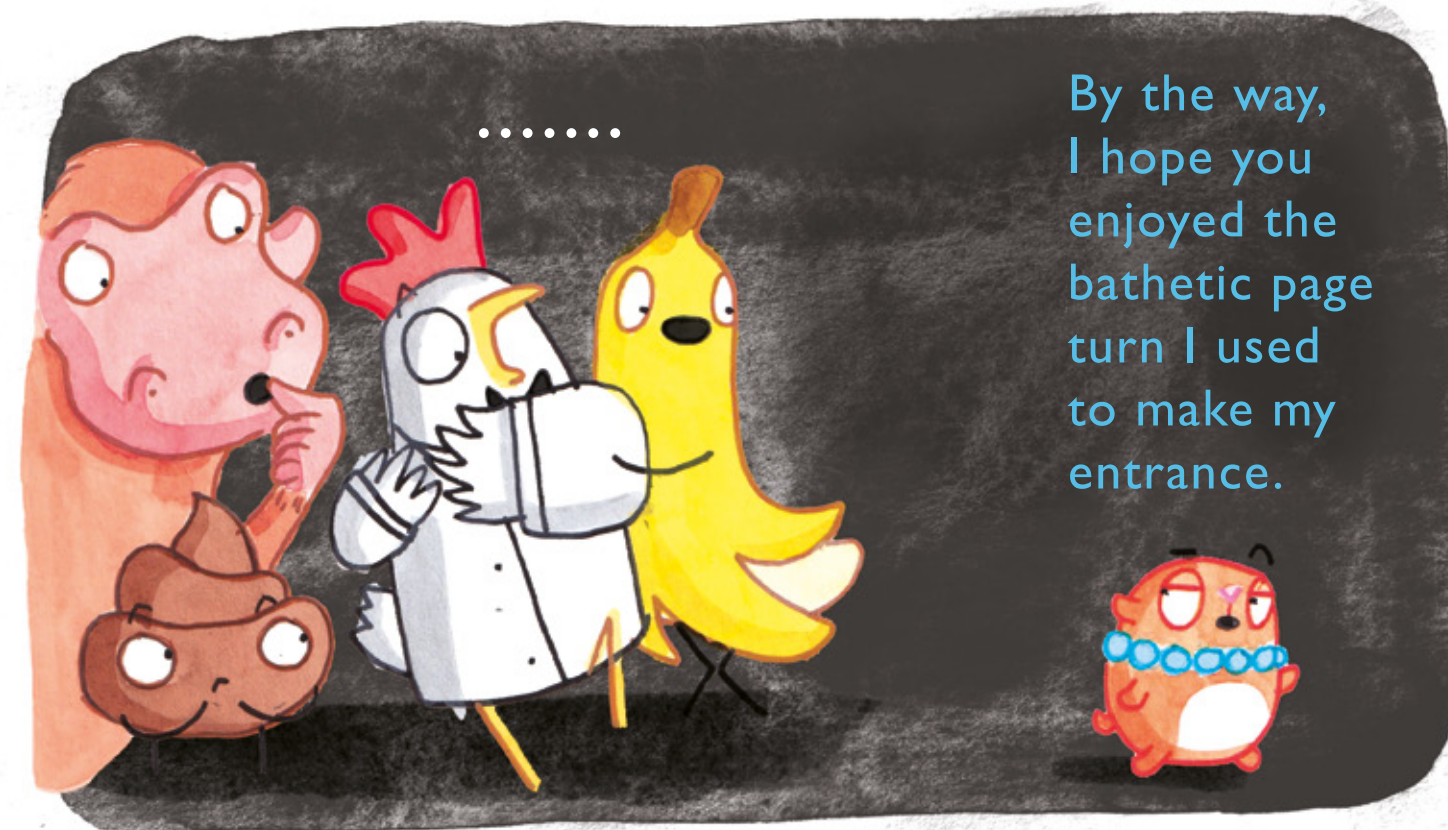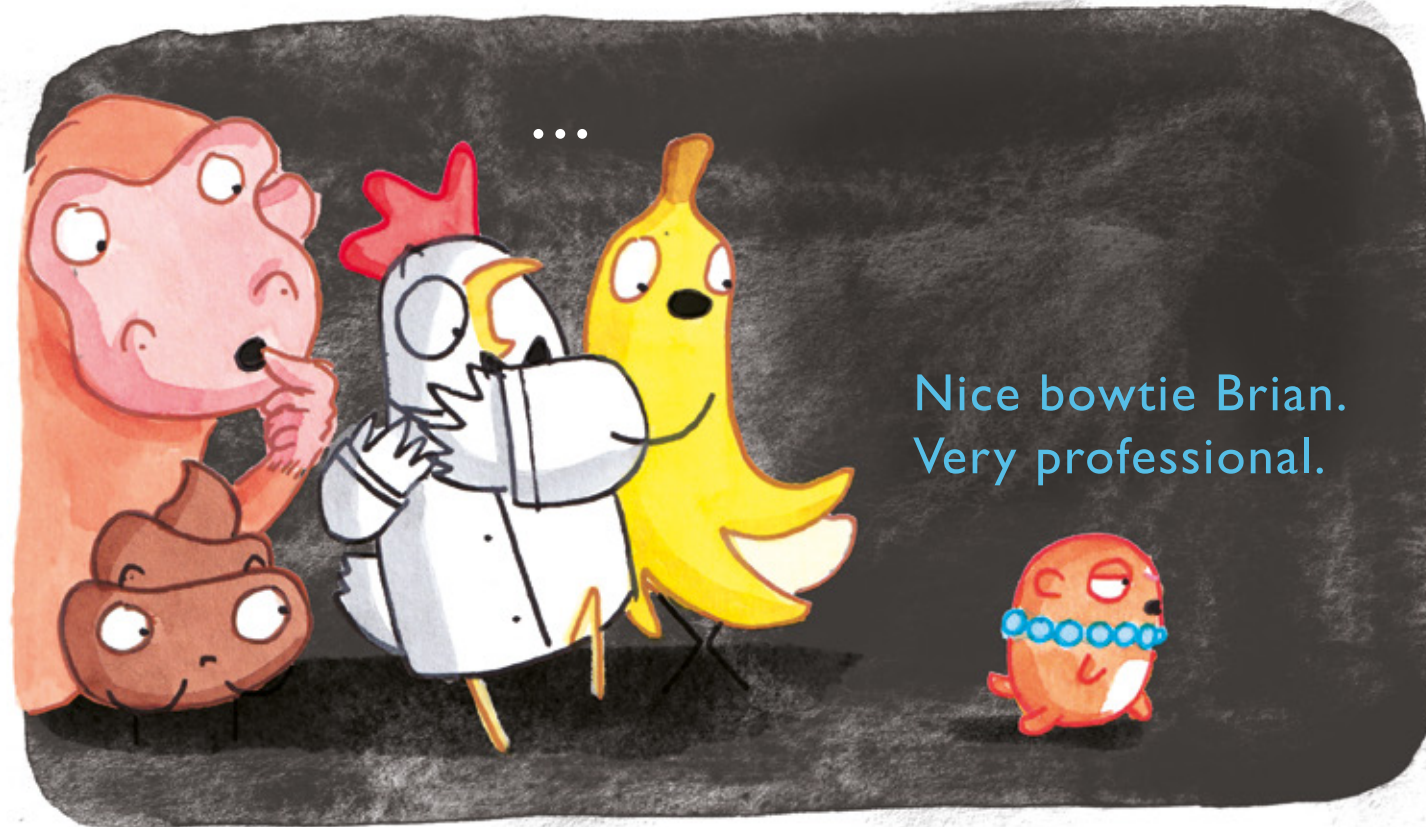
I heard you talking about pacing and page turns to deliver a joke and I thought, I could add a little something extra, a bit of bathos.

We could say that bathos is going from 'the sublime to the ridiculous' (Brown 2015, p.5), the 'ludicrous descent from the elevated to the commonplace' (Crangle and Nicholls 2010, p.9). It can be seen in picturebooks when something is set up as being important, serious or high-brow, then revealed to be the opposite. An excellent example is found in *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Fairy Tales* (Scieszka and Smith 1992) in the Tale of the Ugly Duckling.

I did the same here because your twittering about my terrifying nature set me up as an imposing figure, perhaps a monstrous entity like the Dean, but the page turn revealed me to be an adorable little hamster, which I'm told can be a tad unexpected.

Comedian Richard Herring (2008) suggests that often jokes are based on the surprise caused when there's a twist to our perceived logic. I dare say that's what I was doing here. My appearance twisted what the audience had logically come to expect. I 'benignly violated' it as you would say.

I thought you'd appreciate that Brian, as this is your specialism. Apparently.

In fact, my research is so clear it speaks for itself.
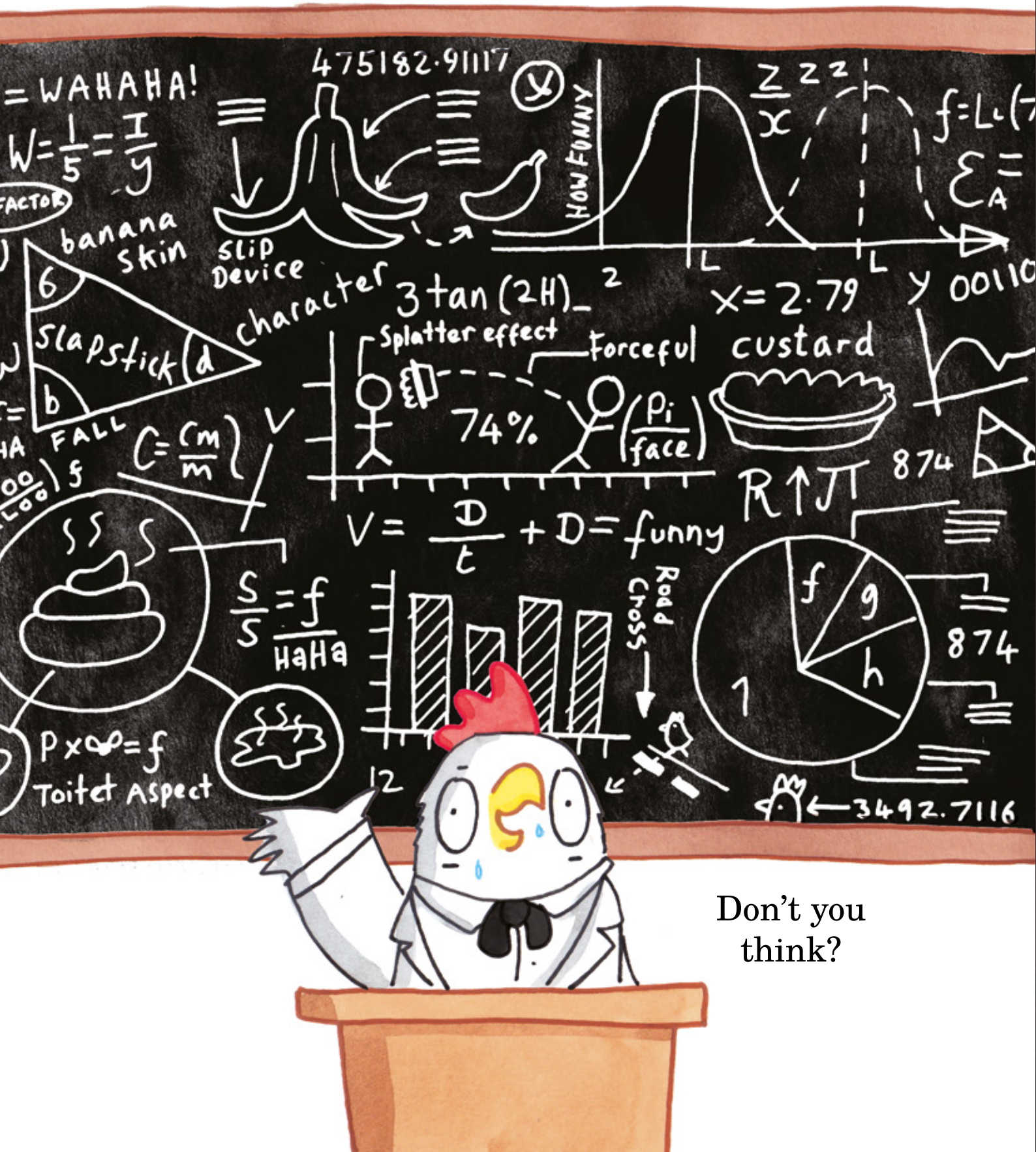
Don't you think?

And my delivery is sophisticated yet entertaining.

Look at my funny hat!

FUNNY HAT!

And most importantly I'm calm under pressure. So calm!
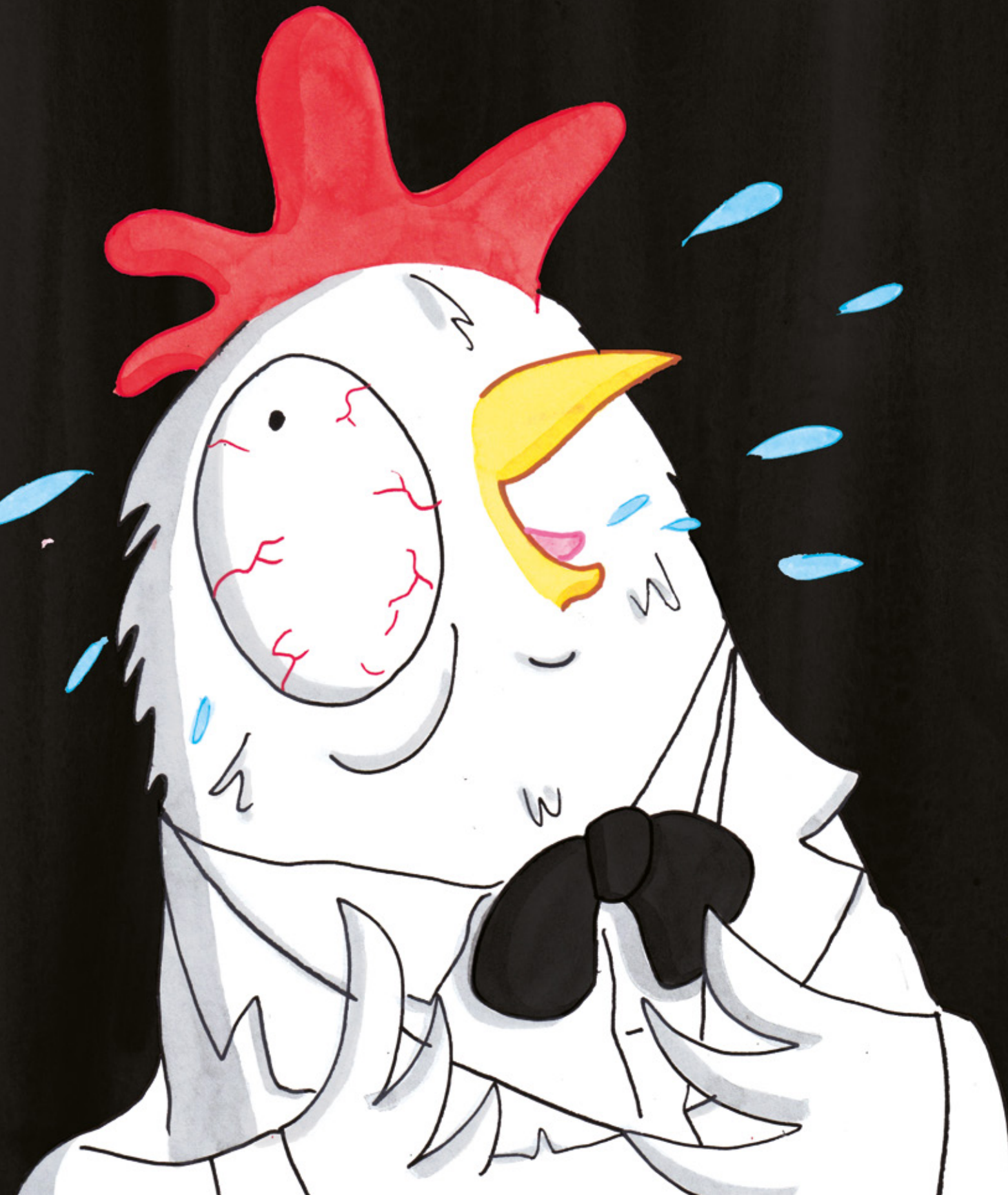
HA! HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

Excellent. I see what you were doing Brian.

You do?

Yes, it's **counterpoint!** When the words and the images provide different or conflicting information (Nikolajeva and Scott 2006, p.17). Here you're using it for comic effect by saying what a competent lecturer you are in the text when it's obvious from the images that you're really a buffoon!

Hilarious! It's just like in *No!* (Altes 2011) or the influential *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins 1967),

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Very good Brian, you make the relationship between word and image so ironic, incongruous even! It benignly violates the expectations you set up through the words. It also really appeals to my excellent sense of humour.

I really thought the Prof was going to get fired.

Yes that was exactly what I was doing. Of course. Obviously.
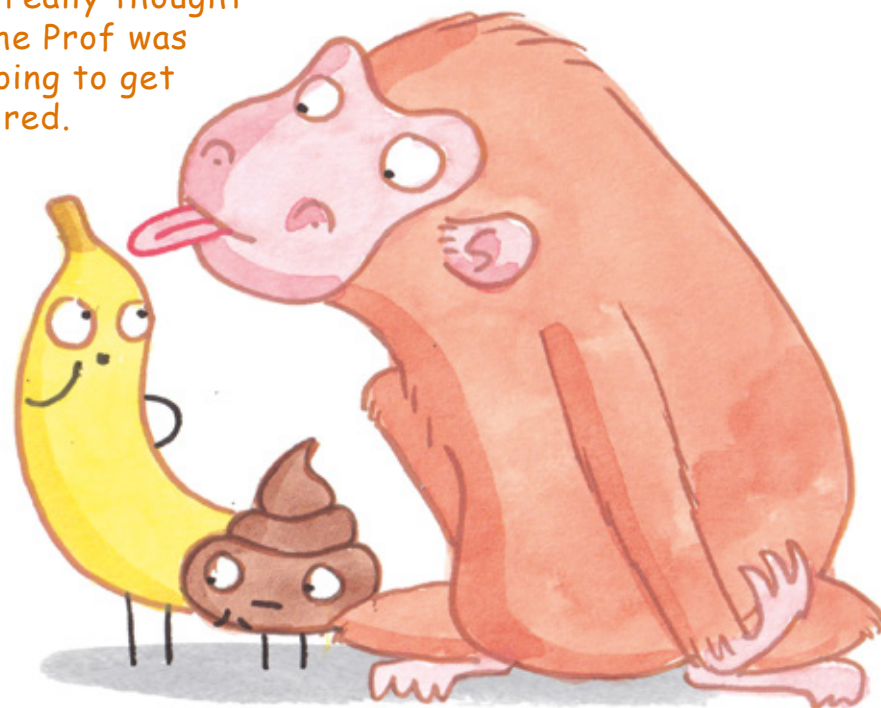
Now why don't you wrap up your lecture. Someone has this lecture theatre booked afterwards, you know.

Oh yes. Right. So, in conclusion, the illustrated portion of the thesis has not merely sought to explain the various techniques and devices used to create humour, but demonstrated them using the characteristics of the picturebook, including characterisation, pacing, page turns, narrative, composition and setting. Clever, no?

I believe to actively witness types of humour and comic devices in context...

...is the most effective method of communicating concepts that have a visual element...

WAHH

What happened there? **STOP THAT!**

I think the Professor fell down the gutter.

I thought we'd done slapstick. Does this mean it's finished? Can we leave?

There's often more than one kind of humour at work to make something humorous.

Take Pants Monkey...

You start with pants.

Which embody toilet humour.

+

SCRATCH! SCRATCH!

Monkeys don't wear pants so the premise is incongruous.

=

PANTS MONKEY!

And Pants Monkey is a satire of clichéd forms of humour.

So you can see there's three types of humour at work here.

The Professor used slapstick but he also benignly violated the conventions of the picturebook by falling down the gutter, an aspect of the book as an artefact that we are expected to ignore, so creating an incongruous situation.

Oh look, he dropped his bow tie.

Why do we keep mentioning that bow tie?

I imagine it's a running joke or a subplot that the professor has been setting up throughout this entire lecture. Repetition and familiarity can be versatile comic devices.

For instance, repetition can establish expectation. In Haughton's *Oh No, George!* (2014), George's repeatedly bad behaviour creates an expectation of how he will react in certain situations. By fulfilling and exceeding those expectations a comic effect is created.

It could be said that these sorts of subplots are rather like a 'call back', a comic device. This is when a reference is made to a previous joke but often in a different context...

BORING.

Lets get out of here. Pants monkey is having a wine cheese evening and we're going to discuss the work of Descartes. You should totally come.

Are you sure? That guy is always trying to eat you... oh wait! That's another subplot! So clever.
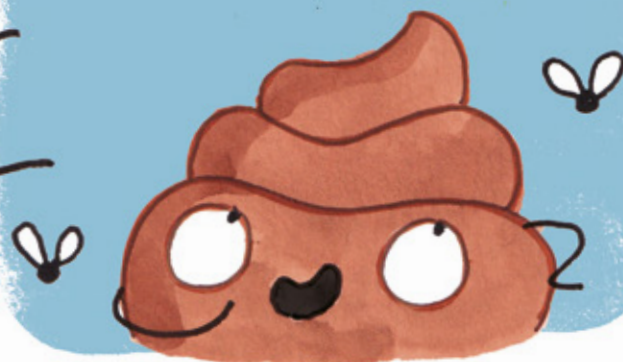
We should probably see if the Professor wants to go.

HELLO? ARE YOU DOWN THERE?

It's not like the Professor to break the rules like that. We're not supposed talk about the gutter or even say we're in a book.

Well, it is very post modern. The Professor wrote a very compelling paper on the subject. Here, I always carry a copy.

Actions, such as a character falling through the book's gutter, can create a humorous situation using several of the characteristics of the postmodern picturebook, as defined by Sipe and McGuire (2008, p.3).

First, by the character acknowledging that they are in a book through the interaction with the gutter, it is 'drawing attention to the text as a text rather than as a secondary world' and so blurring 'the boundaries among author, narrator, and reader'. This 'undermines the traditional distinction between the story and the outside 'real' world'. Some instances of postmodernism in picturebooks can cause comic amusement because they create a benign violation of the norms surrounding of the nature of a picturebook.

In contemporary picturebooks there is much humour creation through the use of self-referential subject matter. *How This Book Was Made* (Barnett & Rex 2016) consistently draws attention to that fact that the book is a book by discussing its creation. The protagonist's dog in *This Book Just Ate My Dog!* (Byrne 2015) is eaten by the gutter. This draws attention to the physicality of the book and making use of it narratively in a way that draws attention to the book as an artefact.
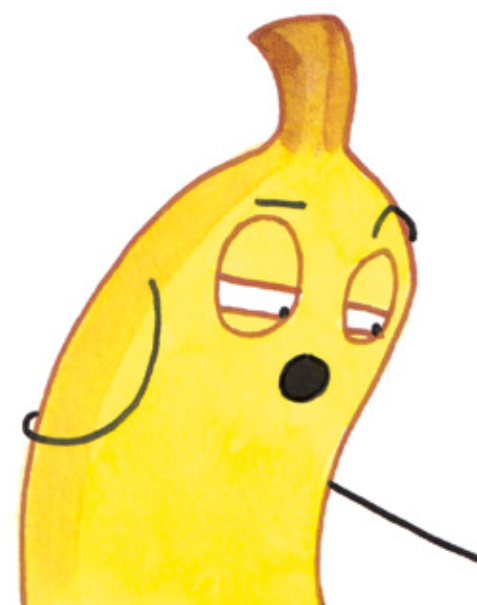
That's very wordy... hang on, can you hear something come from down there?

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FUMUMPH!

And I think this just about brings us to the end of the lecture. Thank you for listening. I won't be taking any questions.

Oh my.
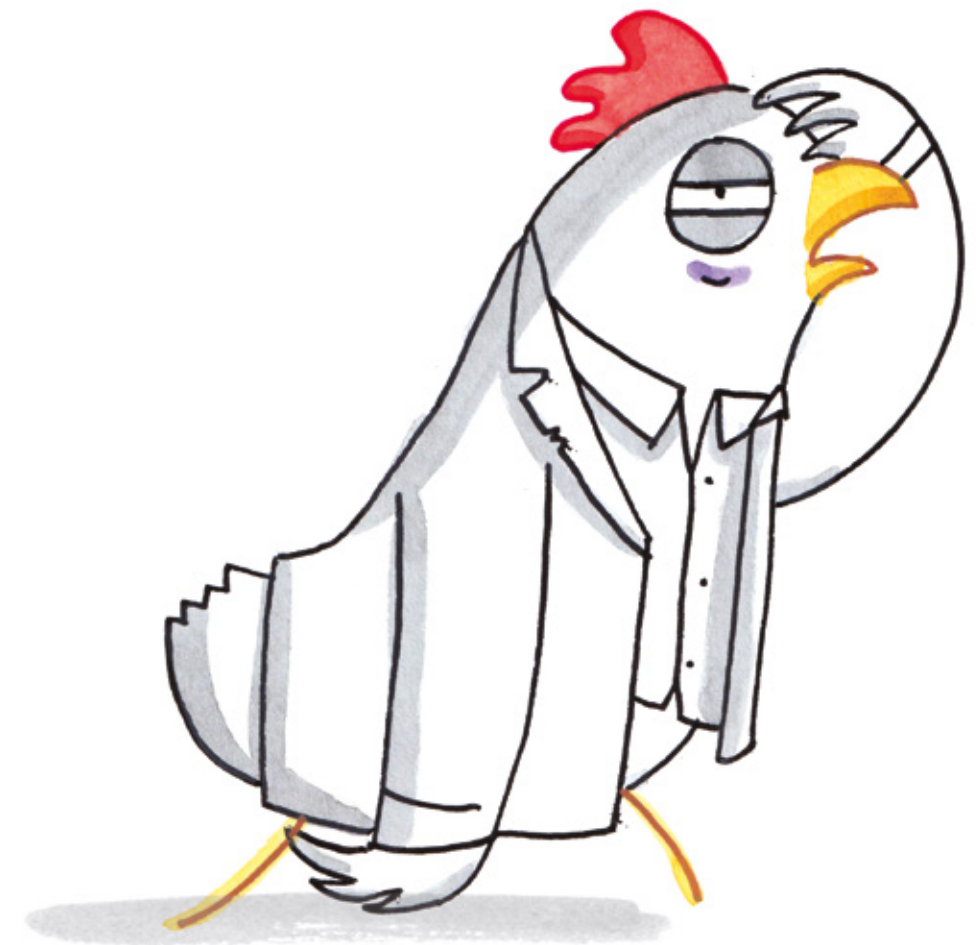
Instead I'm taking a sabbatical.

Cheep.
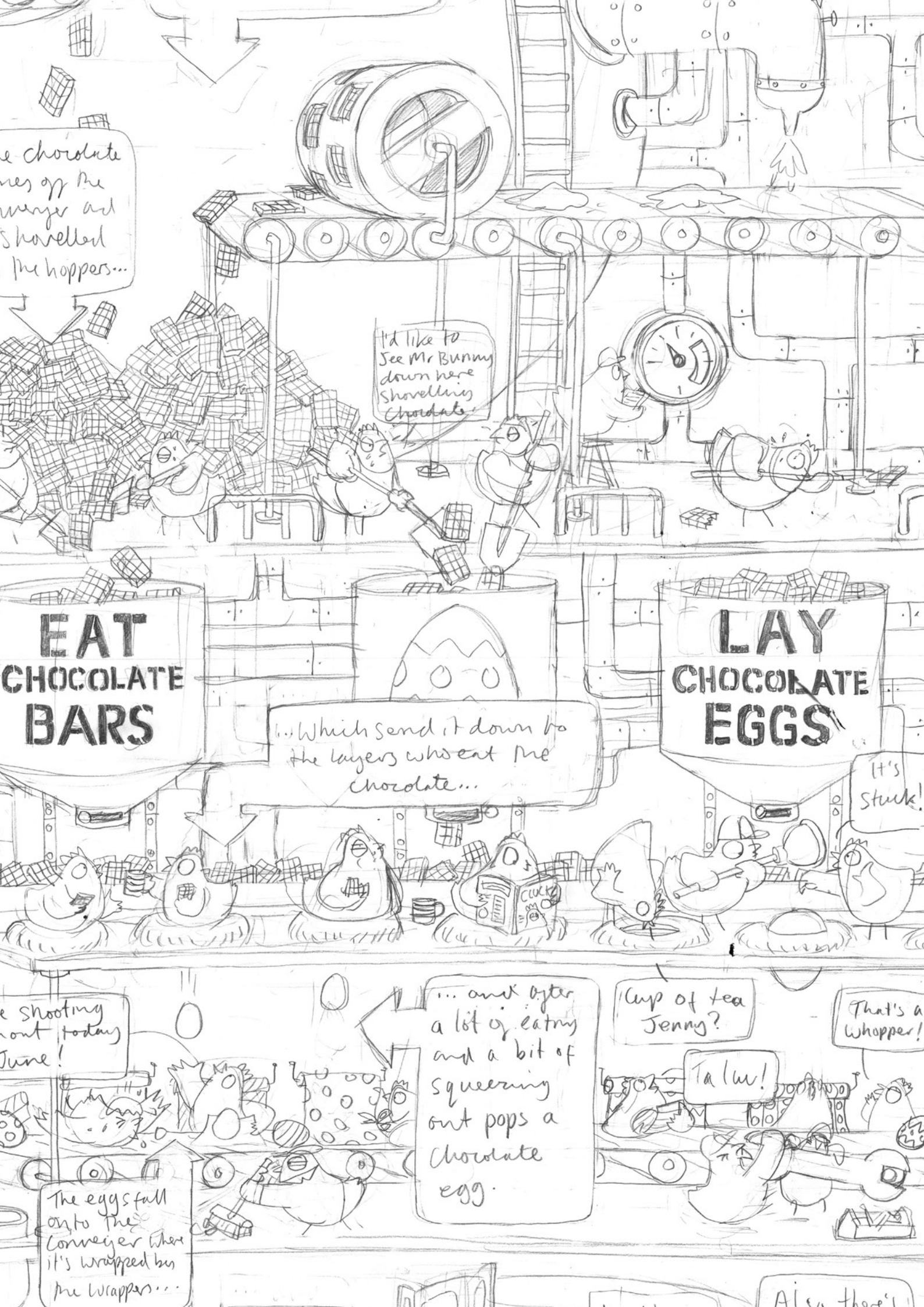
Chapter 5. Creating Humour Through Practice

Four professional picturebook projects were specifically selected for the research focus: *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm, Steven Seagull: Action Hero, The Doughnut of Doom* and *Mr Bunny's Chocolate Factory*. In the interest of brevity, I shall refer to them as *Haunted Farm, Steven Seagull, Doughnut of Doom* and *Mr Bunny*.

As a vehicle to reflect upon the practice engaged in to make these books, I undertook a critical analysis of each project. The four analyses bring together the manifestations and processes of practice used to create the books. These include rough sketches for the development of ideas, colour tests, experiments, correspondence with publishers, larger development drawings, rough dummy books, final artwork and the published books themselves. In addition, the records and reflections contained within the reflective journals were analysed in relation to these manifestations of practice using Schön's (1983) reflection-on-action and Daichendt's (2012, p.100-101) recommendations for critical analysis. The critical analyses can be read in appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Following Yee's (2010) 'pick and mix' methods, in this chapter I shall relate my findings from the critical analyses to additional sources. These include theoretical and contemporary contextual sources, along with the interviews conducted with five makers of humorous books - McLaren, Kitty Long, Sarah McIntyre, Jarvis and Nadia Shireen - about their practice. It is through this triangulation that I will draw conclusions concerning how humour emerges through the practice of making a picturebook.

5.1 Killing Frogs: The Problems with the Conscious Creation of Humour

Earlier in this thesis, I included the following quote because it describes a significant issue I encountered during this research:

> Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the purely scientific mind. (White & White 1941, p.16a)

During this research, I 'killed many frogs'. Once I began to reflect upon and analyse my practice, it became apparent that this 'dissection' could not only kill one's enjoyment of an instance of humour, but also inhibit its creation. To refer back to a comment made in my reflective journal, when I tried to create consciously funny picturebooks, "I became overly self-conscious. What I was doing probably became a little pretentious and the humour itself was just too knowing".

This issue manifested itself when attempting to create a picturebook that satirised traditional picturebook tropes. It was to be set in a world inhabited by clichéd picturebook characters, featuring a panda and a unicorn that were dissatisfied with their situation and so start a detective agency (fig. 10).

I believe this project failed to be effectively humorous because the violation (in this case, the presentation of picturebook clichés) was malign, not benign, as Warren and McGraw (2014) suggest is required to achieve comic amusement. The characters were so cynical that the parody became aggressive and downbeat. In addition, it was painfully obvious that I was attempting to be funny, which gave the failed humour a laboured quality.

This issue with analysing one's humour does not appear to be limited to my practice. In his analysis of comedy within his practice, Rosen (2018, p.2) suggests: "if you pull humour apart you can kill it stone dead". Illustrator and humourist Quentin Blake observes that a more unconscious approach to humour creation is often more effective:

> Humour, insofar as you can identify it to talk about, is in some ways a by-product;
> you produce it best almost by not thinking about it. (Blake 2000, p.94)

Later in this chapter I will examine what humour is a by-product of in the context of creating a picturebook.

Allowing humour to emerge unconsciously, as a by-product, appears to be an effective approach employed by makers of funny children's books. In a *Publishers Weekly* article (Burnett 2011), four humorous makers of children's books were interviewed. They unanimously agreed "that forcing humour is rarely successful". Maker David Roman goes on to say that he "found that humour was organically present in his voice". While "there's no magical code or science" behind being funny, he did learn to respect his natural inclinations and allow his sense of humour to "take centre stage".

Makers of funny picturebooks interviewed for this research tended to pursue an unconscious approach. McLaren says that she does not "strive to be funny or think too hard about it" (appendix 6, p.315). When asked how he creates humorous characters, Long comments: "I literally just don't consider this stuff, because it's instinctive to me" (appendix 9, p.344). McIntyre struggled to create humour consciously as a child, but she discovered in her professional practice that humour appears as a by-product, commenting: "when I start making comics or other narratives, life intrudes and it just IS funny. Or sometimes the setup will make things naturally funny" (appendix 8, p.329).

Jarvis takes a more purposeful approach to humour creation, yet still speaks in terms of instinct and 'gut feeling':

> My instinct is to always make something funny, I'm one of them annoying people
> who tries to make a joke all the time. Then now and again I'll want to do something a
> bit 'serious' but I always get drawn back to comedy. (appendix 7, p.325).

Once I removed any conscious intention of being funny or conscious reflection-in-action from my practice, I was able to create outcomes where I felt the humour was stronger. For example,

Fig. 10 Development work from the unsuccessful panda and unicorn detective agency concept.
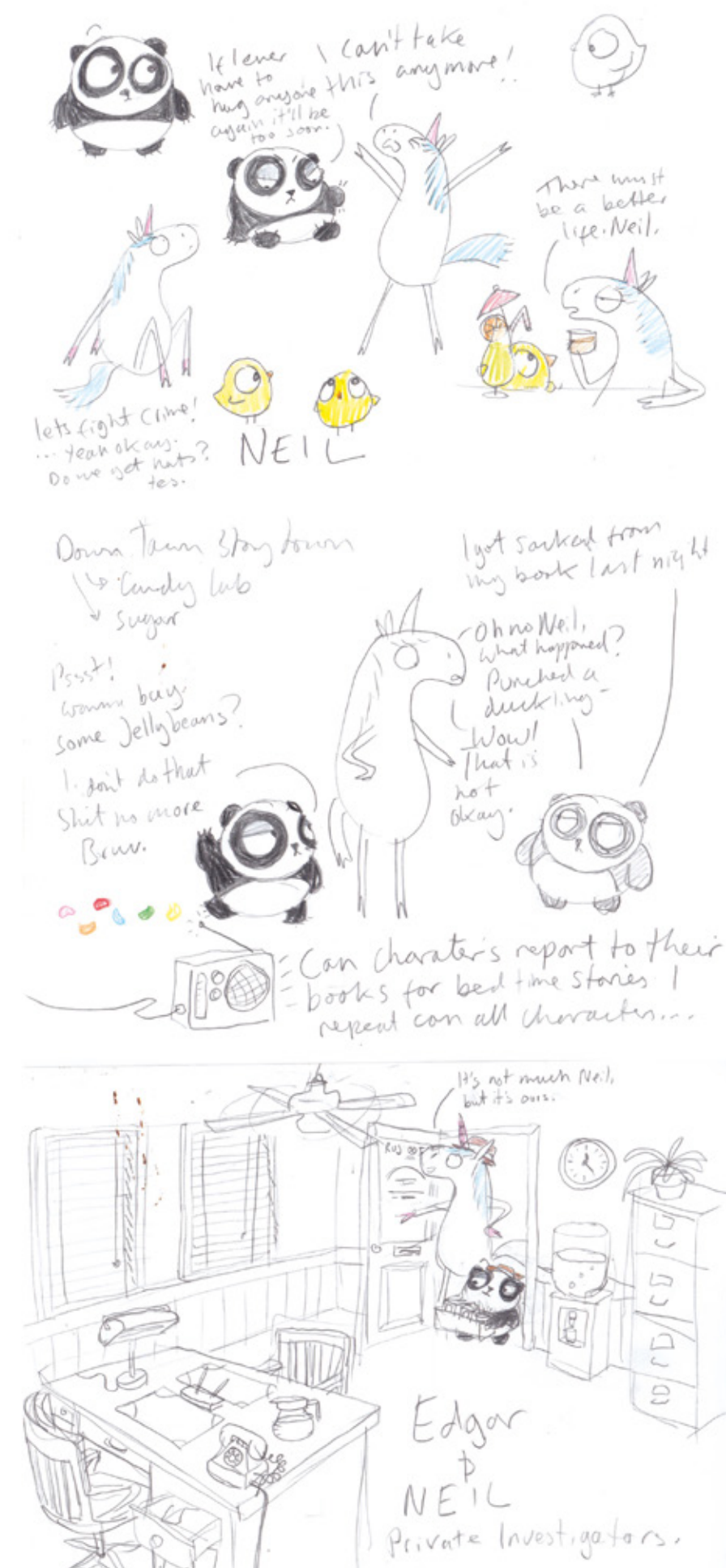
I observe in my analysis that, during the initial sketchbook stages of creating *Steven Seagull,* I created various humorous instances and events including the incongruous premise, a page turn reveal and the physical comedy of Steven's character (fig. 11). I note that this was entirely unconscious at the time (appendix 2): the humour emerged as a 'by-product' of exploring the character and concepts of *Steven Seagull* through sketchbook drawings.

The knowledge I have gained through the analysis of my practice, combined with commentary from other practitioners, suggests to me that for humour creation to be prolific during the 'action present' (Schön 1983, p.62), it needs to be a tacit act.

Although this is an interesting finding, it left me with the most pressing conundrum of this research. If I cannot create humour by setting out on a period of creative practice with the intention of making something funny, how do I gain an understanding of how that humour is produced? How do I create that 'by-product'?

As described in the methodology chapter, I had to separate engaging in practice carefully from reflecting upon it. I employed Schön's (1983) reflecting-on-action retrospectively to analyse the practice used to create the four case-study picturebooks. This meant I could avoid conscious knowledge of humour creation while engaged in practice. The result is the four critical analyses (appendices 1,2,3 & 4). By creating these analyses, I was able to identify at what point in the practice the humour emerged, how it manifested and what altered or affected it. Below I shall break down my practice into four stages and consolidate the knowledge gained through the analyses concerning humour creation.

5.2 Humour Creation Through Practice

While writing the critical analyses of my practice, I found that I could identify four distinct stages: sketchbook and development work; sequencing and text; roughs; and artwork. Each of these stages involves a different set of processes, though there is overlap between them. I shall reflect upon the type of humour created at each stage and how it emerged.

5.2.1 Sketchbook and Development Work

This is perhaps the least structured and most playful stage of practice. It involves the initial development of the narrative concept through activities such as character development drawings (fig. 12), development of setting and the internal logic of the world in which the story will take place (fig. 13), and the testing of scenarios and interactions to become familiar with how the characters behave (fig. 14).

5.2.2 Is this Stage Productive for Humour Creation?

Overwhelmingly, I found this stage to be the most productive, identifying it as such in each analysis (*Steven Seagull* analysis appendix 2, *Haunted Farm* analysis appendix 1, *Doughnut of Doom* analysis appendix 3, *Mr Bunny* analysis appendix 2). For each project, multiple instances

Fig. 11 *Steven Seagull* sketchbook work showing an incongruous page turn reveal.
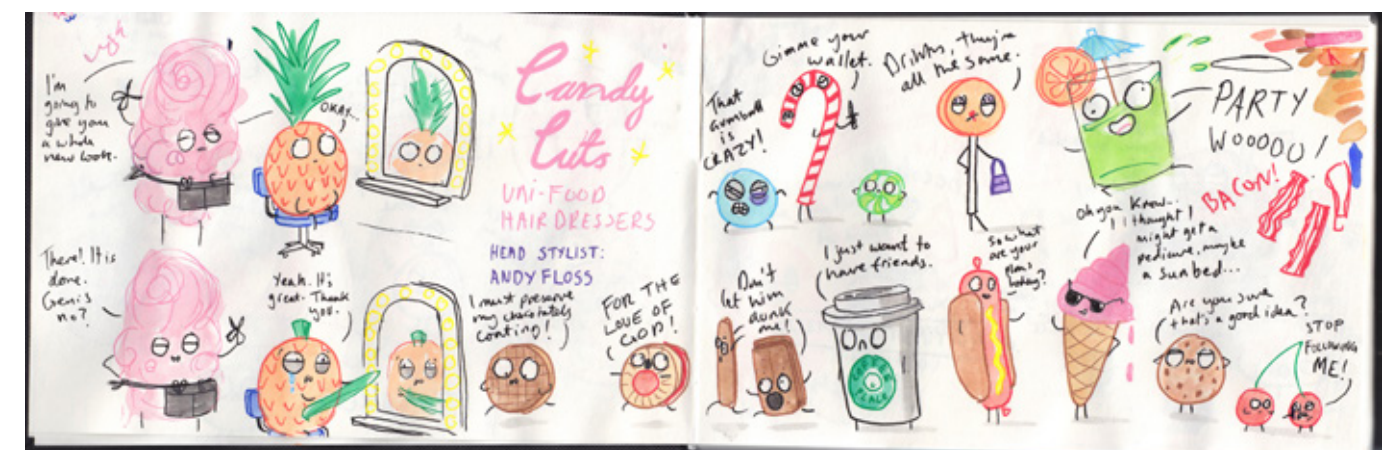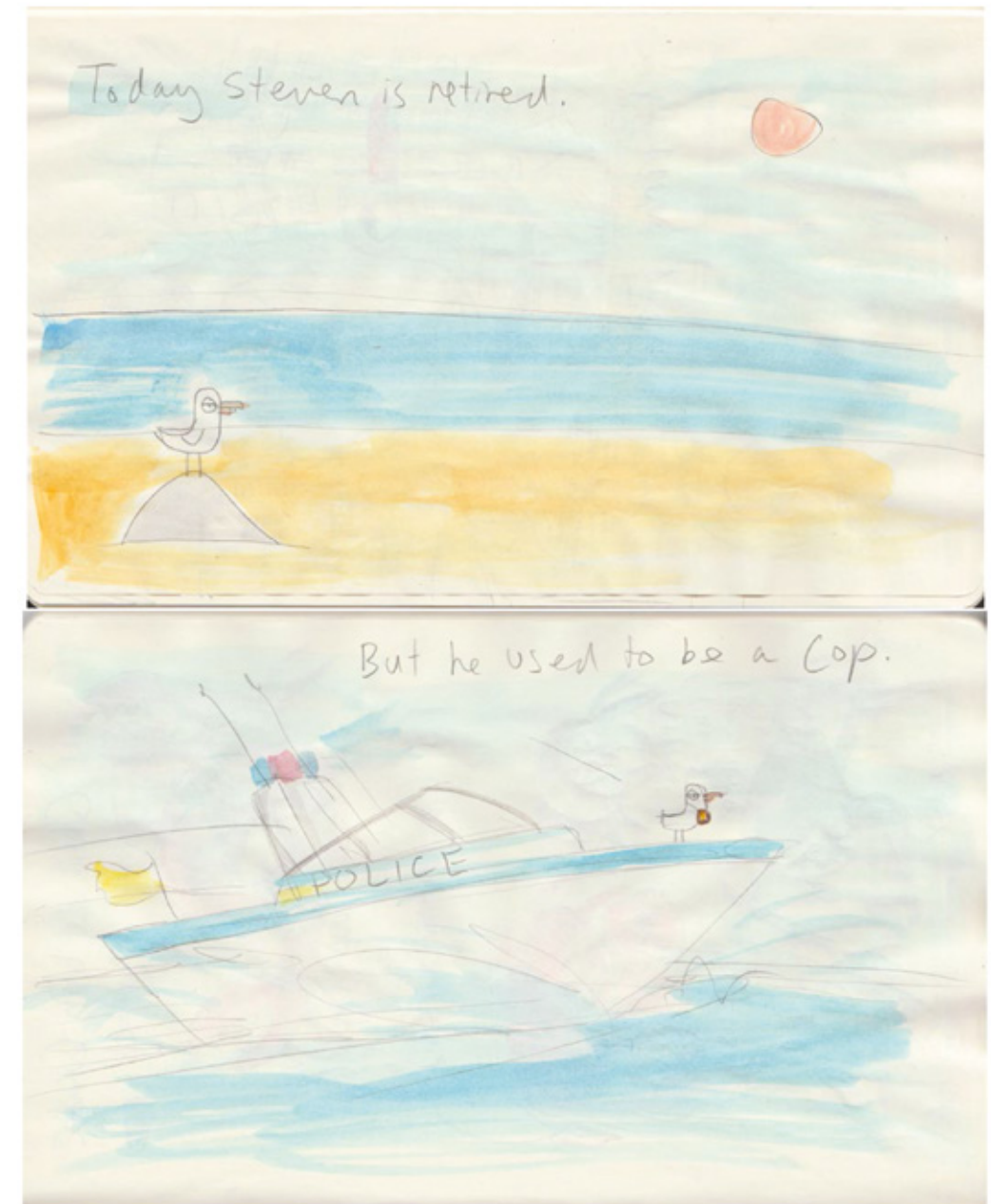
Fig. 12 Sketchbook page of development work for *Doughnut of Doom.*

Fig. 13 *Mr Bunny* factory cross-section big picture development image.

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Fig. 15 *Steven Seagull* development work.

Fig. 14 *Steven Seagull* sketchbook development work.

Fig. 16 *Haunted Farm* sketchbook development work showing a parody of *Nosferatu*.

Fig. 17 *Doughnut of Doom* sketchbook development work featuring 'Cake Kong', a visual pun.

of humour that emerged in this stage were included in the finished book. The humour created consists mainly of visual humour, including incongruous character design (fig. 12), instances of slapstick (fig. 13), parody and satire (fig. 16), with some instances of word play and visual puns (fig. 17) and the occasional joke relying on page-turn reveals (fig. 11).

As well as being a fruitful place to create new instances of humour, I found drawing in sketchbooks functioned as an effective testing ground to refine instances of humour. This is significant because it demonstrates instances where conscious and unconscious practice intersects.

When attempting to find the right food monster for *Doughnut of Doom* (appendix 3, p.272), I comment: "I create some jokes spontaneously which are successful without need for further refinement, others require a process of trial and error to discover how to make them the most effective". That process can be seen in fig. 18. When I use the word 'successful' in this context, I mean that I myself consider the outcome to be satisfactorily humorous; where I say 'spontaneously', I refer to the humour emerging unconsciously.

The process of identifying which monster would be the satisfactorily humorous (fig. 18) relied on a conscious understanding of whether I find it humorous or not. I consciously identified the potential for the character to be humorous, but I was not consciously aware why I believed so: that understanding was tacit. I have a general awareness of what I believe needs to be changed for me to find the character satisfactorily humorous, for example a change of shape or expression, but how I go about changing that aspect and what I change it to is an unconscious, tacit process. I do not articulate to myself a plan of how to change it. I draw until it feels satisfactory.

This demonstrates a process of creating humour that, I believe, is in the majority unconscious but does employ instances of conscious reflection-in-action.

Fig. 18 *Doughnut of Doom* sketchbook development work showing the development of the food monster to identify an appropriate antagonist and refine the humour.

5.2.3 The Emergence of Parody

When reflecting on my practice, it became apparent that any parodic humour in a book would initially emerge at this stage. In my analysis of *Steven Seagull* (appendix 2) I note that I was employing and exaggerating cultural references, such as *Miami Vice* (1984-89) and *Die Hard* (1988), for comic effect. Similarly, in the analysis of *Haunted Farm* (appendix 1) I note that I began to include monster movie tropes, such as zombies and Frankenstein, along with references to *Ghostbusters* (1984) (figs.19, 20, 21).

I suggest in the *Haunted Farm* analysis (appendix 1) that I include such references to popular culture because of my own enthusiastic consumption of horror films. They are my frame of reference for recreating the atmosphere of that genre. As I included these references, though, I unconsciously began to parody them.

The appropriation of genre-specific tropes is discussed by Palmer (2016, p.43), who describes them as 'genre conventions' and suggests that:

> Writers and artists respond to genre conventions, whether they are conscious of it or not, incorporating 'customs' as a means of prompting certain expectations and interpretations in the reader.

I initially incorporate these genre conventions to create a certain response from the reader, or to align the work within a genre. In this instance, it is transposing genre conventions to an unconventional context, such as a farm in *Haunted Farm*, that creates an incongruous combination, and so the humour emerges as a by-product. Transposing these conventions into an unfamiliar context also serves to highlight and exaggerate their nature, which can lead to parodic or satirical interpretations. In addition to this, further incongruity is created by transposing certain genre conventions into the form of the picturebook. There are, arguably, stereotypes associated with the type of content a picturebook is expected to contain. When these are subverted by the addition of unexpected genre conventions to the form of the picturebook, such as those of action or horror films, the effect can be considered incongruous.

This process of parodying genre conventions was initially unconscious but, once I realised I was doing so, I began to promote it consciously because I myself found it amusing. I believe this is an additional example of the intersection of conscious and unconscious practice in humour creation. The original emergence of a form of humour is unconscious but once it is identified, I deliberately include other instances of this form of humour in the book. How I create that humour is still an unconscious, tacit process that occurs through creative play. For instance, when creating parody, I do not seek out reference material of the genre being parodied and deliberately try to work these into the narrative or imagery.

The emergence of genre conventions leading to parody in the development stage also occurs in the practice of other makers. When interviewing McLaren, it became apparent that she did not deliberately intend to parody a detective noir in *Pigeon P.I* (2017), she was creating a true noir.
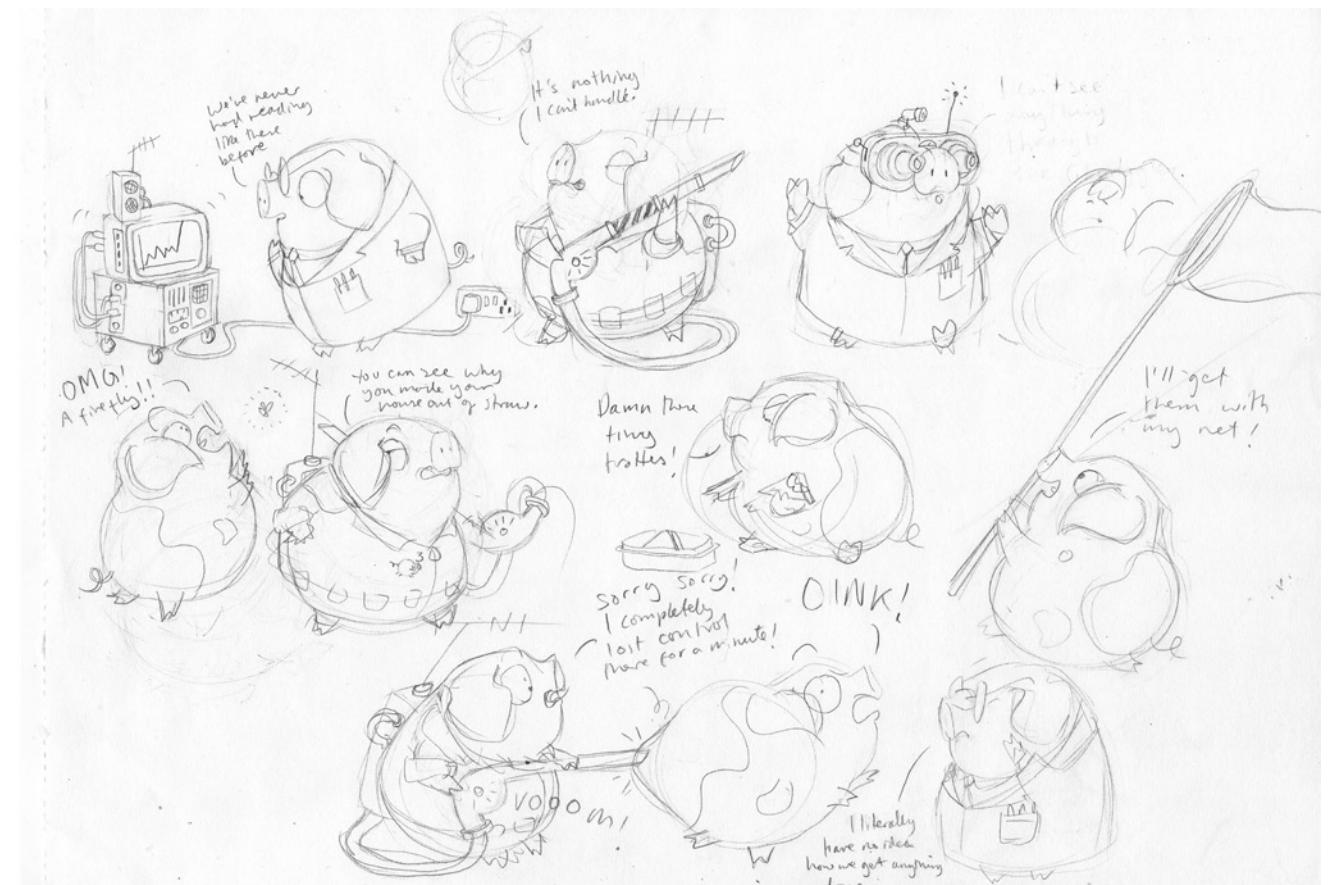
Fig. 19 *Haunted Farm* sketchbook development work showing pigs in outfits reminiscent of *Ghostbusters* (1984).

Fig. 20 *Haunted Farm* sketchbook development work showing zombie ducks.

Fig. 21 *Haunted Farm* sketchbook development work showing 'Frankenhorse'.

McLaren comments:

> We wanted the characters, the world and story to be satisfying in themselves. I
> am aware that by exaggerating certain characteristics and devices, and using a
> pigeon as a detective, we are doing so to humorous effect but this isn't a spoof
> of a noir, it is a noir. It just happens to be for children. It's a book inspired by my
> love of the genre. I'm a huge fan of detective books, films and I love an afternoon
> mystery TV show most of all. If anything I wanted to make an homage, and to
> hopefully inspire a few readers to fall in love with detective stories just like I did.
> (appendix 6, p.317)

McLaren does not reference specific instances from the films that inspired this book. Rather, she says she employs tropes "to create a specific tone and world for my characters to exist in" (ibid.). This would suggest that McLaren's parodic humour emerges in a similar manner to my own, as a by-product from the use of genre conventions. We can see McLaren refining and developing the use of genre conventions during the development stage (figs. 22, 23), in which she refines the character of Murray to resemble Humphrey Bogart and Vee to echo a "young Faye Dunaway" (ibid.).

I would not suggest that all parody emerges as an accident of genre conventions. For example, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (Scieszka and Smith 1992) is so acerbic in its parody that it appears strikingly deliberate. I believe that what I have described here is but one way in which parody can emerge.

One of these different ways can be seen in Long's pirate themed book, *Salty Dogs* (2017). Long was not aiming to recreate genre expectations, but instead says: "I heard the term salty dog, and I thought, 'Let's take that literally'" (appendix 9, p.342). It is through playing with our expectations of a phrase that he took the genre conventions surrounding pirates and combine them with anthropomorphised dog characters. Long adds that he seeks to proliferate parody once he realises it has emerged in his work, stating: "I played up to it. Yes, there was obviously a conscious decision not to ignore what had inspired me" (appendix 9, p.357). This again demonstrates the intersection of conscious and unconscious practice.

5.2.4 The Emergence of Incongruity

Along with parody, I found that many instances of incongruity emerge during this stage. Much of the incongruity stems not just from the transposition of genre conventions into unconventional circumstances, as discussed above, but also from the use of anthropomorphism.

Each of the books created for the purpose of this research include non-human characters in unconventional or classically human situations, such as solving crimes in *Steven Seagull* or working in a factory in *Mr Bunny*. It is discussed in the contextual chapter how anthropomorphism can lead to incongruous humour. It is apparent from the analyses that such incongruity emerges at this stage because this is when I conceive of and refine the anthropomorphised characters (e.g.
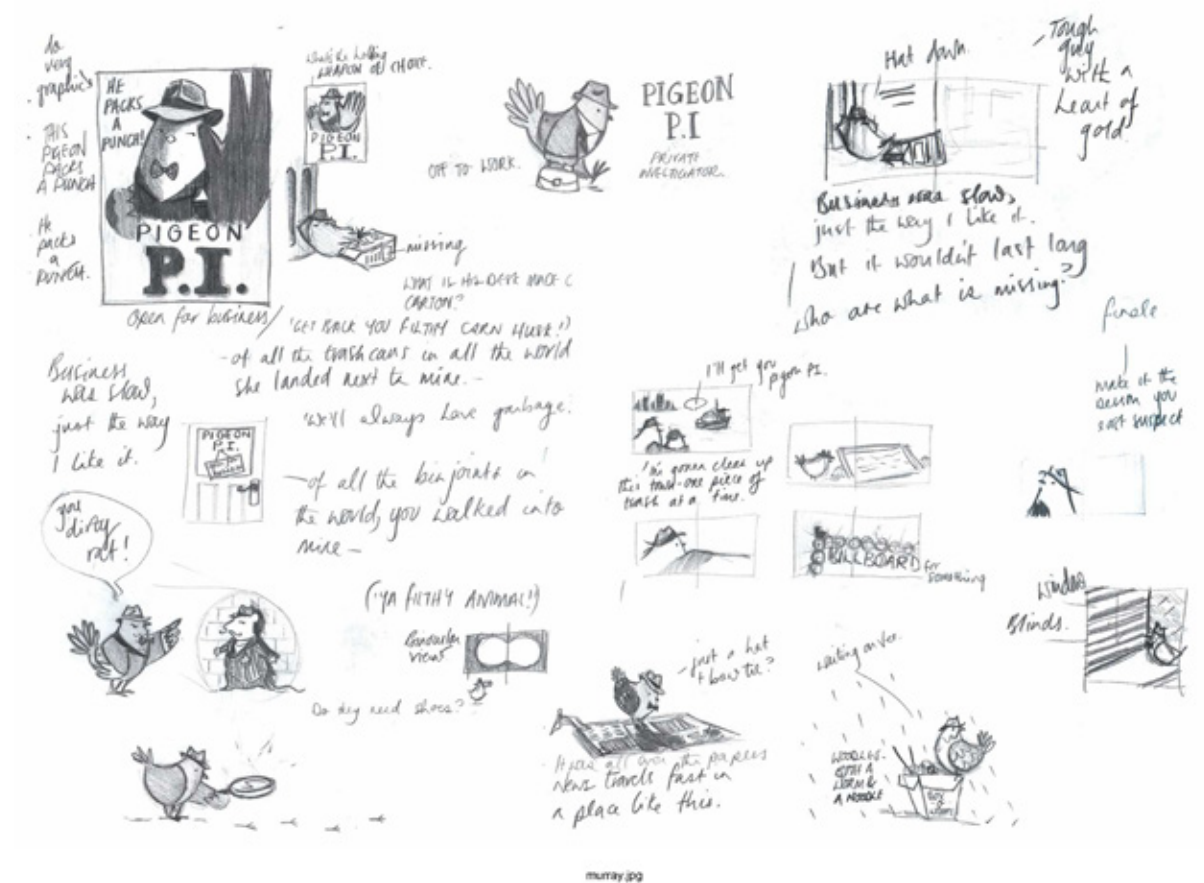
Fig. 22 Development work for *Pigeon P.I* (2017) by Meg McLaren.
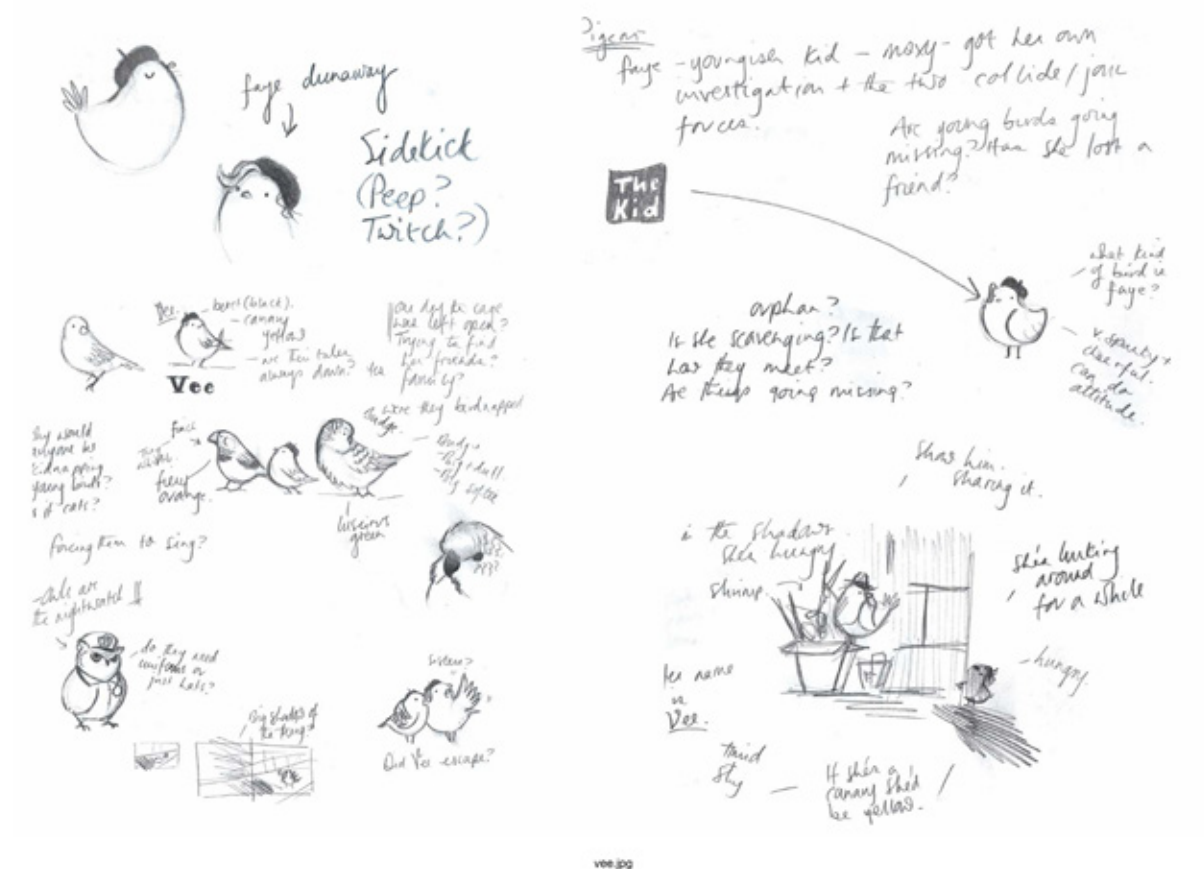
Fig. 23 Development work for *Pigeon P.I* (2017) by Meg McLaren.

figs. 12,18,24) and that I seek to intensify the incongruous humour once I see it has emerged.

For example, in the analysis of *Doughnut of Doom* I strove to intensify the incongruity though targeted anthropomorphism (appendix 3, p.265). I comment that "I believe characters became even more amusing when an element of observation was added to create an 'it's funny because it's true' effect. Using stereotypes around different food to aid their characterisation".

This relates to Marcus (1984, p.128), who suggests that "animals as images in our everyday thought and expression are among the most association-rich of all classes of symbols. Just under the surface of picture book fantasies, cultural meanings may well be at work". Marcus believes that there are cultural associations to different animals, such as 'stubborn as an ox', 'an elephant's memory', 'sly as a fox'. I believe this could extend to various forms of anthropomorphised characters, such as a fit and healthy runner bean or a slow and overweight cream pie. I find myself playing on these stereotypes to reinforce specific character traits, but at the same time it can seems so fitting that it creates a form of observational humour, such as vegetables being health-fanatic gym goers (fig. 25).

While creating the monster for *Doughnut of Doom,* I found that deviating from this incongruous, anthropomorphised characterisation could diminish the comic effect. I comment that "I originally designed the monster to be a classic nondescript monster, not a food like the other characters. This meant it lacked the incongruity of the other characters and did not seem to fit with the world I had created". I decided to create a monster that was a combination of food, but that was "too convoluted" and possibly "confusing" (appendix 3, p.266). Therefore, I decided to make the monster a huge, anthropomorphised doughnut to create incongruity while conforming to the internal logic I had set up within the world of the story.

On reflection, I believe my motivation for using anthropomorphism is to amuse myself. I find it inherently amusing when non-human entities perform human actions. This appears to cause comic amusement in readers because of a convergence of sense of humour. Long's motivation in using anthropomorphised characters also did not initially concern reader enjoyment. He acknowledged the humour in incongruous anthropomorphism but states "Well, I also don't want to draw humans. Yes, you've got to really love the characters that you're making and I just want to stay away from humans" (appendix 9, p.342). Therefore, the motivation for Long is also creative fulfilment.

5.2.5 The Emergence of Physical Comedy

It became apparent throughout my analyses that I was including and refining instances of physical comedy at this stage (appendices 1, 2, 3, 4, figs. 15,19, 26, 27). These take the form of exaggerating physical characteristics and slapstick actions.

Similar to the way in which stereotypical personality traits associated with specific animals or inanimate objects can be used for comic effect, I found I was using the stereotypical physical conventions of the subject for physical comedy. In the analysis of *Doughnut of Doom*, I reflect:

Fig. 24 Sketchbook character development work for the factory chickens in *Mr Bunny*.
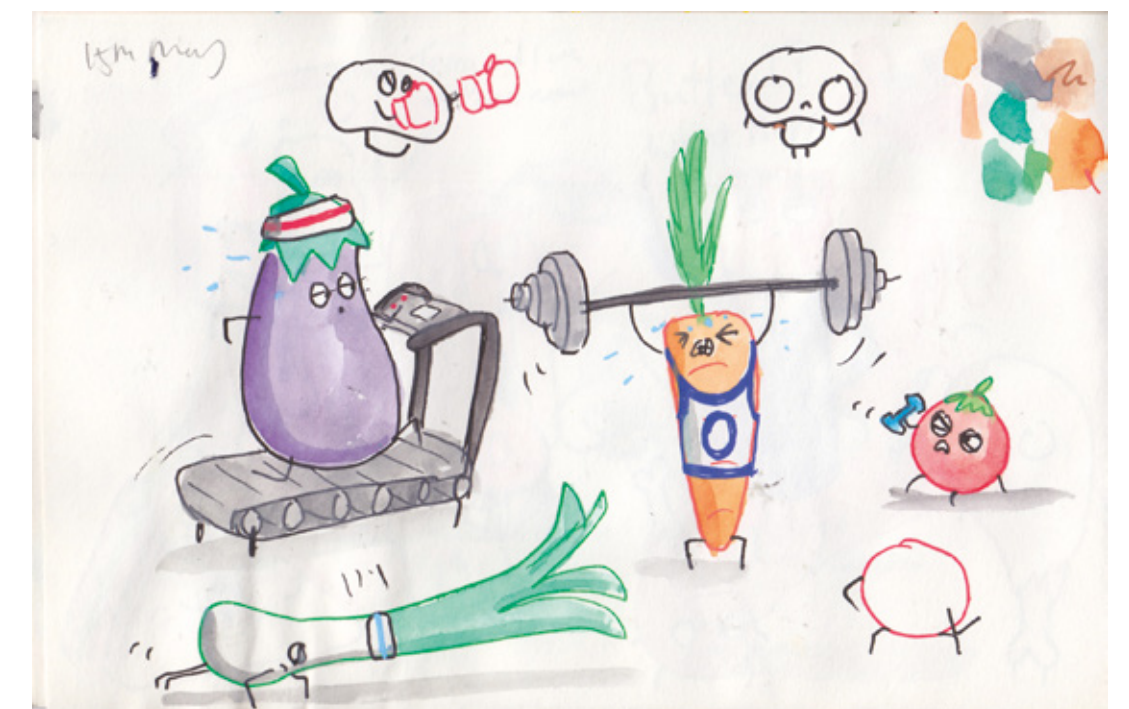
Fig. 25 *Doughnut of Doom* sketchbook drawing of health fanatic gym vegetables.

I progressed to monsters comprised of individual foodstuffs (fig. 18) but they just did not seem humorous enough. Eventually I decided to make it a doughnut. I noted that 'the natural physical humour of a doughnut lends absurdity to the character' and so intensifies its humour. The round, bulbous shape of the doughnut makes it look comically clumsy and doughnuts have an association with novelty and frivolity. This creates an incongruous contrast to it being a terrifying monster. (appendix 3, p.267)

In McLaren's practice, we can see physical comedy emerging at this stage. In her development drawings for the rabbit characters in *Life is Magic* (fig. 28)*,* we can see McLaren refining her shapes and postures to create what she describes as "slightly ridiculous, non-threatening lumps" (appendix 6, p.317).

5.2.6 Combinations of Comic Devices

I have identified various types of humour that emerge most frequently in this stage of practice, but it is important to note that they rarely appear in isolation. This is demonstrated in the character of Lola the Lifeguard from *Steven Seagull* (fig.26).

I reflect in the analysis (appendix 2) that Lola demonstrates three types of humour. As a hippo who is a lifeguard, she presents incongruity through anthropomorphism. Her hippo physique has been exaggerated to make her excessively round with tiny legs for physical comedy. Finally, her red swimsuit and float parody the lifeguard played by Pamela Anderson in *Baywatch* (1989).

On reflection, I believe combining these devices was unconscious. While drawing Lola I included what I instinctively found amusing. This was unconscious, but my experiential knowledge of my audience means that I know they will be of different ages, with different levels of sophistication. Therefore, I am more likely to retain humour that I feel will appeal to both adults and children, such as the physical comedy that children may enjoy or a parody of a cultural reference that only an adult reader may be familiar with.

5.2.7 Why Was This Stage so Productive for Humour Creation?

When scrutinising the reflection in my analyses, I believe they offer clues as to why this stage was so productive for humour creation. In my analysis of *Steven Seagull* (appendix 2, p.342), I point to a reflective journal entry from 12.02.15 where I comment: "it gives me space to test out new things and make those seemingly disparate connections that lead to amusement and humour".

In my analysis of *Haunted Farm* (appendix 1, p.222) I reflect that "I was compelled to create new content spontaneously around a broad theme without the pressure to amuse anyone apart from myself". These experiences have led me to believe that the intuitive act of drawing is the most effective tool I have in my practice for creating humour. The analysis of *Mr Bunny* (appendix 4, p.289) points to a reflective journal entry that suggests this stage was productive "because the ideas are still fresh and novel in my mind and I've not yet been bogged down by the anxiety of having to create a functional story".

Fig. 26 *Steven Seagull* sketchbook drawing of Lola the Lifeguard.
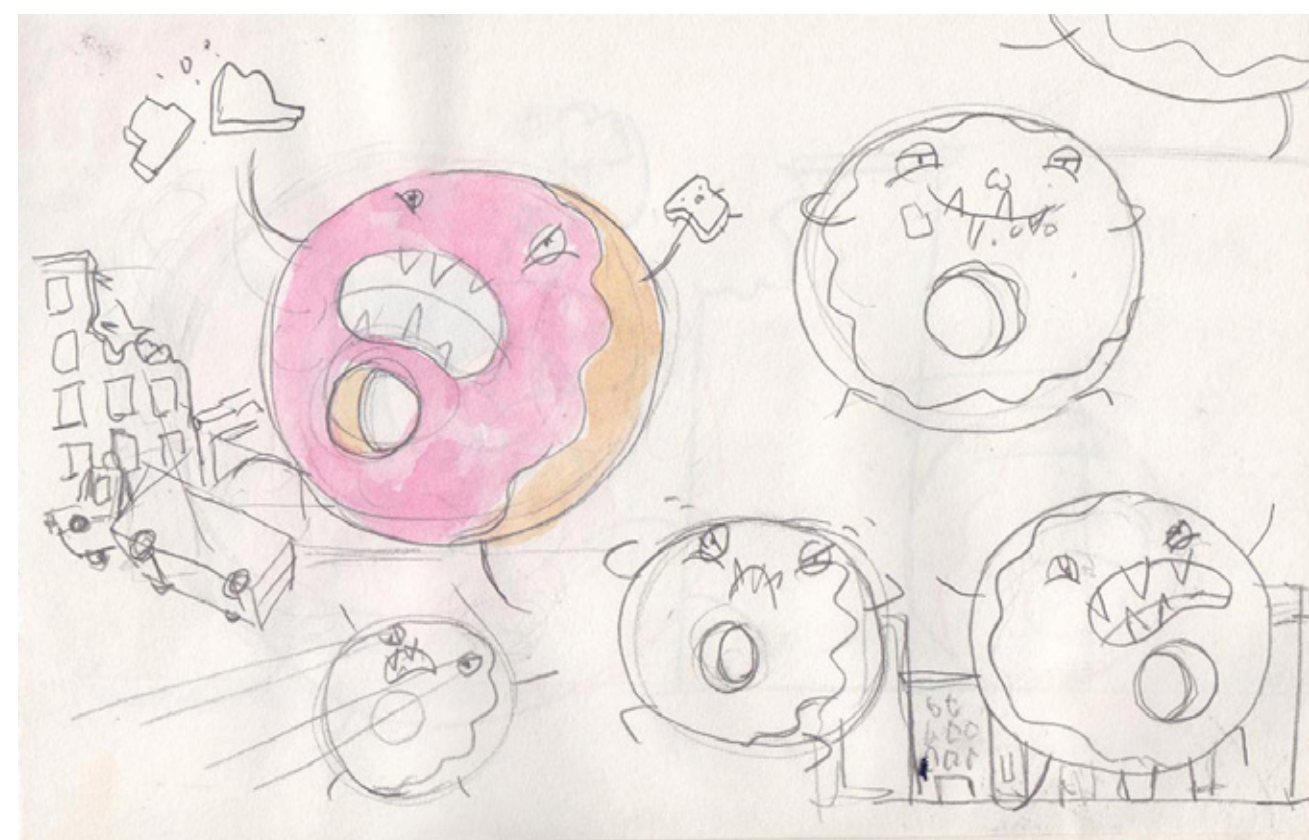
Fig. 27 *Doughnut of Doom* sketchbook drawing. An example of physical comedy.

In the *Haunted Farm* analysis (appendix 1, p.223), I reflect on whether the spontaneous nature of the humour's creation could be said to enhance how effective I consider it: "I believe this sense of unselfconscious spontaneity comes across to the reader. It is commonly accepted that labouring a joke will diminish its humorous effect so it is possible that if the humour appears effortless it will intensify the comic effect."

These extracts point to a space without the pressure and anxiety of having to create a functional story, where I can indulge in a form of creative play that involves making new content to amuse myself. This is where I found that the 'by-product' of humour is most likely to emerge. Examples of where such creative play has occurred in my practice can be seen in many of the sketchbook and development drawings including figs. 12, 13, 14, 19, and 24.

McIntyre and Shireen (appendices 8 and 5) describe a process in their practice that resembles the 'creative play' in mine. Shireen (appendix 5, p.311) seeks this pressure-free space through drawing in her sketchbook:

> it starts with sketchbook doodles. I try and relax, i try to remember to enjoy myself. I will find a character i like and then draw he/she/it over and over. slowly, the character may reveal itself, or i will draw an emotion - sad, pensive, delighted - and then try and figure out why that emotion may have happened. Then it develops, snowball-like.

Similarly, when discussing how humour emerges through her practice, McIntyre (appendix 8, p.333) says:

> I guess it's just when I start having two characters talk with each other, situations naturally develop, and then accidents happen, and embarrassments, and flights of whimsy. I just keep them talking and usually something will eventually make me laugh. It's much easier when I have at least two characters, I find, because then I can pit their personalities against each other, which brings out their foibles.

It is by playing around with characters, putting them in situations and making them interact, that humour can emerge in my practice and that of others. I believe we can see the same phenomenon in McLaren's and Long's practice when they are playing with their characters in figs. 22, 28 and 29.

Long describes his development stage in a way that could be likened to creative play:

> First comes the visual diarrhoea, in which you just draw a load of stuff that's on your mind. Usually, if you've had the idea for a project, you didn't have it five minutes ago. You've had the idea in your head for a while, and this is the point where it just all spills out. That will just be drawings, it might be reckless littering. It might just be drawings, the odd speech bubble, as characters start to come out, what sort of thing is this character saying?. (appendix 9, p.347)
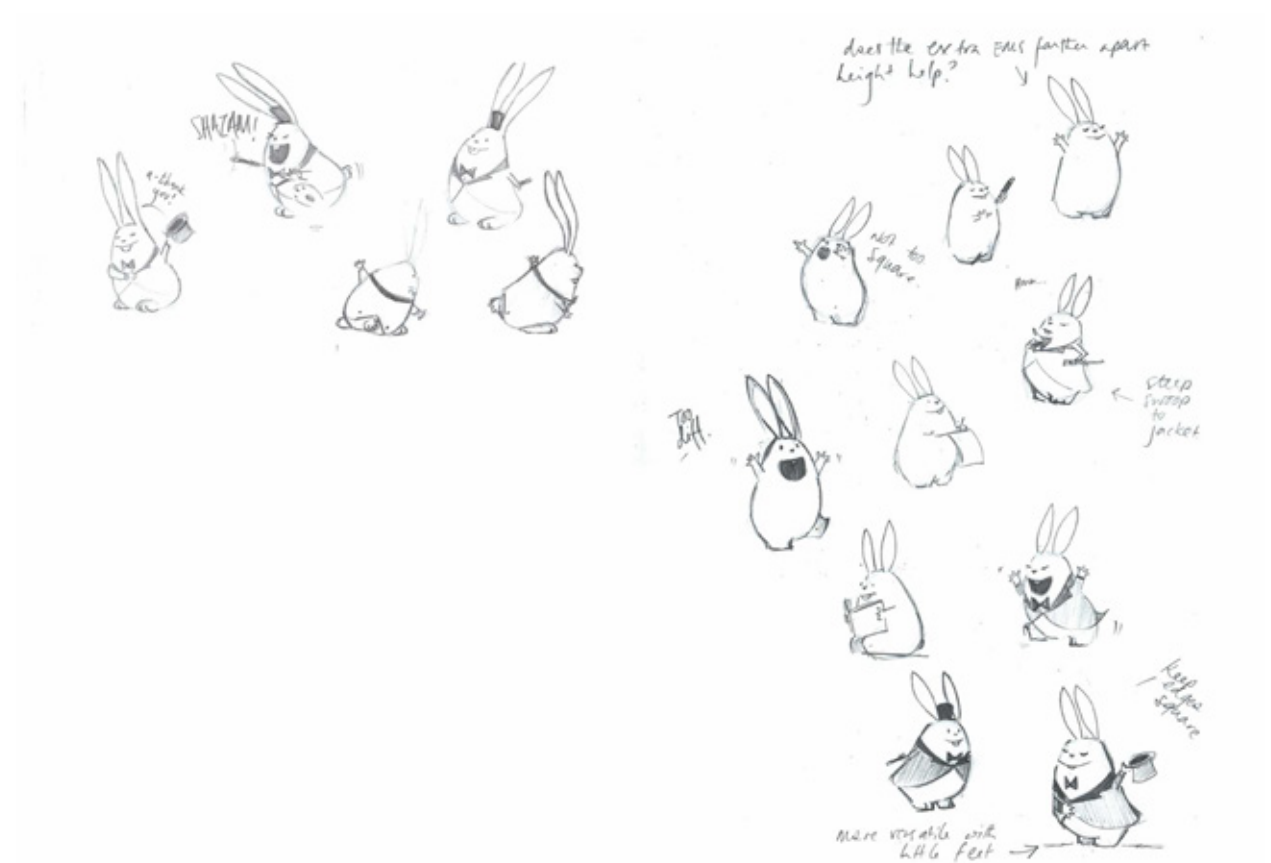
Fig. 28 Development work for *Life is Magic* (2016) by Meg McLaren.

Fig. 29 Development work for *Salty Dogs* (2017) by Matty Long.

Examples of this process can be seen in Long's development drawings (fig. 29), where he is experimenting with character designs and behaviours as well as situations that give rise to instances of humour. I would suggest these are instances of creative play.

Creative play can also be seen in the practice of makers working in different fields. Pixar's chief story supervisor, Jason Katz, discusses how they use 'gag sessions', a technique common in film making, to stimulate the creation of humour (Katz 2015, p.9). These sessions are unstructured and do not necessarily have a firm objective. They allow the participants to play around with the characters and concepts from a specific production through drawing, leading to "a wonderfully spontaneous brain dump of creation" (ibid). Many spontaneously created vignettes or short sequences from these sessions make it into the finished films. Unlike the picturebook-maker's often solo practice, these gag sessions happen in a group, which suggests that creative play does not have to be solitary to be productive.

The act of removing pressure or restrictions from these sessions and allowing the makers to create purely for the purpose of play resembles the low-pressure creative play found in the development stage of making a picturebook. This supports the idea that allowing the maker to play with characters, ideas and concepts through image making in a low-pressure environment is an effective way to stimulate the emergence of humour.

5.2.8 World Creation and Situation Comedy

While engaging in practice, I found that there were activities I could perform that would assist in creating a pressure-free space for creative play. During the development stage, I found that an effective method of stimulating the by-product of humour was to create a large, detailed, single image of the world where the narrative will take place. I then populate it with characters going about their business, adding text in the form of speech bubbles. I did this for *Mr Bunny* (fig. 13) and *Doughnut of Doom* (fig. 30). In the analyses of both of the aforementioned books, I reflect upon the success of this approach in humour creation, describing it as "freeing and productive in terms of ideas" (reflective journal entry 18.05.15 in appendix 3, p.266).

One benefit of creating these images is that it provided me with an intricate understanding of the world that the characters inhabit and the situations they find themselves in. In my analysis of *Doughnut of Doom,* I comment that "making a fully formed, intricate world through drawing before trying to construct a narrative allowed me to make new connections and allowed different types of humour to emerge naturally" (appendix 3, p.266). Similarly, in my analysis of *Mr Bunny*, I say that "being able to see how all elements of the world connect and identify what tensions there might be and conventions the characters adhere to allowed me to rework these predicaments for comic effect, creating situational comedy" (appendix 4, p.288; fig. 31). Many of these instances were include in the finished book.

In addition, creating these big pictures proved an effective method of discovering a central narrative for the books. In my analysis of *Doughnut of Doom,* I reflect that I struggled to develop a central narrative and a setting, noting in my reflective journal on 17.04.15 that "I was having

Fig. 30 For *Doughnut of Doom*. A Large world building development image of a street scene.

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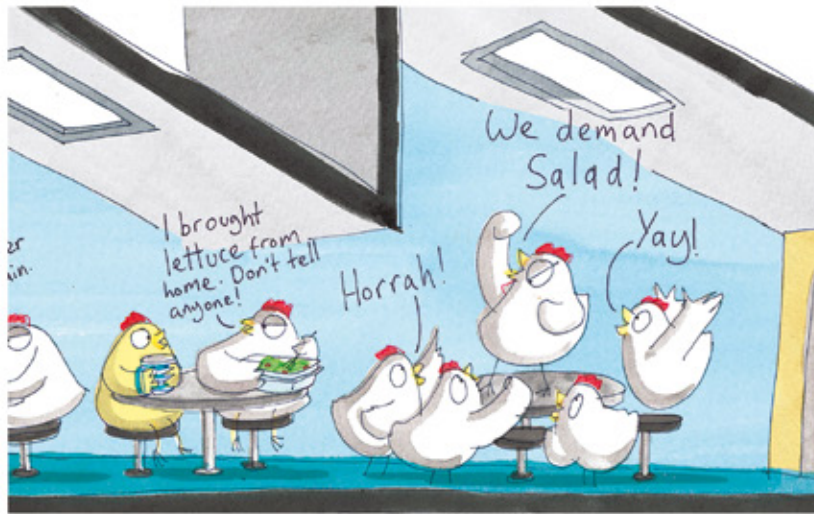
Fig. 31 Details from fig.13 showing situation comedy and the emerging theme of workers rights.

trouble understanding the wider world that these food characters inhabit and I felt that maybe this would come naturally if I worked on making the characters interact [with each other] and get to know them better. So, the characters would dictate the setting by their nature" (appendix 3, p.265). I considered this approach effective. Working within a context allowed me to create various situations and comic moments that made it into the book (figs. 32). In the case of *Mr Bunny*, we can see early instances of themes around workers' rights emerging (fig. 31) that later made up the basis of the narrative. I comment in my analysis that "I felt I had created a well formed and detailed world within this image and a narrative was starting to emerge naturally" (appendix 4, p.285).

Using this method of world-building to create a context in which humour can emerge could be likened to the situation comedy often found in television and radio. This is where a character or ensemble of characters bring out the comic potential in a specific situation (Creeber 2015, p.97) due to "the normalcy of the premise undergoing stress or threat of change and becoming restored" (Mintz 1985, p.114–15, cited in Mills 2009, p.28) or that situation is so absurd it creates a humorous effect (Horton 2000, p.23).

I would suggest that one reason why the act of creating these big pictures was so productive in humour creation is because it is an extension of the pressure-free creative play seen in the sketchbook work. With regard to these big pictures, in my analysis of *Mr Bunny* I comment: "the act of allowing myself to intuitively draw with little planning and see what emerges from that was liberating. Humour, varying from slapstick to incongruity and satire, naturally emerged without conscious attempts to put it in. Freeing myself from the pressures of having to construct and pace a narrative could be said to have helped stimulate the creation of humorous content" (appendix 4, p.289).

5.2.9 Sequencing and Text

This stage concerns the development of narrative and how it can be transposed into the 32-page format of a picturebook. Aspects such as page content and compositions, image-text relationship, pacing and placement of page turns were planned here. This most often manifested in the form of thumbnail drawings (fig. 33).

5.2.10 Is This Stage Productive for Humour Creation?

This stage did give rise to new instances of humour, but overall it was not as abundant as the development stage, especially for the books with heavily detailed imagery (appendices 1 & 3). During this stage, I found myself more concerned with trying to create "a firm and easy to understand central narrative from which to hang the humour" (appendix 1, p.226). In the *Doughnut of Doom* analysis, I also comment that I was striving "to create a clear narrative that will support and explain the humorous characters, settings and concepts" (appendix 3, p.273).

On reflection, humour is conveyed more effectively where the central narrative functions well. If the reader is distracted by a confusing or convoluted narrative, I would suggest that it could detract

Fig. 32 Details from fig.29 showing settings that were included in the finished book.

Fig. 33 *Doughnut of Doom* thumbnails.
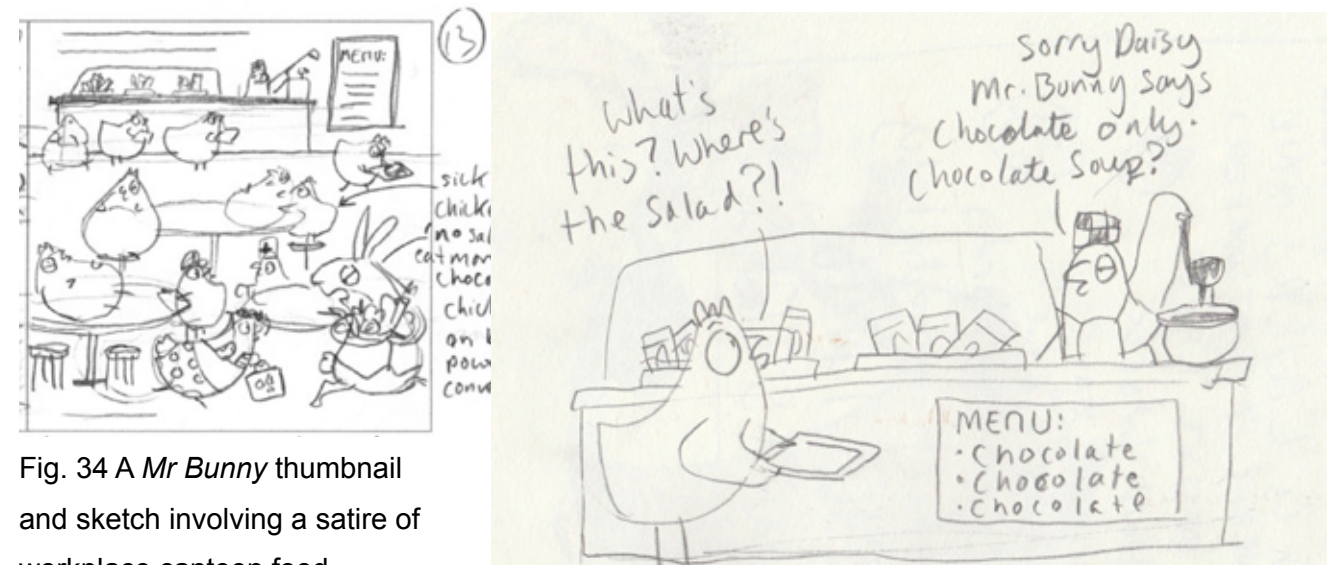
Fig. 34 A *Mr Bunny* thumbnail and sketch involving a satire of workplace canteen food.

n any humorous moments. In the analysis of *Haunted Farm* (appendix 1), I reflect that the
dition of an unnecessarily complex plot could make the narrative appear less spontaneous an
re laboured, which can diminish the humorous effect, as I have previously suggested.
e significance of the central narrative was recognised by the publisher when creating *Mr
nny*. They encouraged the removal of a page I had included for its satire, observational and
sical humour (fig. 34). The publisher suggested it was not necessary in the context of the sto
pendix 4). On reflection, I found that this improved both the narrative and the overall balance
humour because the story became clearer. It is the narrative that gives context to the humour,
ecially in situation comedy. For situation comedy to work, the reader requires clear knowledg
he world the characters inhabit and the situation the characters find themselves in. This
vides context to the characters' reactions to these situations, so the reader can see the benig
ations that create instances of humour.

Laren makes a significant point when she observes that "the humour doesn't exist by itself.
appens at the exact same time as we're introducing characters and plot points and creating
vironments, and so it's woven so much into the fabric of the book that I find it hard to separate
ut on its own" (appendix 6, p.321). If other aspects of the book are dysfunctional, such as the
ntral narrative, I am unlikely to consider the humour effective.

g echoes the need for a functional narrative: "at the end of the day it's still a story, and it's go
low, and it's got to be strong throughout the story". Long seeks to prevent the humour from
voluting the clear narrative. He must "try not to make the reader forget amongst the humour
t there is actually a plot here, and they are trying to do something. You've got to include little
inders, because they are going to spend a lot of time in each spread. They are going to
gh, hopefully, at jokes and things that distract from the main plot of the book. You just do little
erences back to remind them" (appendix 9, p.367).

vis refers to this as the book having 'heart', and comments: "sometimes I'm trying to chase
augh so much I forget about the heart (See 'Fred Forgets'!) But if you can get both, that's the
resting spot. If you can laugh and feel something for the characters then that's what all the
st funny art has" (appendix 7, p.327). This 'heart' could be seen as emotional engagement. It i
oherent narrative that is significant in communicating effectively with the reader to create that
pathy.

This stage is significant for humour creation when the artwork is less detailed, because the
success of the humour is dependent on how the narrative unfolds rather than on subplots and
humorous asides. In a reflective journal comment from 12/02/15 (appendix 2, p.247), I say that
Steven Seagull is "a much less detailed book and more like a traditional children's book in the
way it reads. This means the humour came more from the pacing and physical comedy of the
characters."

While creating the thumbnails, it is evident that I am manipulating the sequencing to create
instances of humour through pacing and reveals. This can be seen in fig. 35, which shows

A sedate and classic beach scene is established here.

The page turn reveal presents a surprising contrast.

Here humour is created through counterpoint between the text and image.

Steven's confusion over what the sand was being used for contrasted with the image, which make it glaringly obvious, creates counterpoint. The composition is used here to intensify the counterpoint by the scale of sandcastle and how obvious and dominant it is on the right hand page.

Vignettes create a sense of building tension and lead the reader to expect Steven to have a heroic and ingenious solution to the situation.

The page turn creates a pause and sense of suspense. Expectations are violated with a surprising contradictory outcome to create a comic effect.

Tension and anticipation is increased as the reader become aware of the inevitable moment of slapsitick.

Tension is released with huge slapstick moment. The magnitude of the moment is increased by it's scale on the page, the lack of text and the pause from the proceeding page turn..

Fig. 35 Analysis of pacing and page turn reveals in the *Steven Seagull* thumbnail.

Fig. 36 Thumbnails from *Mrs Mole, I'm Home!* (2017) by Jarvis.

Fig. 37 Thumbnails from *Haunted Farm* showing bathetic humour.

Fig. 38 Thumbnails from *Doughnut of Doom* showing bathetic humour.

Fig. 39 Thumbnails from *Mr Bunny* showing bathetic humour.
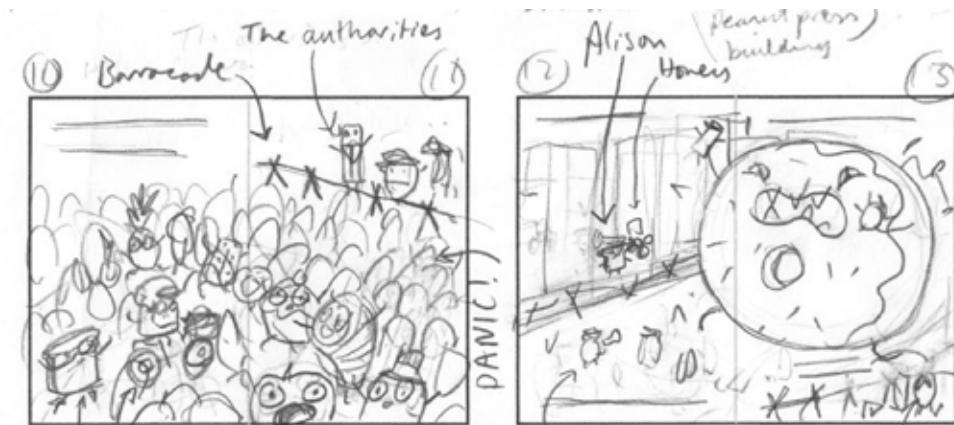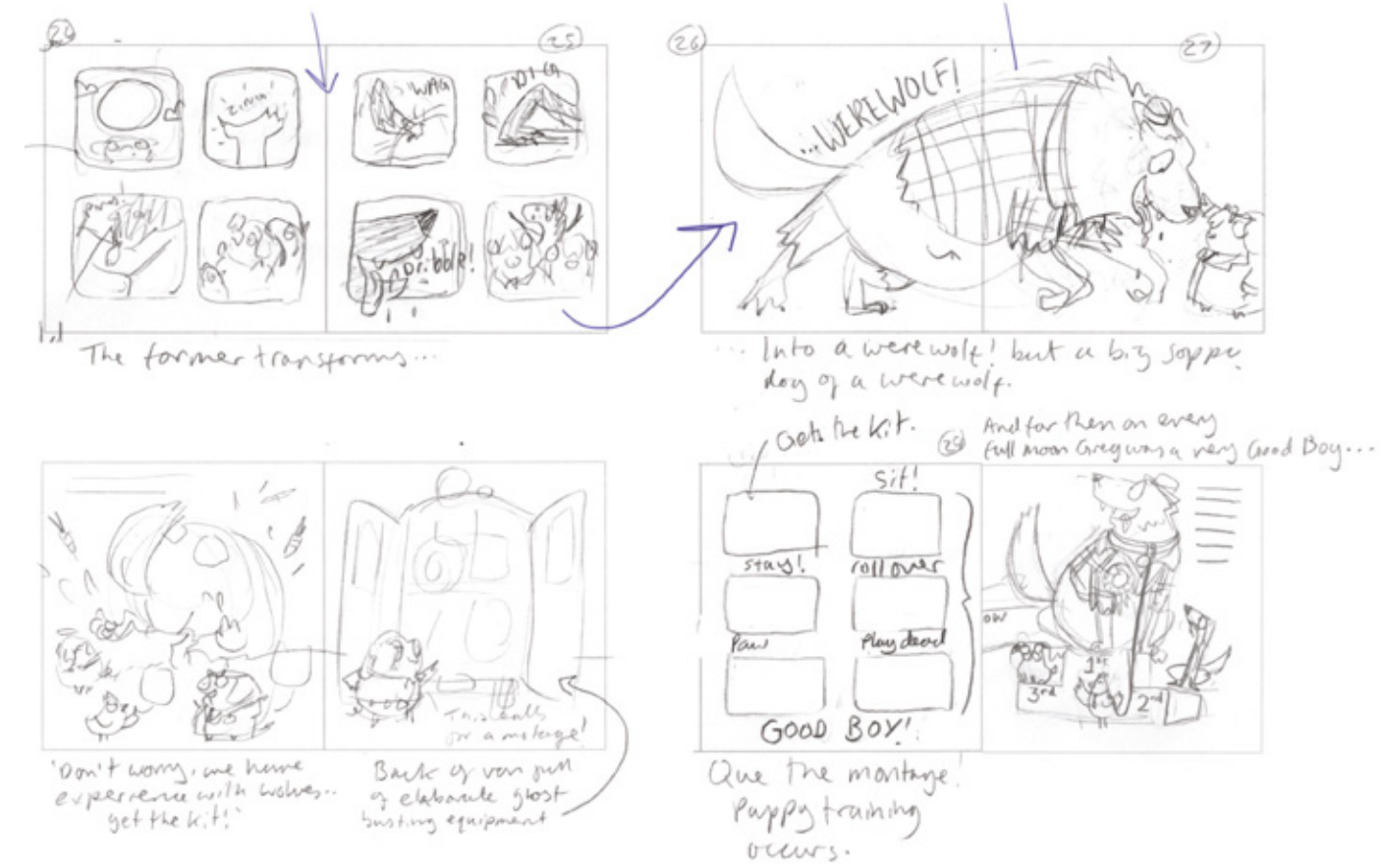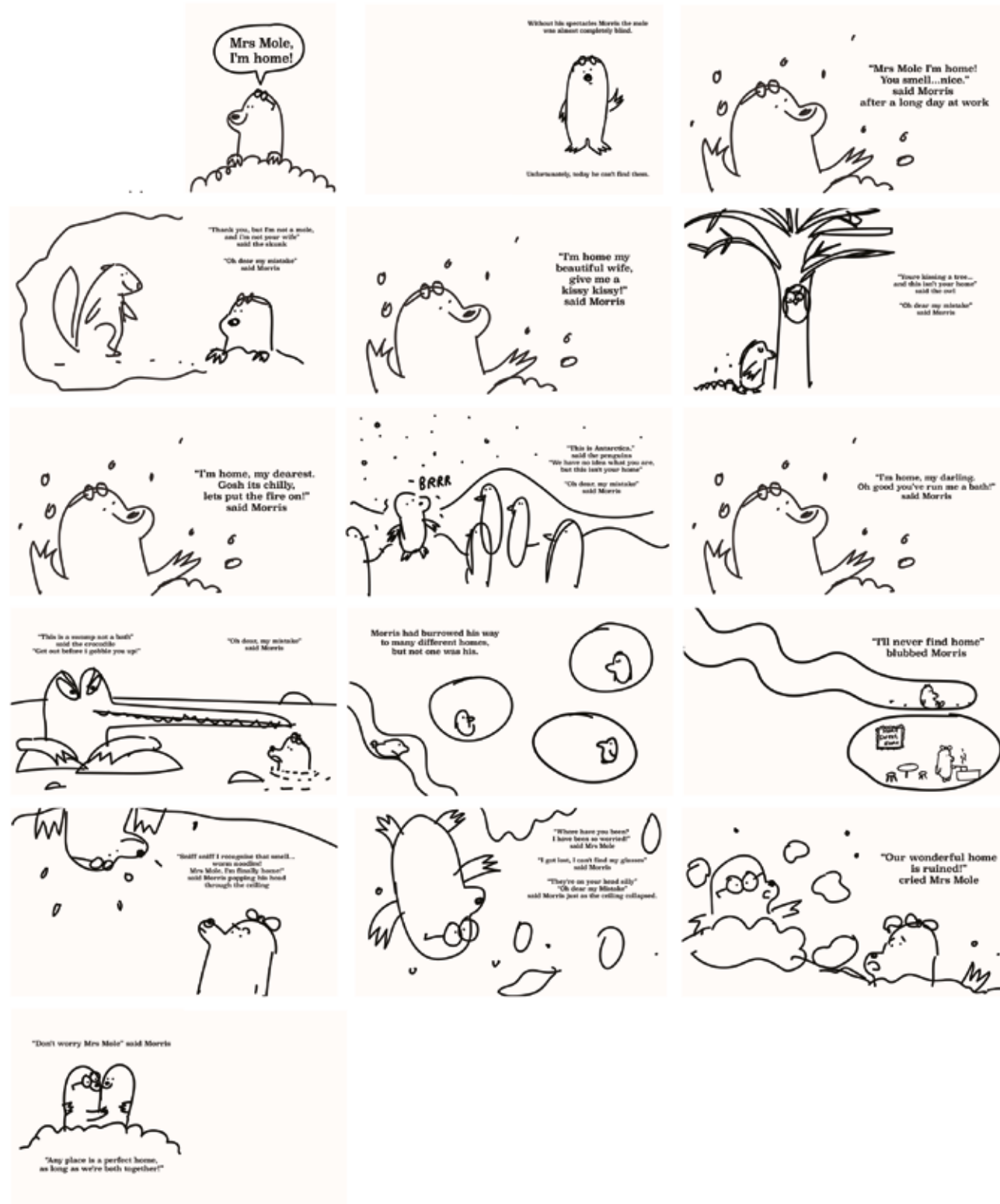
the *Steven Seagull* thumbnails where I was "creating surprise, twisting logic and contradicting expectations to create a comic effect" (appendix 2, p.249).

The same manipulation of pagination in this stage of practice can be seen in Jarvis' work as he developed the sequence for *Mrs Mole, I'm Home!* (fig. 36).

Humour is created by using page-turns to reveal Mr Mole's misconception of where he has emerged from the ground to the reader. We can see that Jarvis planned those reveals at this stage. He comments on how this use of the page turn is integral to the book and was the initial idea from which the book developed, "so actually the delivery of the joke was all I had, and it was more shaping a story from it" (appendix 7, p.327).

This stage was particularly productive for creating humour dependent upon the turning of the page to create a reveal. Examples of this can be seen in the bathetic humour of dog poo reveal in *Haunted Farm* (fig. 37), the monster reveal in *Doughnut of Doom* (fig. 38), and the reveal of Mr Bunny's factory (fig. 39).

5.2.12 Why is This Stage Productive for Humour Based on Timing and Reveals?

Salisbury (2004, p.82) suggests that the rate at which the story unfolds can be altered by "varying the viewpoint, the size of the images and the design of the image on the page". I observe in my analyses that creating thumbnail drawings is the first opportunity to view and manipulate the aforementioned elements and so the first opportunity to include humour that relies on them.

Again I would suggest this humour is more of a 'by-product' (Blake 2000, p.94). I comment in my analysis of *Steven Seagull* (appendix 2, p.249) that I am "conscious of the need for a strong central storyline when creating the thumbnails but not conscious of the need to inject humour". Again, humour is an unconscious, tacit addition, but the nature of the practice engaged in at this stage stimulates the emergence of humour reliant on pacing, composition and reveals.

5.2.13 Roughs

The roughs are full-size pencil drawings of each double-page spread of the book (fig. 40). The compositions are finalised while making these drawings and additional details created.

5.2.14 Is This Stage Productive for Humour Creation?

While creating the roughs, I found that humour of a different nature emerged. This took the form of humorous details that were not narratively significant, such as subplots and call-backs to earlier jokes.

Similarly, you can see the addition of humorous details separate from the main narrative emerge at this stage in McLaren's practice. Where her practice differs from my own is that she continues to add further humorous details in the artwork, but in both stages these instances of humour take the form of background details (see fig. 41). McLaren comments that "the humour grows as the book is made" (appendix 6, p.345).
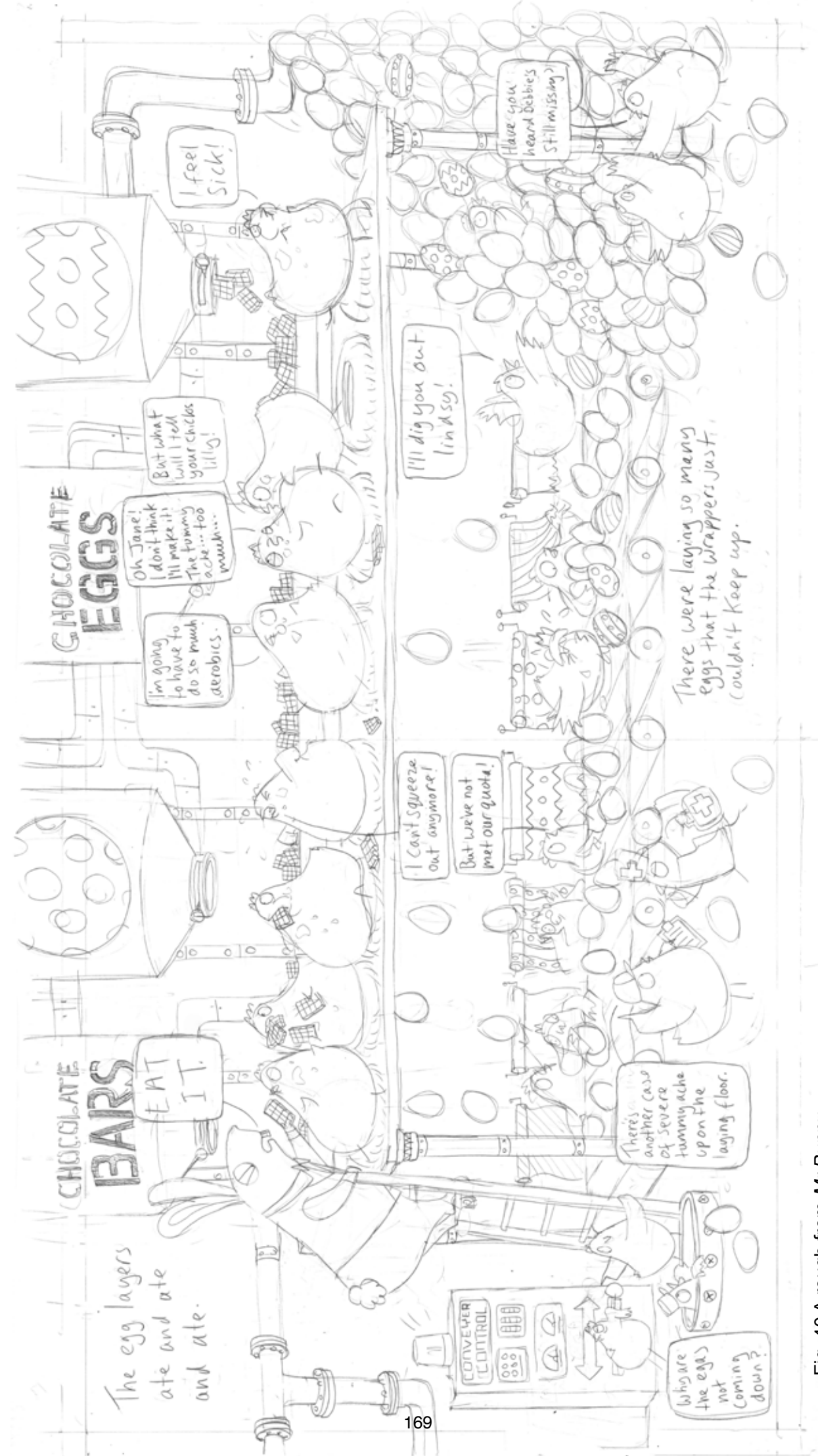
Fig. 40 A rough from *Mr Bunny*.

Fig. 41 A rough and artwork image from *The Station Mouse* (2018) by Meg McLaren showing the inclusion of new details between the roughs and artwork stage.

Fig. 42 A detail from fig. 29 showing the first instance of haircut pineapple.
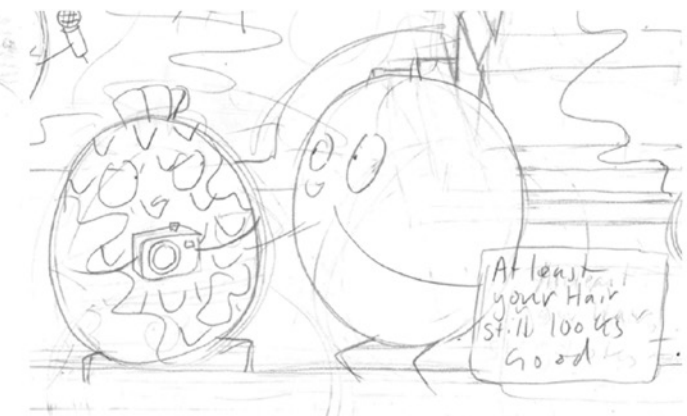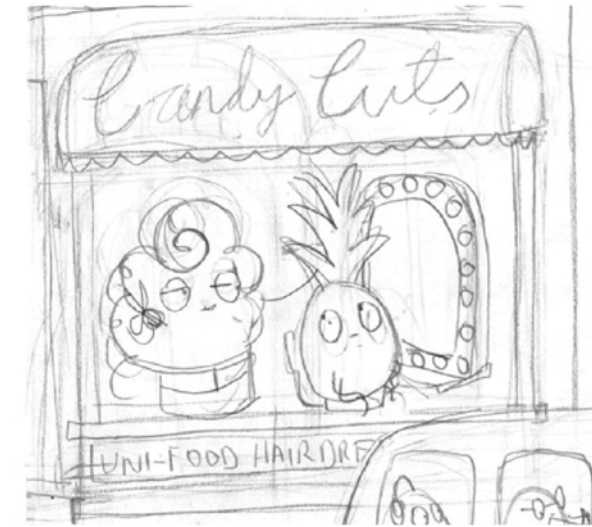
Fig. 43 Details from the *Doughnut of Doom* roughs showing haircut pineapple's subplot.

5.2.15 Subplots and Call-backs

I found myself adding additional humorous subplots while creating the roughs. During the roughs stage of *Doughnut of Doom*, I introduced the mini-narrative of haircut pineapple, which features instances of slapstick (fig. 43). It was inspired by a background character originally created in the development stage (fig. 42). In *Mr Bunny*, I introduced a subplot concerning Debbie, a lost chicken, in the roughs stage (fig. 44). In the analysis I comment that "[t]his provides a vehicle to include extra slapstick and the surprise and recognition when the reader spots her in the background" (appendix 4, p.298).

This stage also gave rise to humour through *call-backs*, referring to or expanding on a previous joke. In *Mr Bunny*, a chicken called Vera books two weeks in the Maldives just as Mr Bunny cancels all holidays. Though less narrative than Debbie's subplot, Vera's want for holidays is repeatedly referred back to throughout the narrative for comic effect (fig. 45).

These forms of humour did not emerge in the less detailed artwork of *Steven Seagull* (p.12). The lack of visual detail meant that the compositions could not comfortably accommodate such subplots.

McLaren also introduces subplots at this point in her practice. While creating the roughs for *Life is Magic*, she added a subplot concerning two rabbits playing hide and seek throughout the book. This subplot emerged because at this point, she was trying to ensure "all the background characters have their own narrative or their own motivations and relationships within the group" (appendix 6, p.317).

5.2.16 Character Comedy

In *Steven Seagull*, new instances of humour did emerge during this stage through the creation of new background characters to add interests to the spreads. Though these characters did not have their own subplots, there were humorous aspects to their characterisation. For example, the incongruous Dez, seal personal trainer (fig. 46). This was not limited to *Steven Seagull*, In the *Doughnut of Doom* analysis (appendix 3), I note that I added "extra food puns, some new and some translated from my sketchbook or the big picture".

During the rough stage, Long also creates new characters and details to add to the spreads, such as the goblins doing winter sports in *Super Frozen Magic Forest* (fig. 47). Long suggests that new humorous characters emerge through drawing new environments for the roughs (appendix 9).

5.2.17 Crossover Humour

In the *Doughnut of Doom* analysis (appendix 3), I reflect that the introduction of new details in the roughs allowed for the addition of crossover humour that could appeal to a different age group, such as an adult audience. I suggest that these details do not detract from a younger audience's enjoyment of the book because they "do not interfere with the central narrative which must cater towards the primary audience of younger readers. These often take the form of background details that an adult reader may spot as they go". I will discuss crossover humour in more detail later in
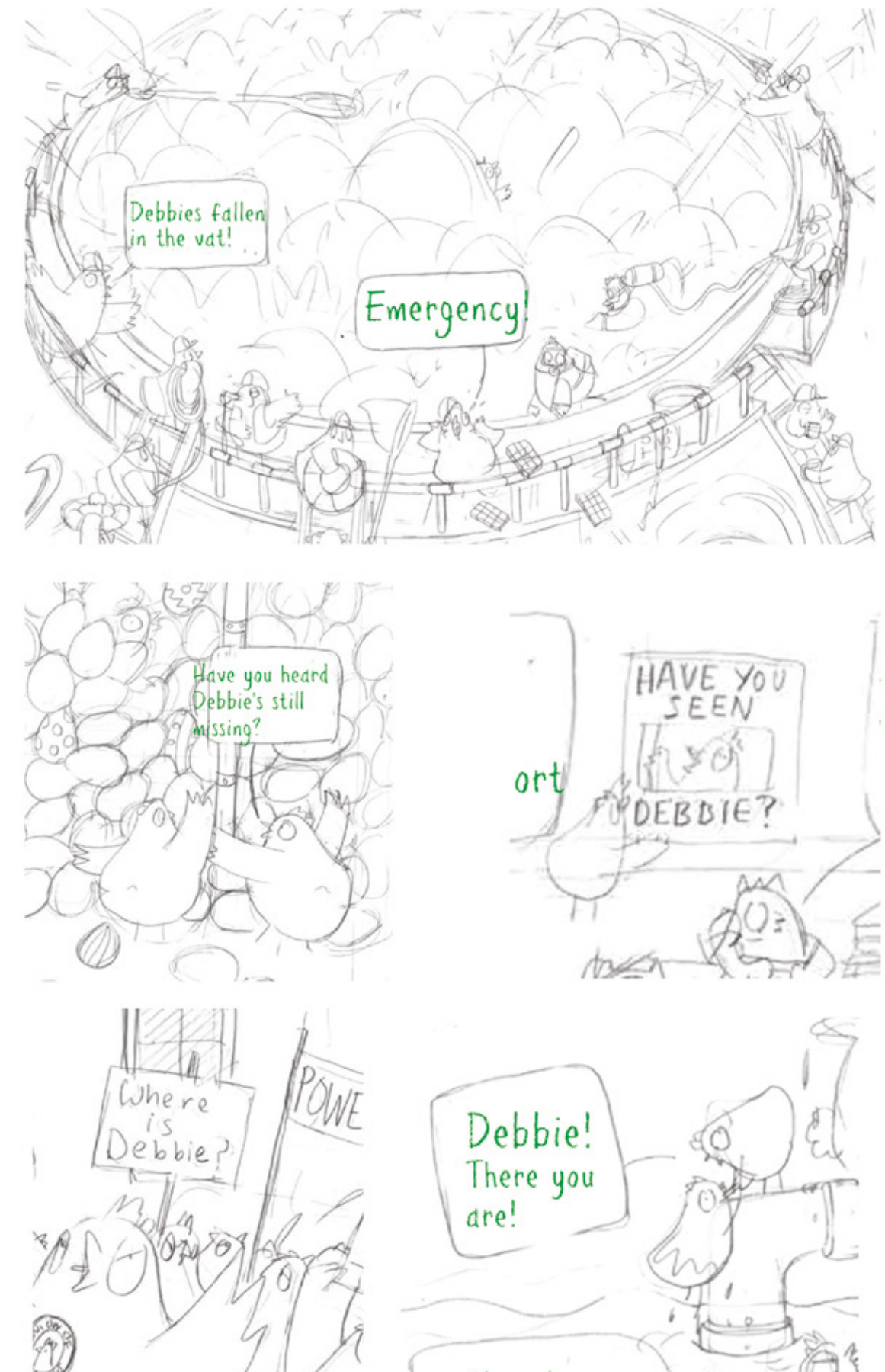
Fig. 44 Details from the *Mr Bunny* roughs showing the Debbie's lost subplot.
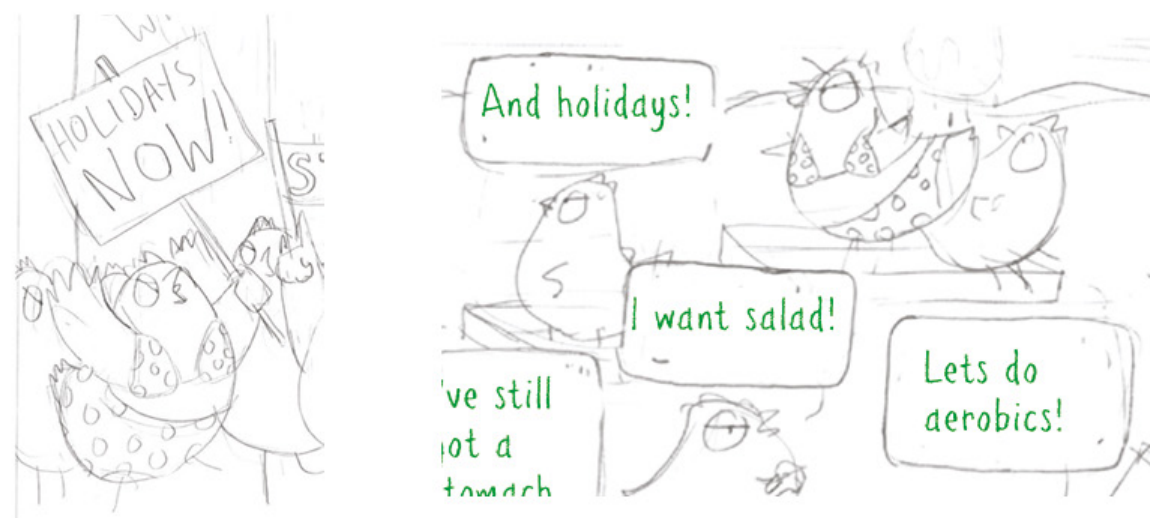
Fig. 45 Details from the *Mr Bunny* roughs showing Vera's holiday subplot.
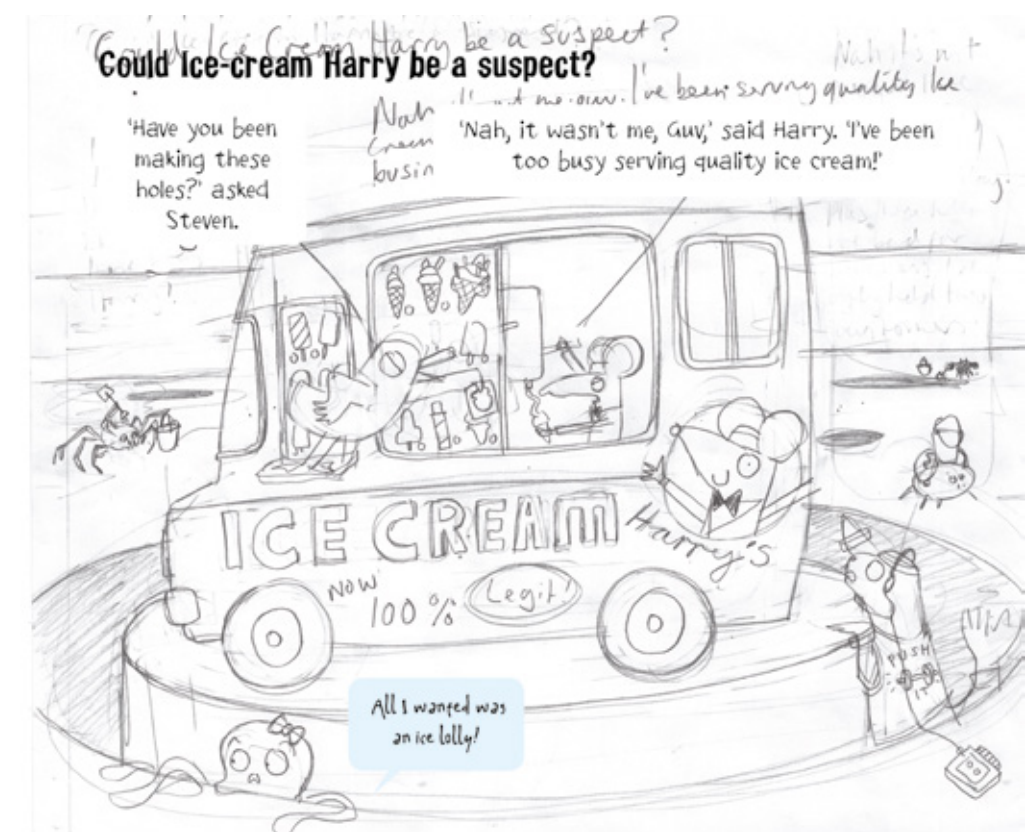
Fig. 46 Detail from the *Steven Seagull* roughs showing Des the personal trainer.

Fig. 47 Detail from *Super Frozen Magic Forest* (2018) by Matty Long showing goblins doing winter sports.

5.2.18 Satire

While creating *Mr Bunny,* I became aware that the roughs stage yielded the creation of satire, which did not occur in this stage when creating the previous books. I reflect that "satire, a type of humour that is used to ridicule, to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, seems an effective way to present Mr Bunny, and the stereotypical authority figures his character echoes, as unreasonable and unacceptable" (appendix 4, p.294).

The satire emerged strongly while adding further details to Mr Bunny's surroundings in the roughs. For example, fig. 48 shows Mr Bunny depicted in two elaborate portraits that display his vanity and in fig. 49 he is "surrounded by all the trappings of a business fat cat and corporate clichés" (appendix 4, p.294). Satire is also evident in Mr Bunny's characterisation. I comment that "I exaggerated his facial expressions and actions… to echo the stereotypical and unreasonable boss and make this behaviour seem absurd" (fig. 50).

I believe the new addition of satirical humour to my practice demonstrates how my use of humour changes as I develop as a person. *Mr Bunny* was the last picturebook I created for this research and differed in that the humour that emerged was not purely a tool to elicit comic amusement: it discusses a serious issue. I reflect that "to an adult these issues would probably be seen as workers' rights but children will probably see this as more of a matter of fairness" (appendix 4, p.307). I add that these themes emerged unconsciously and that it could be because of my own changing tastes and world view:

> I have become increasingly politically dissatisfied recently and I find that the content I consume unconsciously comes through in my practice, such as my interest in classic horror movies in *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm* (appendix 4, p.307).

This could explain the change in the form the humour took. Much as I have used genre conventions to situate the narrative within a genre that interests me, here I am using the conventions of the world I inhabit to situate the narrative in relation to a particular social issue I find compelling. This had an overall effect on the type of humour that emerged in the book. Where there was parodic humour in the previous books, *Mr Bunny* was more satirical, providing a critique of Mr Bunny's unfair behaviour by making it appear absurd, and so reflecting my own viewpoint.

Previously, I consciously avoided imposing a moral aspect on my books, in part to undermine the perception that children's book should be improving to the reader - which Michael Rosen (2014, para.47) describes as "saving the child" - and avoid patronising the reader (appendix 4).

Once I was aware that there was a moral aspect to *Mr Bunny,* I was concerned that it might "overwhelm the humour by making the book too moral or preaching" (reflective journal 13/11/15) and "inhibit the comic effect" (appendix 4, p.307). I was more concerned that humour should emerge than that any specific themes should. On reflection, the underlying moral issue provided
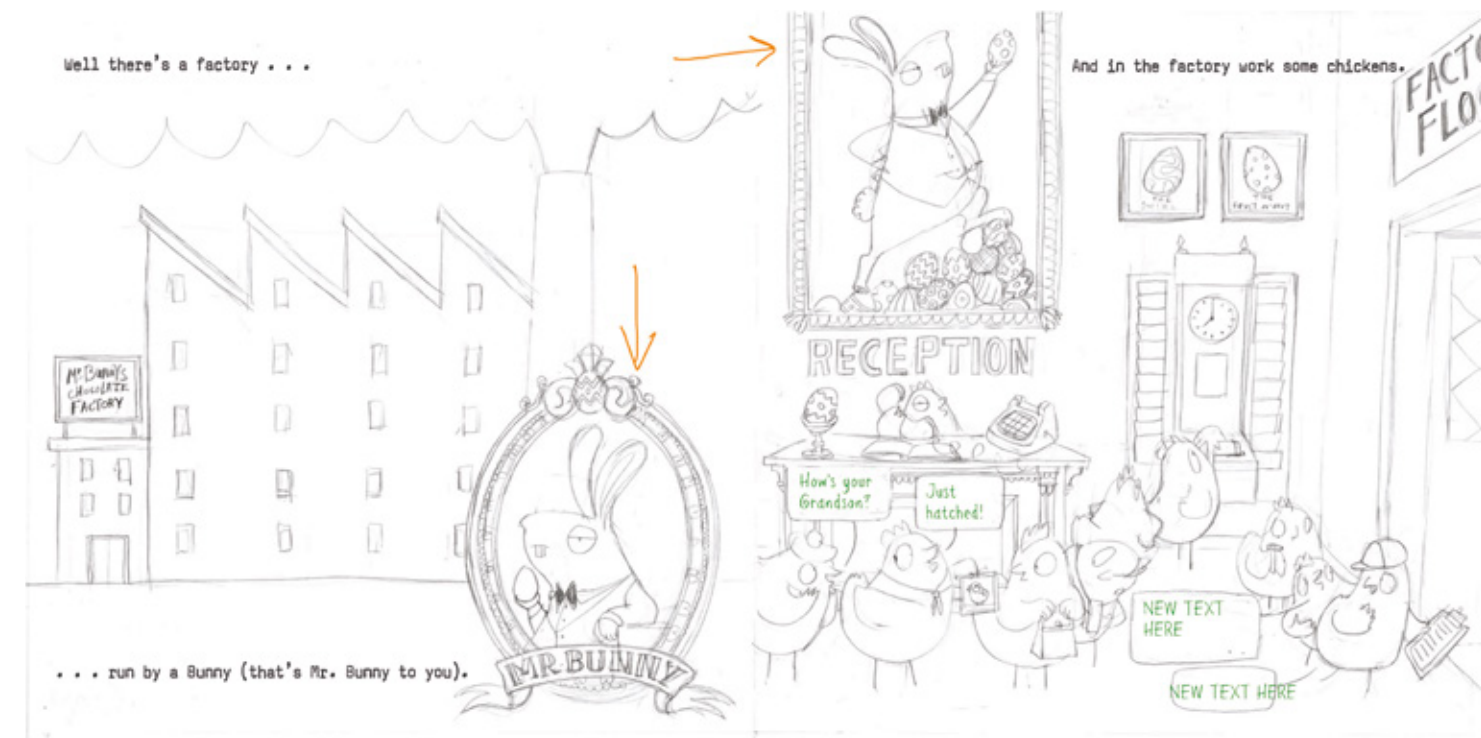
Fig. 48 Rough from *Mr Bunny* showing elaborate portraits.
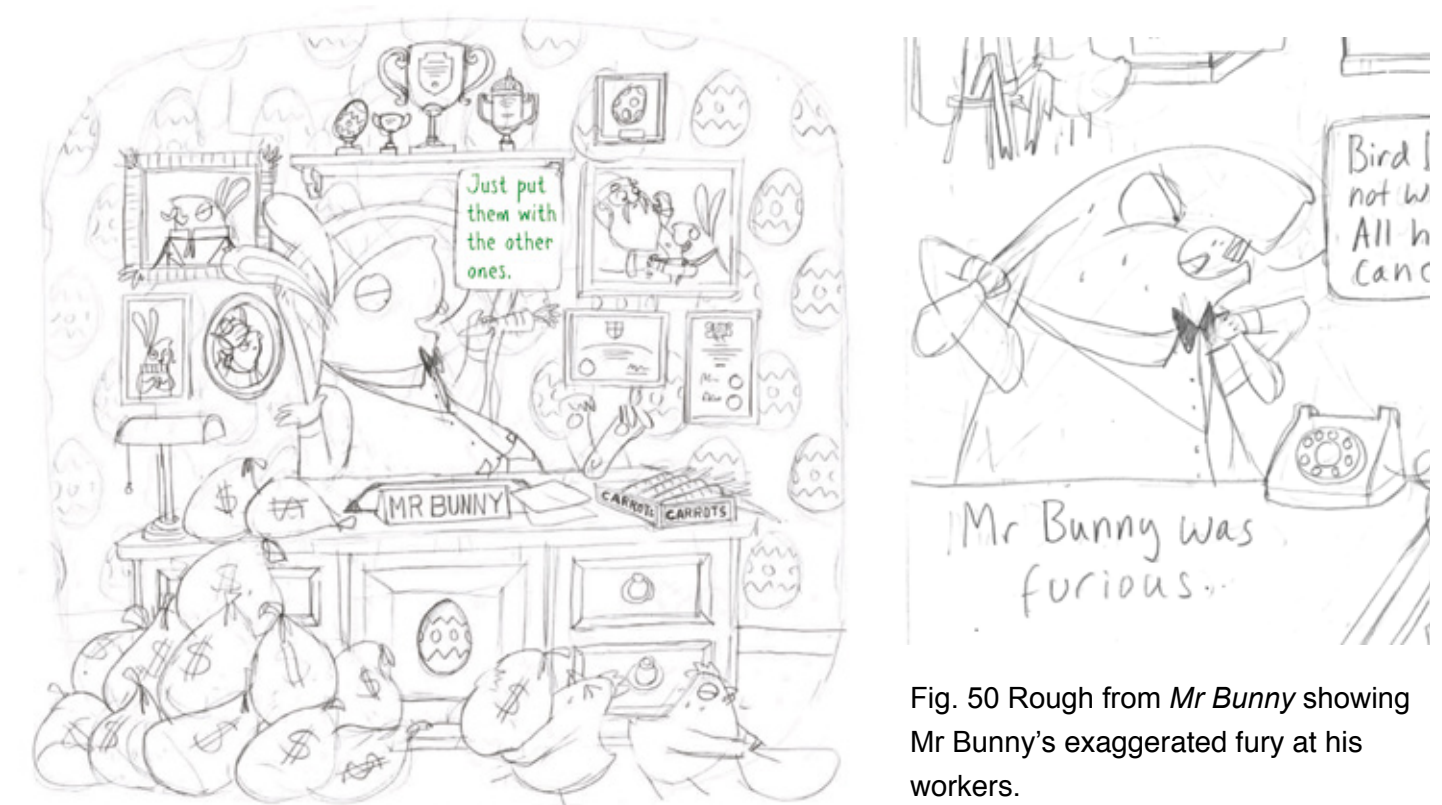
Fig. 49 Rough from *Mr Bunny* showing Mr Bunny's office.

Fig. 50 Rough from *Mr Bunny* showing Mr Bunny's exaggerated fury at his workers.

"an essential vehicle for the comic aspects" because it provided the material to satirise, creating a form of humour new to my practice. I reflect that:

> I believe having humorous overtones made what could be quite dark and dry issues understandable and relatable for a young audience. The exaggeration of Mr Bunny's unfair nature and authoritarian character made the behaviour clear but also seem absurd and unreasonable whilst still inherently comic (appendix 4, p.307).

5.2.19 Why Did This Stage Give Rise to These Types of Humour?

I believe I found this stage effective for the introduction of additional instances of humour because it is the first point in the process where I created all the visual detail. By including a high density of detail in an image, I am able to include copious amounts of information in a single spread. In my analysis of *Haunted Farm* (appendix 1, p.307), I suggest that this density of detail can be used for humorous instances and include "running gags and subplots as well as asides that do not necessarily directly relate to the central narrative". In addition, the ability to add additional detail at this stage allowed the satire to emerge strongly in *Mr Bunny.*

When creating the roughs, I am able to see areas that require new content to fill the composition, providing the opportunity to create new comic background characters and asides. Having an overview of the entire book in all its detail allows me to make content that links from spread to spread, often taking the form of subplots and call-backs.

In the analysis of *Haunted Farm* (appendix 1), I observe that the roughs stage can give rise to situation comedy similar to that which emerges through making a 'big picture'. I would suggest this is because I have a greater understanding of my characters and the world they inhabit once I have done the roughs, which gives me the tools to create situation comedy. This would suggest that these 'tools' can be gained not only through creating a big picture at an earlier stage of the process, but also at a later stage when creating the roughs. I believe this highlights the similarity between the practice involved in creating a 'big picture' and creating detailed roughs. I would suggest that both facilitate creative play. The roughs provide the opportunity to create new content, free from the constraints of the narrative, which has been established in the previous stage. This facilitates the sense of play, which leads to humour creation.

The roughs stage gave rise to new instances of humour. In the analysis of *Doughnut of Doom* (appendix 3, p.273), I reflect that I was able "to collate and curate the existing humour and combine it with new comic moments that occur whilst drawing the roughs". It is a valuable stage for refining the delivery of the humour. For instance, where within a narrative or composition would a specific food pun be most effective? The roughs do not just provide the space and actions to create new humour, they also provide a key moment in the process to gain an overview of the existing humour and reflect upon it.

5.2.20 Artwork

At this point, the final full-colour artwork that will appear in the finished book is created (fig. 51).

Fig. 51 An example of artwork from *Steven Seagull.*

Fig. 52 Details from the *Mr Bunny* artwork showing additions to the Debbie's lost subplot.

Within my practice, I use the roughs as a guide to create the artwork. The media used are pencil or Posca pen outlines, watercolour and digital manipulation in Photoshop.

5.2.21 Is This Stage Productive for Humour Creation?

Through the analyses, it became apparent that choices made and actions undertaken at the artwork stage rarely contribute to new instances of humour. In both the *Haunted Farm* and *Doughnut of Doom* analyses (appendices 1 & 3), I reflect that my concerns at this stage were with trying to preserve or effectively communicate the humour that emerged in the earlier stages.

There were occasions where I expanded on instances of humour created in earlier stages. For example, in *Mr Bunny,* reflecting on the subplot concerning Debbie being lost led me to feel it was humorous and seek to expand it. Addition background details were added that reference her plight and show her appearing in the final double page spread after she has been found (fig. 52).

Where I did find this stage to be significant was the discovery that the way in which the artwork is executed can affect how effectively the humour communicates or provide the element that makes a comedic moment work. While working on spread 1 of *Haunted Farm* (fig. 53) I noted the importance of colouring this first spread in my reflective journal because "it's got to set the scene, establish the tone and there's a joke that needs good visuals to make it work" (appendix 1, p.226). The joke in question comes from the counterpoint between the relaxed text describing the situation and the chaos emerging in the imagery. Therefore, it was important that I used the correct combination of colour, balance of tone and type of mark making to deliver that chaotic atmosphere.

When creating the artwork for both *Steven Seagull* and *Doughnut of Doom,* I knew tacitly that I needed to approach the artwork in a specific way to augment the humour (appendices 2 & 3). I felt the artwork should appear loose and spontaneous. On reflection, I believe I was striving to avoid a laboured appearance that could reflect on the humour and cause it to feel more laboured, too.

In addition, it was my intention that the artwork should establish the expectation of humour. I believe I tacitly knew that a spontaneous, unrefined approach would do so. If I used approaches that would result in a highly rendered, realistic depiction of Steven Seagull, the genre conventions associated with such artwork would confuse the humour rather than augment it.

I would not suggest that a loose and spontaneous approach to artwork is essential for the creation of humour. There are illustrators who produce humorous work using very different approaches to the artwork, such as John Vernon Lord in books such as *Miserable Aunt Bertha* (1980) and his illustrations for *The Nonsense Verse of Edward Lear* (2012), and Janet Ahlberg in *The Jolly Postman* (1986) or *Burglar Bill* (1977). I would suggest that a maker may instinctively adjusts their approach to artwork in the way they feel would best deliver the humour, much as stand-up comics differ in the way they deliver a punchline. The difference here is not in the types of humour found in the work of various makers, but in the delivery of that humour.

This causes me to consider why I equate fast and spontaneous mark making within my practice with superior communication of humour, why I make this my 'delivery'. On reflection, I believe this is connected to a loss of life and energy in my imagery when I first began practicing as an

Fig. 53 The artwork and rough for spread 1 of *Haunted Farm*.

strator. This came about when I tried to translate rough imagery to final artwork. Even when I
considered the rough image to be successful, when I attempted to recreate it in a more rendered
manner, I would overwork the image and it would not communicate as successfully. It was only
when I began to work in a more fast and spontaneous manner, as can be seen in *Steven Seagu*

5.2.22 Why is the Nature of the Artwork Significant in Creating Comic Effect?

Doonan (1993, p.12) takes the position that all aspects of a picturebook image are
significant in its communication, stating that:

> Pictures are made of simple basic ingredients: arrangements of interwoven lines
> and shapes and colours, which the artist sets down in a particular medium and, at
> the same time, organises. The movement of the pen or brush and the organisational
> decisions, made either consciously or unconsciously, and the medium itself induce
> an experience in the beholder.

My own experiences through practice support Doonan. My manipulation of tools such as colour,
mark-making, tone and texture change how the information contained within the composition can
be perceived, creating a different 'experience' for the reader. It is through creating the artwork
that these tools are deployed, finalising the 'experience'. It is my belief that the 'experience' can
be manipulated in the artwork stage to augment humour that was initially conceived in the earlier
stages. This can be seen in the difference between the rough version of the opening spread from
Haunted Farm and the finished artwork (fig. 53). The addition of an atmosphere that evokes the
feel of a haunting through the colour pallet and the use of tone augments the impression that
there is something very wrong on this farm. This produces a humorous contrast to the text, which
underplays the situation by saying: "something wasn't quite right".

5.2.23 Comic Fatigue

In my analysis of *Haunted Farm* (appendix 1, p.230), I observe how fatigue can affect humour
creation and retention. I found that when I reached the artwork stage, creating and retaining
humour became increasingly challenging. I reflect that:

> Over-exposure to the book is making me lose sight of what I thought was funny. It's
> losing its potency for me so I'm just trusting the decisions I made earlier and trying to
> realise them the best I can.

This is something that Long identifies as an issue, suggesting that he loses sight of what is
humorous as he works on a book. Long says: "it's harder to step back and see it in the perspective
of a whole, a whole book and how it works at each moment. Because, at the time, you're just
worrying about everything" (appendix 9, p.339).

This could relate to the need for spontaneity, play and a lack of pressure when creating humour, as
mentioned earlier in the chapter. I found that the 'over-exposure' created by the extended period

required to create a picturebook gradually erodes the novelty. This contributes to the reduction of
humour creation and an inability to objectively assess the success of previously created humour
when the book is nearing completion.

5.3 Creating Humour Within the Context of the Publishing Industry

All four books were created within the context of the publishing industry and went on to be
published. The analyses make it apparent that the most significant influence on the emergence
of humour within my practice, aside from my own tastes and personality, was that of the publisher
(appendices 1, 2, 3 & 4).

5.3.1 The Influence of the Publisher-Maker Relationship

In chapter 3 I described the extent of a publisher's influence on a picturebook project. It is my
experience that this influence can have a profoundly positive effect on humour creation, but also a
negative one. I will discuss examples of these, using 'publisher' to mean communication from the
editor or art director with whom I was working on that picturebook.

An example of positive influence can be seen in the analysis of *Mr Bunny,* where the publisher
assisted in manipulating aspects of the picturebook to facilitate comic effect. While creating
Mr Bunny, the publisher suggested "a minor layout change to one of the spreads that I believe
substantially augments a joke" (appendix 4, p.339). This instance can be seen in fig. 54. The
humour relies in part on the contrast between the calm on the previous spread and the chaos
revealed on the next spread.

The publisher suggested cropping the composition to zoom in on the action (fig. 55), which I
believe emphasised the feeling of chaos and augmented the humour. I suggested that "I had not
picked up on this effect myself because extended exposure to the work had made me over familiar,
so it became difficult to identify approaches different to those I had already taken" (appendix 4,
p.306). This suggests that a publisher can assist in the creation of humour due to their distance
from the practice, combined with their familiarity with the mechanics of picturebooks. Their greater
degree of objectivity allows the publisher to employ their expertise in ways the maker may not be
able to.

The makers interviewed found a collaborative relationship with their publisher to be a positive
influence on their use of humour. McLaren comments: "[i]f I'm stuck then they're the first people
I'll ask. If a joke or the timing of something doesn't work then they'll let me know, especially if it's
affecting the pacing of the story". She details instances where their influence has augmented the
humour, going on to say: "as we've gotten to know each other they have become more confident
in pitching jokes or pointing out gaps where they think I'm missing one" (appendix 6, p.321). Jarvis
comments on the publisher's ability to structure his output, saying that "[t]he jokes are there and
the story is there, but not necessarily in the right order! So yes, the publishers help to shape them.
And sometimes when we chat through things in meetings a new joke comes up" (appendix 7,

Fig. 54 Spreads from *Mr Bunny* showing the contrast between relative calm and chaos.
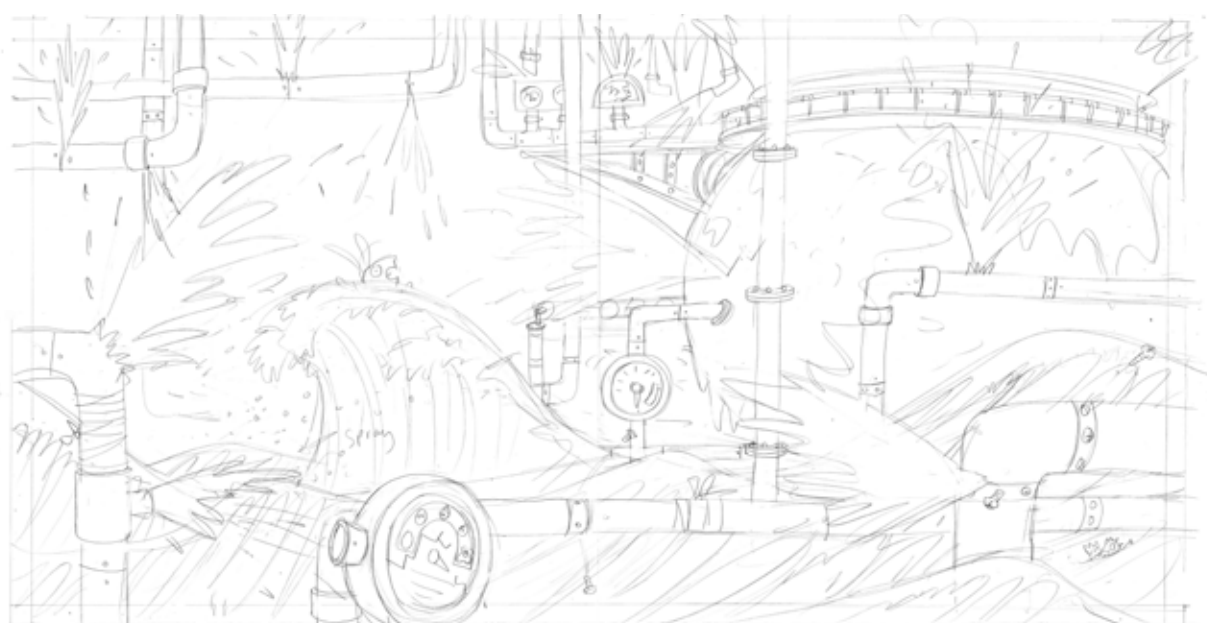
Fig. 55 Rough from *Mr Bunny* showing the original composition.

p.327). Long enjoys an equally collaborative relationship with his publisher, describing various experiences where they have assisted with sequencing to aid the delivery of a joke or the clarity of the central narrative (appendix 9).

McIntyre finds that her friends offer more effective input on her use of humour and receives a mixed reaction from her publishers. Some encourage it and allow her to "have free rein", and others "prefer things to be jolly rather than laugh-out-loud funny". This creates a struggle: McIntyre must "get the balance right between them worrying about getting in trouble and me being allowed to tell the story I want to tell" (appendix 8, p.331).

This struggle is something I encountered in my own practice. There were occasional instances of the publisher overexerting their influence, resulting in a negative effect on the emergence and communication of humour. When creating *Haunted Farm,* I received a great deal of input and suggested changes from the publisher. It is not unusual for a book to undergo substantial change, but in this instance, I felt "the attention to detail was unprecedented" (appendix 1, p.237). Implementing the many changes began to change the overall tone of the humour within the book. The nature of these changes is explored in the *Haunted Farm* analysis (appendix 1). The publisher's approach to humour conflicted with my own: they were inclined to suppress the humour I found amusing and promote their own, and I would behave vice versa. I reflect that this led to the book lacking a clear 'voice', which began to cause the type of humour included and the way it was delivered to seem "confused and disparate". This could be due to the way in which extensive changes "can slowly erode the exciting spontaneous humour, which is then much harder to replace during the later stages of creating the book" (appendix 1, p.236), where humour creation is less prevalent.

The concept of a clear voice discussed above appears to be the same phenomenon that McIntyre describes as the 'tone' of the book. She acknowledges how extensive editorial changes can alter it, going on to say:

> tone is very important; not everyone gets tone, and when an editor doesn't understand a tone I'm trying to achieve, it makes me wonder if anyone else will (appendix 8, p.329).

This demonstrates how a publisher's misunderstanding of tone can lead to doubt in the mind of the maker. McIntyre goes on to suggest that informal testing (discussed later in this chapter) can be an answer to this.

Long suggests that having a clear voice is important from a reader's perspective, as they have to "buy in" to a maker's sense of humour and understand "… what, kind of, makes you tick and what you find funny. So, you do need to put your own personal sense of humour really just on the table" (appendix 9, p.354). Presenting the maker's sense of humour clearly to a reader through a single voice could aid their understanding of the comic 'tone' the maker is attempting to convey.

Negative experiences when working with a publisher proved to be rare and, overall, a good

publisher-maker relationship was a beneficial factor for the emergence of humour. When I recognised that my opinion was valid and I did not feel I was being dictated to, it created an environment that decreased stress and enhanced my enjoyment of the process. I felt comfortable "to play with unusual ideas and connections" (appendix 2, p.257). It was "easier to 'riff off' [the publisher] and come up with ideas together", which led to instances of humour emerging. In all my analyses, I reflect that more humour emerged when I was enjoying the practice. On reflection, I believe this is because the enjoyment stimulated my inclination to indulge in the 'creative play' I previously identified as being significant in humour creation. The publisher's attitude can be key in creating such an atmosphere.

5.3.2 Commercial Concerns

The nature of working within the context of the publishing industry presents limitation to the type of humour that can be included within a picturebook. In my experience, this is due in part to commercial concerns such as selling co-editions to different cultures, as well as a highly cautious approach to avoid offending or isolating child or adult readers.

Examples of these concerns impacting on humour include having to change the nature of the ghosts in *Haunted Farm* due to concerns about how the American market might react to anything resembling possession (appendix 1). Similarly, in *Doughnut of Doom,* concerns were raised about depicting the police as cakes and biscuits in case this was perceived as representing them as lazy, which could again be received negatively by the American market (appendix 3).

Doughnut of Doom highlighted issues around the depiction of different foods in relation to issues of body image and how children might perceive themselves. The publisher insisted on a text change to avoid negative descriptions such as "fattening" (appendix 3) in case it influenced children's perceptions of that food. The pink colour of the doughnut proved contentious because, rightly or wrongly, there was concern that it might isolate a male readership (appendix 3). Further details of these instances can be found in the analyses.

As a maker, I found it challenging to balance these commercial concerns with my desire to promote and protect the humour created. I had to attend to each change on a case-by-case basis and, if I did not agree with the publisher's concerns, decide whether retaining an instance of humour was of greater benefit to the book than facilitating the publisher's cautious approach. In most instances discussed in the analyses, humour could be preserved by identifying a compromise that would not excessively alter the 'voice'.

The makers interviewed also found that humour had to be altered due to the publishers' need to sell co-editions. McLaren debated with her publisher whether an instance of humour concerning the card game Snap could remain because they were unsure if it was a reference that an American reader would understand (appendix 6).

Long's work has also been subject to change due to co-editions. For the American edition of *Super Happy Magic Forest* (2015), the text was changed on the introductory spread, which removed much of the more ironic humour. Long was not sure why this was removed. He comments: "I don't

pry into it too much. I just complain" (appendix 9, p.385).

5.4 Humour for Adults? Humour for Children? Humour for Publishers?

Though many of my instances of humour emerged unconsciously, I do undeniably gain satisfaction from identifying that humour has emerged in my practice and if a reader finds comic amusement in it. I seek to proliferate the humour once I see it is there. What I do not do is attempt to direct the humour at any specific audience or age group, though I am aware they exist. It is evident by reading the four books that there are instances of crossover humour, humour that will appeal to a younger reader and humour that may be solely appreciated by an older reader. This causes me to ask, why does this crossover humour emerge and why do I include it? To investigate this, I will consider how I create humour for children, how I create humour for adults and why specific instances of humour are retained or removed.

5.4.1 Humour for Children: How Do I Know What Children Find Funny?

Prior to undertaking this research, I conducted no formal investigation into what children find funny. This raises the question, how then am I able to create work that amuses a younger reader?

In the analysis of *Haunted Farm,* I theorise that it is a tacit process, like much of my humour creation. I would suggest this is based on encounters with children that are a typical part of my practice, such as school visits, readings and informal testing of my work on younger relatives (appendix 1), as well as memories of my own childhood experiences. C.S Lewis (1967) suggests that people tend to assume our tastes and interests change as we age and that we therefore cannot comprehend the proclivities of our younger selves. Lewis goes on to suggest that this is not the case. Instead we accumulate interests, as opposed to systematically abandoning them as time goes by, which Lewis identifies as growth. I would suggest this is the case in my own situation: I retain many of my childhood enthusiasms and these emerge in my practice and resonate with a younger audience.

On reflection, I see that I tend to avoid consciously considering what children might find amusing because past experiences have shown that when I try to create humour for a specific audience, instead of allowing the humour to emerge as a by-product, it becomes contrived and ineffective. Avoiding actively creating humour for children does not appear to be limited to my practice. In the previously mentioned *Publishers Weekly* article (Burnett 2011), multiple makers said they did not consider a target age range. Rather, they make work to amuse themselves.

Shireen comments; "I always want to make myself laugh, because that's the only barometer I can accurately gauge. Often the stuff that makes me laugh makes other people laugh. there's no other way of knowing" (appendix 5, p.311).

McLaren takes a similar approach, stating:

Selfishly, I am writing for myself. Humour is so subjective and so specific to each individual that it's very hard to write a joke with a particular audience in mind and have it land exactly how you thought it would. I write and draw things that amuse me (appendix 6, p.315).

Shireen and McLaren's approaches appear similar to my own. I would agree that, when consciously creating humour for a specific audience, I am less likely consider it successful than when I create humour that amuses myself.

Jarvis takes a more conscious approach to his audience, but his own amusement is still a primary concern:

When I started out it was just me. But then when I started reading to kids and parents, I began to try and play to that audience a bit. So first I think 'do I like this?' and if I do 'will a room full of kids like it? (appendix 7, p.325).

I have observed through my interactions with children in my role as a maker that there are forms of humour that appeal equally to a younger and older audience. These include toilet humour, incongruity and physical comedy. These are forms of humour that emerge tacitly through my practice, but once I recognise them, I tend to retain them. This is because I recognise their appeal to a younger reader. In addition to this though, many instances of humour that a younger reader might not appreciate also emerge and are retained.

5.4.2 Humour for Adults: Why am I Motivated to Include Crossover Humour?

There is an abundance of parodic humour in *Steven Seagull, Haunted Farm and Doughnut of Doom.* Previously, I discussed how much of my parodic humour emerges as a by-product of the use of genre conventions to establish a setting or tone. Once that humour has emerged, I tend to recognise it as humorous and make a conscious decision to retain it. It is my instinct as a maker that the reader must be familiar with the cultural reference point that is being lampooned in order to understand a parody. This is supported by the context discussed in chapter 3. When parodying a fairy tale, a child reader may recognise the reference, but in the case of *Steven Seagull* they are unlikely to recognise the references to *Die Hard* (1988) or *Miami Vice* (1984). So if I am choosing to retain this type of humour even though my primary readership might not understand it, why am I retaining it, and who do I retain it for?

Beckett (2012, p.1) describes books that have an appeal across age ranges as 'crossover' books and suggest that "more than any other genre, they [picturebooks] can genuinely be books for all ages" (p.1). Therefore, when a picturebook includes humour for a range of ages, I will refer to it as using *crossover humour*.

I believe that the more sophisticated crossover humour emerges because my most effective approach to humour creation is unconscious, causing humour to appear as a 'by-product'. The unconscious nature of this approach means I have little control over the sophistication of the humour that emerges. It automatically aligns to my own adult frame of reference. If I were to consciously manipulate the type of humour and its sophistication dramatically, I fear it would

become not only ineffective but also patronising, because I would be "changing the register [of my humour] due to my unsubstantiated preconceptions of audience response" (appendix 2, p.257).

To understand why I retain such sophisticated humour, we can again look to the analyses. In the analysis of *Haunted Farm* (appendix 1, p.222), I write that I am motivated to retain such humour because it amuses me, causing "a sense of creative satisfaction". I comment that "I do not necessarily expect any of my readership, adult or child, to get these specific references, though I do endeavour to make the image interesting". It could be said that the stereotypes become cultural reference points worthy of parody because they are fascinating or iconic in their own right. Therefore, reflecting them should make for entertaining content even if the reader does not recognise their source. When analysing *Steven Seagull* (appendix 2), I reflect that I do not want to patronise my audience by assuming a less sophisticated appreciation of humour. Therefore, I tend to leave instances of humour in even if I suspect some readers may not understand them.

Another reason for retaining such humour relates to ensuring my books reach my primary audience. Pattison (2008, para.5) states that "adults are the gatekeepers for children's access to picture books" and it is my experience that this is correct. If a book of mine entertains or interests an adult as well as the primary audience of children, it has a better chance of making it into the hands of a child. In my experience, the initial 'gatekeeper' that my humour must appeal to is the publisher. Leaving this aside, I feel it is important that the book entertain an adult reader because "picturebooks offer a unique opportunity for a collaborative reading experience between adults and children" (Beckett 2012, p.2), creating a communal experience. Within this communal experience, an adult's enjoyment could even enhance the humorous effect, since it relies on the way the adult reader delivers the jokes, which would be superior if they too understand and appreciate the humour.

Despite this, I recognise that it is important not to isolate a younger reader by making an excessive amount of the book incomprehensible. The *Publisher's Weekly* interview (Burnett 2011, para.10) describes how maker Laurie Keller uses "funny asides, thought-bubbles, and other capricious details" to "layer her humor in degrees". In all four of my books, I am employing this same technique, using extra details and subplots to convey the more overt instances of humour for an older reader, while ensuring the central narrative and concepts are comprehensible for a younger reader.

McIntyre suggests that it might not be imperative that a younger reader understand every instance of humour: "sometimes I do jokes that I know will go over the kids' heads, but as long as the story works well without getting the joke, that's fine" (appendix 8, p.329). This reinforces the importance of a functional central narrative from which to hang the humour.

Long's ideas around including crossover humour are similar to McIntyre's. He likens it to his experiences of watching *The Simpsons* as a child: "I only understood some of the jokes I got when I was 20. It didn't matter that I didn't get them when I was five, because there were other things that I liked about it" (appendix 9, p.353). This supports the idea that including instances of sophisticated humour is not a concern for makers as long as other aspects are accessible to a younger reader.

5.4.3 Humour for Publishers: Publisher Opinions on Age Appropriate Humour

Publishers have encouraged my inclusion of humour, but there tend to be caveats. They have specific requirements relating to what they consider appropriate humour for a picturebook, along with the amount and type of crossover humour. Discovering these requirements has been a process of trial and error, through conversations with editors and designers. This had a substantial impact on the overall nature of the crossover humour included within *Mr Bunny, Steven Seagull, Haunted Farm* and *Doughnut of Doom*. I discuss specific instances of this below.

5.4.4 Romantic Love

At the roughs stage, *Mr Bunny* contained a subplot involving a love story between Edgar, the quality control unicorn, and a chicken called Lacy. I felt the subplot added an incongruous parody of Romeo and Juliet that would appeal to an older reader. In the *Mr Bunny* analysis (appendix 4), I note that this was removed because the publisher felt it was not "child-centred" enough and was concerned it might decrease the book's appeal to foreign publishers. Other instances of humour for older readers were retained, so it the crossover humour was not the issue, it was the reference to romantic love. I do not believe this alteration weakened the book as a whole, but it undeniably altered the type of humour included.

5.4.5 Decency

Along with romantic love, there were instances where humour involving taboos surrounding body-parts and functions were removed at the request of the publisher.

Originally in *Doughnut of Doom* there was a detail that could be perceived as a double entendre (fig. 56), concerning a cupcake saying "My cherry! It's gone!" The publisher was concerned this could be likened to the euphemism 'to pop your cherry'. They remarked that "it was not felt to be age appropriate, despite that a younger audience is perhaps unlikely to make that connection" (appendix 3, p.278).

In *Mr Bunny,* I originally included little pink dots on the bums of the chickens as a little hint of toilet humour. When I received the proofs of the book, I noticed that each of these dots has been removed without my consultation (fig. 58). I inquired why but never received an answer.

I speculate this could be connected with the perceived sensitivity of the American market to toilet humour. I encountered similar issues concerning an instance of toilet humour in *Haunted Farm*. At the end of the book there is an instance of toilet humour involving a dog poo (fig. 57). The publisher wanted to replace it with a puddle of urine because they felt it would be less offensive to an American audience (appendix 1). Considering the wide variety of children's books involving poo, I was unconvinced that it was an issue and concerned that the humour was being altered to such an extent that it convoluted the 'voice'. I encouraged the publisher to speak to the American publisher who confirmed the dog poo was allowable. This incident suggested to me that there are occasions where a publisher's sensitivity to the perceptions of foreign publishers may be excessive.

It is fascinating to see where publishers draw the line, especially considering the popularity of

Fig. 56 Detail from *Doughnut of Doom* showing the missing cherry.

Fig. 57 Detail from *Haunted Farm* showing the dog poo.
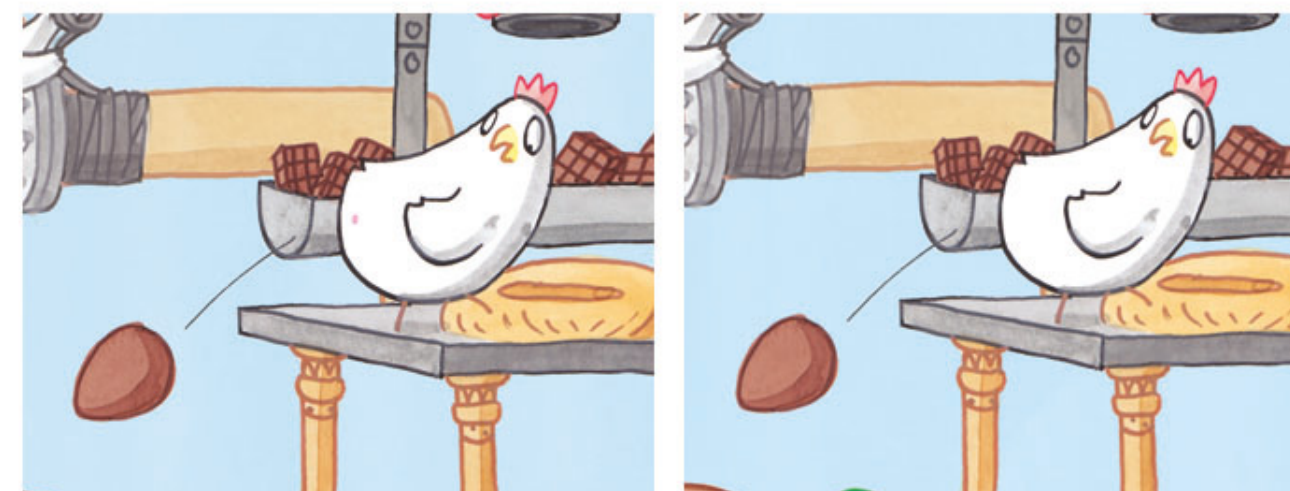
Fig. 58 Details from *Mr Bunny* showing an example of before and after a pink dot was removed.

books that involve toilet humour and other bodily functions. For example, *The Story Of The Little Mole Who Knew It Was None Of His Business* (Werner and Erlbruch 1994) is a book in which the humour relies upon displaying different types of excrement: it has been continuously in print since 1989. In addition, Robinson (2019, para.3) suggests poo is no longer a taboo due to its extensive presence in popular culture, describing it as "bigger than Beyoncé". It is my experience that where a publisher draws the line of acceptable humour is variable, based on their own preferences and experiences, but an overriding concern does appear to be the way the humour would be received by an international audience.

5.4.6 The Balance of Parody

[...] ncerning parodic humour and what children comprehend (appendix 2). I wished to include [...] word 'renegade' in a key piece of narrative text (fig. 59) because of its associations with the [...] show genre, but my editor felt it might not be understood. I argued that it should be retained [...] cause I considered it effective as a parody and I felt the inclusion of the occasional word a [...] nger reader might not understand would stimulate their desire to learn what it means. On this [...] casional, the publisher was persuaded.

[...] the purposes of parodying genre conventions, I included the term 'police brutality' in the title [...] ge (fig. 60) of *Steven Seagull*. The publisher felt this should be removed and in this instance I [...] eed. On reflection, I felt that the implied violence of the terminology, combined with a younge [...] der's lack of understanding, could result in misinterpretation. Therefore, the possible negative [...] weighed the benefits of including this instance of humour.

[...] established in the contextual chapter, one's perception of humour is highly subjective, based [...] context of humour, the individual's preferences and their personal and cultural background [...] itchley, Simon and Simon 2011, p.67; McGraw and Warner 2014, p.95). There is the ever- [...] sent possibility, even with instances of humour I consider satisfactory, that the reader will not [...] ceive it as humour, misinterpret its meaning or find it does not elicit comic amusements. To [...] ude humour is to take a risk. As a maker, I am inclined to risk this undesirable reaction from [...] reader, whereas I have found publishers are more cautious. This is perhaps due to the weigh [...] commercial concerns, such as selling foreign co-editions, and that they take less personal [...] isfaction from readers finding the books humorous.

[...] e above instances of publishers vetoing instances of humour could be related to what McIntyr [...] scribes as the publishers' need for 'safe' humour. McIntyre suggests that "much of humour [...] bout at least a slight bit of transgression" (appendix 8, p.329), so if this transgression is [...] pressed it can diminish humorous effect. In an effort to ensure age appropriate humour, [...] Intyre suggest that publishers can be excessively cautious and can "tailor a funny story to be [...] ply cheerful and perky" (ibid.). Here McIntyre highlights the danger of a publisher implementin
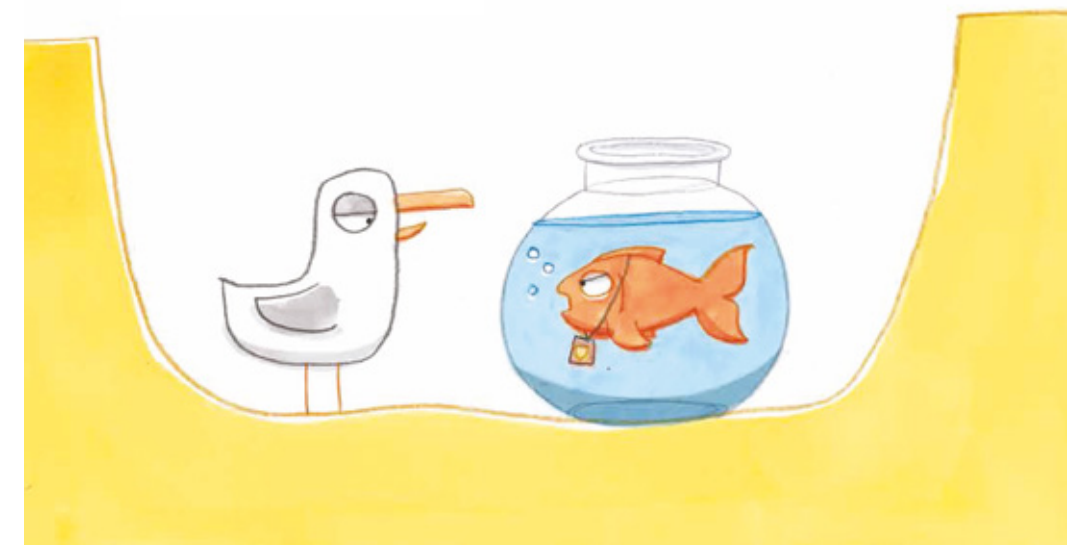
Fig. 59 Detail from *Steven Seagull* showing the use of the word 'renegade'.

Fig. 60 Detail from *Steven Seagull* showing where 'police brutality' was changed to 'police misconduct'.

5.5 Promoting Humour Creation When Working in the Context of the Publishing Industry

In the analysis of *Haunted Farm,* I comment:

> It is hard to balance [the creation of humour] with making a picturebook in a professional context because it is, by nature, a long and drawn out process with a huge amount of close introspection by both myself and the publisher. This is an environment seemingly destined to destroy humour. (appendix 1, p.230)

This illustrates some of the challenges I encountered with the emergence of humour while making a picturebook for publication. I found these challenges could be overcome and that there were actions I could take to promote humour creation.

5.5.1 Undertaking Actions That Promote Creative Play

The disadvantage of constantly analysing a humorous concept and tweaking it in response to publisher feedback is that it can erode the existing humour and block it from being produced as a by-product. I discovered that I could stimulate humour creation by setting myself activities that mimicked the kind of spontaneous creative play as found in the initial development stages. For example, in the *Haunted Farm* analysis I write: "by allowing myself short spaces within my practice where I can be spontaneous, for example, ensuring I do not write any of the speech bubble text until the rough stage, [I allow] space to create new content spontaneously" (appendix 1, p.230).

5.5.2 Presenting a Well Resolved Concept From the Beginning

Through the process of creating *Haunted Farm,* the core concepts that the central strand of parodic humour was based on were gradually eroded away through the high volume of changes. When making *Doughnut of Doom,* I presented the concept to the publisher at a later stage, when it was considerably more resolved. I reflect in my analysis that:

> …having made my vision very clear at the beginning meant there was less opportunity for the publisher to misinterpret the nature of the humour I wanted to achieve and push it in a different direction. Therefore I was able to avoid many of the gradual changes that warped the humour in *Haunted Farm*, so retaining and creating the humour I original envisaged would characterise the book whilst preserving a positive practitioner/publisher relationship. (appendix 3, p.280)

5.5.3 Managing Stress

In the analysis of *Doughnut of Doom,* I state that:

> My experiences of working as a professional author and Illustrator have demonstrated to me that it is often a very stressful occupation. There is continuous pressure to meet tight deadlines, produce a high volume of work and create new ideas. Some of my

experiences when working on *The Doughnut of Doom* suggest that this is perhaps not conducive to the creation of humour (appendix 3, p.280).

The analyses show that humour is more likely to emerge through my practice when it is undertaken in a low stress environment. For example, the concept for *Steven Seagull* developed while on holiday. While creating *Doughnut of Doom,* I felt creatively burnt out, so I took a month off to develop new ideas in an unstructured way. This led to "the most fruitful period of humour-creation during this project" (ibid).

These experiences suggest that I can create work I consider humorous more effectively if I cultivate a low stress environment. This facilitates spontaneity and creative play which, in turn, allows the by-product of humour to emerge.

Long's practice is also affected by the stress of working within the publishing industry, forcing him to produce instances of humour quickly, which affects their quality (appendix 9, p.339). He comments:

> sometimes you're staring at the page and, like, "Do I need another joke?" You've got to try and think of it there and then. You might be under pressure to deliver roughs, or edited roughs, as I was recently, and you've just got to think of something.

5.5.4 Informal Testing

It became evident that the length of time it takes to produce a picturebook and the stress caused by the "continuous pressure to meet tight deadlines, produce a high volume of work and create new ideas" (appendix 3, p.280) creates issues around the objective evaluation of the humour that emerges. It became difficult to judge if the humour was effective and if not, why not. This relates to the 'comic fatigue' mentioned previously. I reflect on how I overcame this in my analysis of *Mr Bunny* when I was unable to judge the effectiveness of the egg-laying lizards and fish (figs. 61 & 62) version of the narrative. I talked it over with a trusted fellow maker, which helped me to see where it was flawed and why (additional detail in appendix 4). I comment that "this event confirmed the importance of informal testing of my jokes and humorous concepts, especially during periods of high stress. This helps to compensate for the lack of objectivity cause by stress and time pressure" (appendix 4, p.292). Similarly, such informal testing allowed me to see how the humour in my initial concept for *Doughnut of Doom* could be enhanced (appendix 3).

McIntyre (appendix 8, p.329) highlights the importance of informal testing, suggesting it can be a way of gaining clarity as to the effectiveness of her humour when a publisher has misunderstood the 'tone' she was striving to achieve. McIntyre says: "luckily I have a few trusted friends that I can run things [by], to make sure things aren't only funny to me". She goes on to say that "most of them come from a comics background and they understand the structure of jokes and how to make them work", suggesting that the informed opinions of other makers could be more valuable than those of a layman.

It is reasonable to suggest that not all instances of humour that emerge through practice will successfully elicit comic amusement in the majority of readers. This can cause doubt in the

minds of makers, especially when the process of making a book can remove objectivity. Informal testing can provide a valuable editing process to compensate for this, different from the input of publishers. It is free from a publisher's commercial concerns and can come from the perspective of a maker familiar with the nature of practice.

Fig. 61 Sketchbook image from *Mr Bunny* showing egg-laying lizards.

Fig. 62 Sketchbook image from *Mr Bunny* showing egg-laying fish.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have presented the experiential knowledge I have gained through practice, contextualising it with knowledge gained from interviewing other makers about their practice and from existing sources. This knowledge has allowed me to address the research questions I began with:

1) What is humour in the context of a picturebook?

2) What devices can be employed within the form of the picturebook to create humour?

3) What actions does the picturebook maker take that allow humour to emerge through practice?

4) How does creating a picturebook within the context of the publishing industry affect humour creation?

All the answers to these questions provide a contribution to our knowledge and understanding of humour in picturebooks. I believe, though, that the most significant contribution of this research is in identifying an intersection of conscious and unconscious practice, as well as actions that can promote the emergence of humour in the practice of a picturebook maker. This is because such knowledge could only have been gained through practice research, as it is often a tacit aspect of practice and requires engagement with and reflection on practice to make it articulable. In addition, it is the knowledge that could prove the most useful for practitioners and educators of practitioners. This will be discussed further in 6.2. Ahead of this, I shall summarise my findings in relation to my original research questions.

6.1 Drawing Conclusions

6.1.1 What is Humour in Picturebooks?

By examining the existing scholarly research into humour and picturebooks, I determined that, for the purpose of this research, I would define humour as "the object that causes a state of comic amusement" (Carroll 2014, p.5). This could take the form of any occurrence within a picturebook, such as an amusing character, a funny situation, wordplay, a visual pun, etc. It provides us with a convenient method for identifying humour in the context of the picturebook, but not an understanding of how that object can produce a state of comic amusement.

As previously discussed, there are a variety of theories of humour that explain how certain forms of humour manifest in picturebooks. However, the experiential knowledge gained through practice suggests to me that the root of much of the humour created in this research can be explained by Benign Violation Theory (McGraw and Warner 2014). I repeatedly created humour caused by a violation of a norm, such as those shown in chapter 4, including characters exaggerated beyond

normal constraints, anthropomorphised characters performing human action, or an image violating the norm established by the text. These norms are violated in a benign manner, so it does not cause real harm or offence, and so have a humorous effect. I would therefore suggest that, in the context of my practice, the object that causes a state of comic amusement usually does so through the benign violation of a norm.

6.1.2 What devices can be employed within the form of the picturebook to create humour?

Along with the practice analysed in chapter 5, the pictorial essay in chapter 4 suggests that an extensive range of comic devices used to create humour in picturebooks are used within my practice. These take the form of familiar types of humour such as:

- Incongruity and the absurd
- Physical and emotional exaggeration
- Humour reliant on timing, such as unexpected reveals and 'rule of three's
- Toilet humour
- Rule breaking
- Parody and satire
- Bathos
- Irony

These types of humour are recognisable in a variety of contexts in addition to picturebooks. What makes these forms of humour unique in the context of the picturebook is that they are deployed using the tools available to the picturebook maker, including:

- Composition
- Colour
- Mark making
- Pacing and page turns
- Character and setting design
- Word-image relationship
- Subplots

When the tools listed above are used in a manner that creates comic amusement, I would suggest that we can define this as the use of a comic device in the context of a picturebook. For example, a bathetic reveal such as the one shown on page 112 of chapter 4 is accomplished by setting up anticipation of an imposing character on the first spread. Then a page turn reveals the bathetic punchline in the form of an exaggeratedly diminutive character design, which is reinforced by a composition with an excess of negative space to make the character seem even smaller. In addition, I found that I will often I employ several comic devices in the same instance of humour. In the above example, it relies on a bathetic reveal and exaggerated character design.

6.1.3 What Actions Does the Picturebook Maker Take That Allow Humour to Emerge Through Practice?

Tacit Creation of Humour:

My understanding of the role tacit knowledge plays in humour creation has developed over the course of this research. The analysis in chapter 5 suggests that the initial emergence of an instance of humour is often a tacit process within my practice and that this is supported by the commentary from other makers. This is an example of Schön's (1983) knowing-in-action, as these instances of humour emerge from patterns of action (as described in chapter 5) that I previously would not have been able to describe.

This research supports Blake's (2000, p.94) assertion that humour is often a 'by-product', something that 'emerges' through practice, rather than something to be consciously created. Humour creation was found to be most prolific in my practice when it was not consciously attempted. In addition, a conscious effort to be humorous through practice and conscious reflection-in-action actively inhibited its emergence. This suggests that humour creation should be tacit during the "action present" (Schön 1983, p.62) in order to be fruitful.

This research identified that this initial unconscious emergence of humour as a 'by-product' does not constitute the entirety of the process of creating humour through practice. Often there is then a process of refinement involving more conscious reflection.

The Consciousness Intersection:

Though much humour initially emerged unconsciously, I would consciously seek to refine and retain it once I identified it. When an instance of humour was identified, I could consciously see if it needed refinement and, in a general sense, what aspect might need development - for instance, a character's expression. On resuming practice to make those refinements, the process of adjusting or augmenting once again became an unconscious process. This suggested that there was an important intersection of conscious and unconscious practice in creating humour. I have termed this phenomenon 'The Consciousness Intersection'.

The use of the consciousness intersection in my practice is usually tacit. I was unaware I was switching between conscious and unconscious practice to refine an instance of humour while engaged in this pattern of action, that knowledge was tacit. As this incorporates both unconscious and conscious practice, in this instance 'tacit' can no longer be seen as synonymous with 'unconscious'.

Due to the significance of the unconscious and tacit aspects of humour creation, it was not possible to identify a replaceable formula or procedure for the creation or development of humour in my practice. This provides us with an understanding of why conscious efforts to insert comic devices were found to be ineffective would appear contrived. A more holistic approach, embracing the unconscious aspects of practice, allowed humour to emerge initially. Then a process of refinement, through the use of the consciousness intersection, could occur. This was when I was most satisfied with the results. The process of refinement was not confined to a limited or specific

set of the picturebook 'tools' previously described but involved the manipulation of all such tools.

Though this research did not identify a prescribed series of actions that can be undertaken to create humour, there were certain aspects of my practice that promoted the tacit creation of humour.

The Significance of Creating and Exploiting Opportunities for Play:

While conducting reflection-on-action, it became apparent that different stages of practice, and the different actions I engage in while undertaking them, gave rise to different forms of humour. Similar approaches were also identified in the practice of other makers. This is described in detail in chapter 5. To summarise:

Sketchbook and development work: led most frequently to the emergence of humour such as incongruity of premise and characterisation, physical and emotional exaggeration, parody, satire, visual puns, situation comedy, word play and slapstick. It was the most productive stage for the creation of instances of humour.

Sequencing and text: Though mostly concerned with creating a clear and functional central sequence, new instances of humour emerged during this stage. This humour was reliant on sequencing, pacing and page-turn reveals, and included bathos, rules of three and incongruous reveals.

Roughs: The additional background detail required for the roughs and the opportunity to gain a comprehensive overview of the entire book allowed a different form of humour to emerge, including humorous subplots and call-backs to earlier jokes.

Artwork: The least productive stage for the emergence of humour, the creation of the colour artwork was significant in terms of retaining and augmenting the humour that emerged in the previous stages.

While analysing these stages, it became apparent that there were actions, processes and conditions associated with particular stages that stimulated the tacit creation of humour. These were primarily actions that facilitated a form of pressure-free creative play.

I found that I could undertake certain activities that created a situation that promoted 'creative play' and therefore tacit humour creation. The big pictures created for *Mr. Bunny* and *Doughnut of Doom* are good examples.

6.1.4 How Does Creating a Picturebook Within the Context of the Publishing Industry Affect Humour Creation?

This research identified that, due to their direct input into the stages of the picturebook making process, the influence of the publisher on how humour becomes manifest in my practice is

substantial. The other makers interviewed report a similarly significant relationship. The publisher's influence can be both positive and negative, depending on the nature of the publisher-maker relationship and on whether the maker's and publisher's views on the form of humour that should be included within the book align.

At its best, humour creation when working with a publisher can be a collaborative relationship. It can provide the maker with access to an objective opinion and a dialogue that can lead to humour emerging. It can be an essential aspect in editing the humour that can be included and in creating an environment where humour creation can flourish.

Creating a humorous book in the context of the publishing industry can provide obstacles due to the publisher's need for the book to be a commercial success. They are likely to inhibit humour that may not work in other cultures and would therefore jeopardise co-edition sales, or humour that they subjectively consider age-inappropriate or socially unacceptable. There were instances of humour that I would have retained if the practice were situated in a different context.

6.2 What Contribution Does This Research Make?

This section will discuss how the knowledge gained from this research makes an original contribution to the existing research concerning humour in picturebooks, and how it could benefit various individuals working in the field of illustrated children's books.

The chief contribution this research makes is to our knowledge and understanding of the emergence and development of humour in the work of a picturebook maker. It identifies two significant aspects:

- The intersection between conscious and unconscious practice when humour is created in picturebooks. I found that humour was more effective if its emergence in practice was initially unconscious. I could then refine and retain it through a combination of conscious reflection and a return to intuitive practice.

- Actions that can promote the emergence of instances of humour, in the form of 'creative play'. When working in the context of the publishing industry, I found that allowing humour to emerge through practice could be challenging due to the length of the process, the many edits and changes, and an atmosphere of pressure relating to time constraints. Through this research, I discovered that I could use actions that promoted creative play as a way of stimulating the emergence of humour when working in such an environment.

Knowledge such as this, concerning how the maker creates humour and their motivations, could aid scholarly discourse concerning picturebooks. In chapter 3, I address how scholars can assume or misinterpret maker motivations. The knowledge gained through this research can facilitate and provide new avenues for such discussions.

In chapter 2, I identified a need to demonstrate rather than explain how humour is created within the context of a picturebooks for the reader to gain full understanding. This gave rise to the pictorial essay in chapter 4. Though this form of scholarship, which employs the relationship between word an image, has been used to communicate doctoral research relating to the field of comics (Sousanis 2015), to my knowledge this is the first time it has been applied to picturebooks. The pictorial essay demonstrates how the synthesis of word and image, informed by the characteristics of picturebooks, can be utilised by academics to communicate their research. This is a new approach in picturebook research, which could be transferable to the discussion of many of aspects of picturebooks or themes relating to them, in a way that simultaneously demonstrates and explains the researcher's discoveries.

This research examines and explains the emergence of humour in picturebooks at a level of detail not touched upon in any existing research. In addition, it is the sole practice-based analysis of the subject that I have identified. The way in which the pictorial essay utilises the devices identified in the creation of a sequence with the characteristics of a picturebook demonstrates the transferable nature of the knowledge gained. As a result, it could benefit other makers of picturebooks in their own endeavors to harness the comic devices discussed and aid publishers in facilitating this process, as well as informing the academic discussion of these devices and their use in the field of picturebook research.

In addition, other makers could benefit from this research in relation to approaches to practice. Both creative practice and humour are specific to the individual, so a maker could not simply replicate my approaches and achieve a humorous result. Yet they could pick and choose specific approaches they deem appropriate to their own particular creative practice, to use in experimenting with and augmenting their own humour creation. For instance, they may find activities that allow for creative play that could promote the emergence of humour.

Similarly, knowledge relating to practice could aid educators of children's book illustrators. It could provide insight into the practice of students who encounter similar issues to those discussed in this research and aid the educator in nurturing the tacit, unconscious aspects of their students' practice. Additionally, it could provide examples of approaches to humour and practice that could be used as case studies.

The knowledge concerning the maker-publisher relationship could benefit publishers of humorous children's books. It could lend context to the publishers' own maker relationships and aid them in providing effective and appropriate feedback, along with encouraging them to be aware of the need for an atmosphere conducive to humour creation.

6.3 Avenues for Future Research

Aside from this research, there is no formal research that explores humour creation in picturebooks from the perspective of the maker. This presents various opportunities for further research. Humour is such a multiform phenomenon and so closely connected to the individual that there

may be other approaches to humour in illustrated children's books yet to be identified. Equally, there is opportunity to investigate humour creation in other forms of illustrated books for children. Therefore, further practice research from makers of humorous picturebooks, comics and illustrated fiction could provide new knowledge.

This research is situated in the publishing industry from the perspective of the maker, so publisher influence was investigated from the maker's viewpoint. To gain a comprehensive understanding of humour creation throughout the entire process of creating a picturebook, practice or auto-ethnographic research from the perspective of the publisher could be conducted. Considering the substantial impact that the publisher has on the emergence and development of humour, such a study could provide valuable knowledge regarding why certain decisions are made by the publisher and how they formulate the feedback they deliver to picturebook makers.

All four picturebooks created for this research were created within the context of the publishing industry. Further practice research could be conducted in the form of a comparison between a book situated within the publishing industry and another situated outside of it. This would enable an analysis to see if the way in which humour emerges and develops differs between these two settings.

From an educational perspective, there is the opportunity for further research concerning teaching the practice of picturebook-making in higher education, or indeed teaching visual arts in general. Further research could investigate how educators can foster the tacit aspects of practice and if this could be an aspect of assessment or be defined through learning outcomes.

The insights regarding humour creation through practice from this research could form the basis for a comprehensive study of different makers' approaches to humour, taking the form of in-depth interviews. This research gained some knowledge from other makers' commentaries on their practice, yet the plethora of funny books available suggests there is a wealth of knowledge that could still be gained from the current cohort of makers.

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Appendix 1

The Mystery of the Haunted Farm: Critical Analysis

Introduction

This document was brought together from review, reflection and analysis of the processes of creative practice used to make *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm*. This includes rough sketches for the development of ideas in sketchbooks, colour tests and experiments, correspondence with publishers, larger developmental drawings, rough dummy books, final artwork and the published book. Along with this, a reflective journal was kept to record decision making and analytical processes as well as keeping a timeline of events.

I do not consider *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm* to be a success in terms of the humour it produced. On reflection, I do not feel the final product lived up to the promise of the initial development work. I have identified several areas I believe caused this which relate to the difficulties of working within the context of the publishing industry.

At the time I considered this a detrimental experience but on reflection the knowledge I gained through the process of making this book proved valuable for my research. This was the project where I identified the substantial influence the publisher relationship can have on the humour within a picturebook and I adjusted the focus of my research accordingly to accommodate this.

Humour and Creative Practice

Here I describe how and when the humour emerged in the creation of *Haunted Farm*. I have broken this down into what I identified in my practice as the four main stages of creating a picturebook.

1. Sketchbook work and the development of ideas.

This was the most fruitful period of humour creation. I was compelled to spontaneously create new content around a broad theme without intervention or the pressure of having to amuse anyone apart from myself. It led me to believe that the unselfconscious act of sketch-booking is one of the most useful methods I have of stimulating the creation of humour.

From the beginning, a strong monster movie influence is evident in my development work (figs.1, 2), though initially this was unconscious. Similarly when designing the central characters, who are three pigs with a ghost hunting business, they automatically started to look like characters from the film *Ghostbusters* (1984) (fig.3). This could be because I consume a lot of popular culture including horror films and monster movies so they are my frame of reference for this subject matter. I draw heavily on visual cues from these influences as a way of stereotyping the atmosphere I want to create, in this case that of a haunting, and naturally began to parody them.

Once I was aware I was doing this I began to make more explicit and specific references (Figs.4,5 ,6).

The humour here was created spontaneously and I think that feel of spontaneity comes across to the reader. I instinctively know that labouring a joke will destroy the humorous effect so if the jokes appear effortless it intensifies their funniness.

The amount of parody I included in these early stages led me to consider who am I aiming it at? Parody involves the reader having existing knowledge of the cultural reference point that's being lampooned to get the joke. The younger readership of picturebooks is unlikely to have encountered some of the movie references I included. I think I include much of these references to amuse myself and gain a sense of creative satisfaction. I do not necessarily expect any of my readership, child or adults, to get these specific references, though I do always endeavour to make the image interesting. It could be said that these stereotypes become cultural reference points worthy of parody because they are fascinating or iconic in their own right. Therefore, reflecting them should make for entertaining content even if the reader does not recognise their source.

Fig.2 Zombie Ducks. Sketchbook.

Fig.1 Frankenhorse. Sketchbook
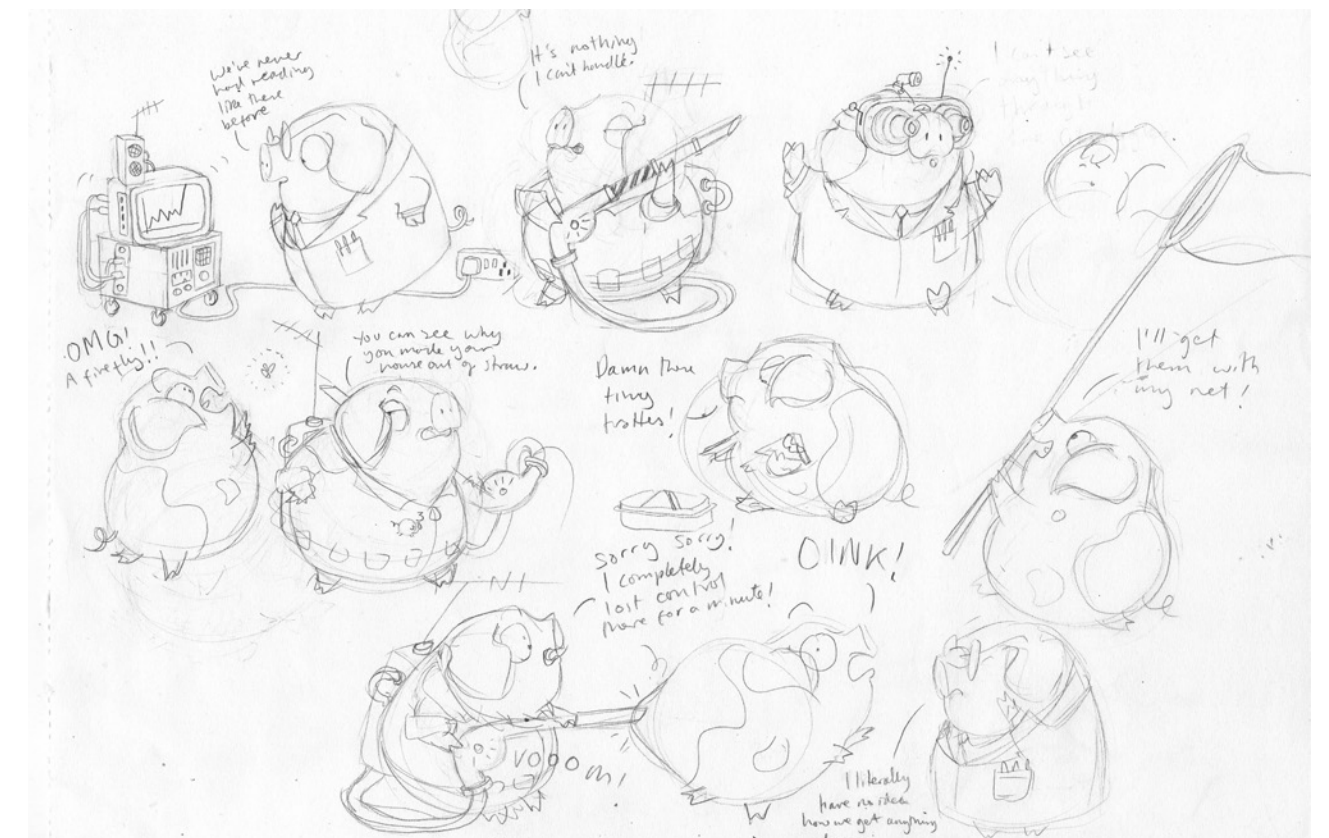
Fig.3 Three Pigs Ghosthunters. Character development drawing.

Fig.4 Chicken coup design referencing buildings from horror films. Left Bates Motel from *Psycho* (1960). Right the house from *Amityville Horror* (1979).

Fig.5 Chicken referencing *Nosferatu* (1922).

Fig.6 Goats referencing *The Shining* (1980).

Fig.7 Farmer character development sketches.

I did aim to include types of humour I instinctively perceive as child friendly. In the characterisation of the pigs (fig.3) and the farmer (fig.6,7) it can be seen from the development drawing that I have tried to include physical comedy such as their exaggerated physics and slapstick actions. I also include a toilet humour laden joke at the end involving a dog poo on the carpet left by a werewolf.

I have to ask myself how do I know that children will find these kinds of humour amusing? I have not carried out any conscious study so I would theorise that it is tacit knowledge, which I could have gained through experiences I encounter as part of my practice such as school visits, readings in libraries, informal testing of my work on younger relatives.

2) Thumbnails

This stage did not create a huge amount of individual jokes. I was more concerned with creating a firm and easy to understand central narrative to hang off all the humour I developed in the sketchbook stage. On reflection, this was an area where I could develop large, humorous incidents that were also major plot points. For instance this is where I planned the incongruous werewolf reveal (fig.8).

3) Roughs

While drawing the roughs much further humour emerged, but a different sort to the initial sketchbook work. At this stage I understand my characters and the world in which they inhabit so I now have the tools to create a form of situation comedy. Creating artwork with this level of space and detail allows me to include a high level of information including running gags, subplots and asides that do not necessarily directly relate to the central plot (figs.9,10).

4) Colour Artwork

In the artwork stage I note in my reflective journal that 'As for the humour I've found so far that during this colouring phase I've created little to none… I've found I'm much more focused on trying to preserve or effectively communicate the humour I created in the previous stages'.

For example, whilst working on spread 1 (fig.11) I noted in my reflective journal the importance of colouring this first spread because 'it's got to set the scene, establish the tone and there's a joke that needs good visuals to make it work'. The joke is question comes from the counterpoint between the relaxed text underplaying the situation and all hell breaking loose in the imagery.

I also make a comment about something I refer to as 'picture blindness' where I become unable to

Fig.7 Farmer character development sketches.

Here we see how vignettes of the farmer transforming into a werewolf are used to set up the expectation that a terrifying monster is about to appear.

Here those expectations are incongruously contradicted as the werewolf turns out to be an overweight, somewhat ridiculous wolf heavily resembling the farmer.
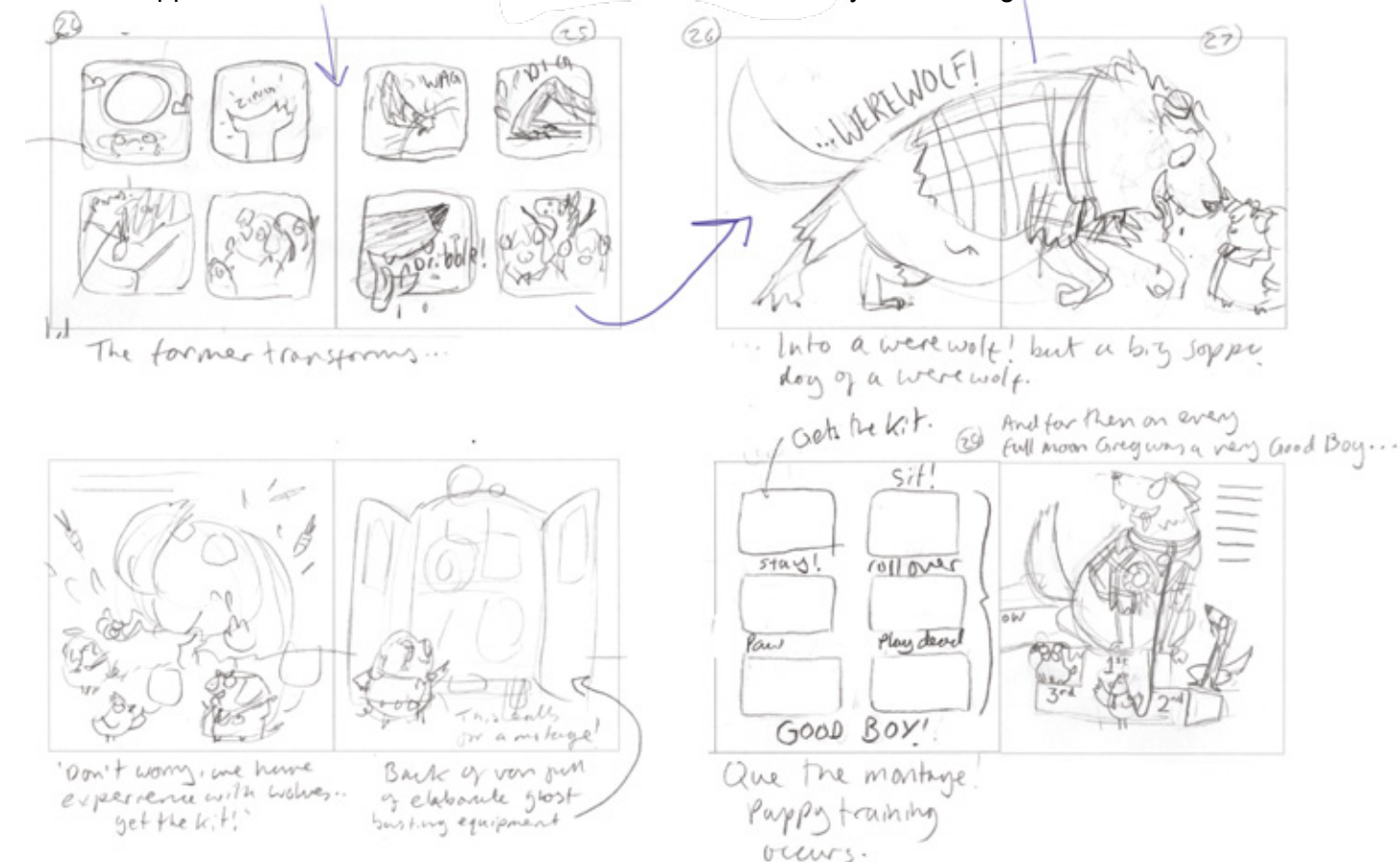
Fig.8 Thumbnails dated 28/07/14.

Fig.9 Example of the variety of humour created while drawing the roughs.

Pigs reacting to the situation in a humorous way that reflects their characters.

Additional slapstick added at the roughs stage.
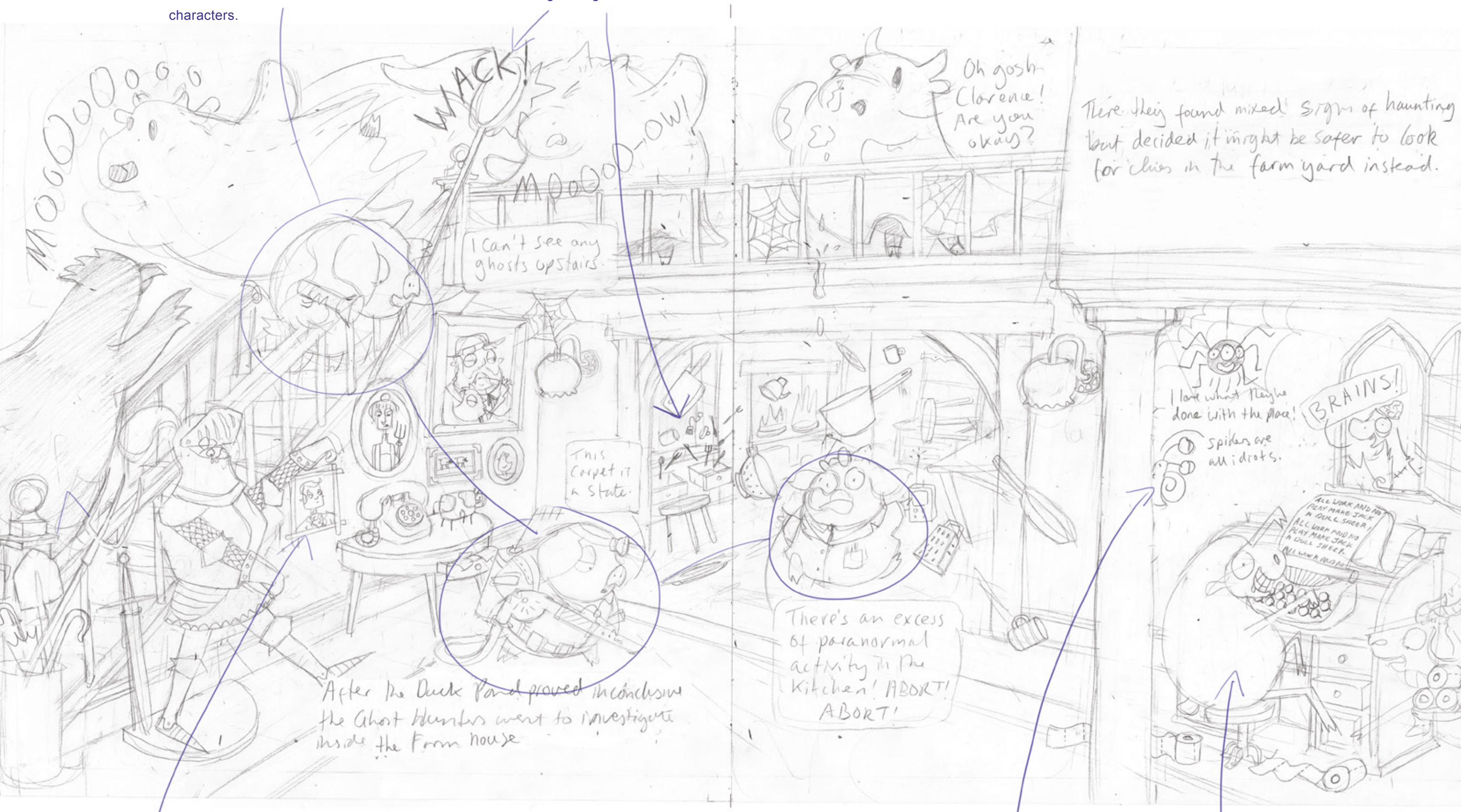
Extra details such as photos of the Farmer's family added to enhance the setting.

The acerbic snail character was added during this stage.

Decisions about where to place comic instances from the sketchbook are made whilst drawing the roughs.

recognise the comedy I have already created. 'Over exposure to the book is making me lose sight of what I thought was funny. It's losing it's potency for me so I'm just trusting the decisions I made earlier and trying to realise them the best I can'. I think this relates to the need for spontaneity when creating humour because if I over analyse it I find myself likely to lose sight of what made it funny in the first place.

It is hard to balance this with making a picturebook in a professional context because it is, by it's nature, a long and drawn out process with a huge amount of close introspection by both yourself and the publisher. This is an environment seemingly designed to destroy humour. Looking at my reflective journal entries, in the roughs and sketchbooks I seem to manage to allow humour to emerge by creating brief instances to be spontaneous e.g. ensuring I do not write any of the speech bubble text until the roughs. This is made more challenging by the huge amount of changes suggested/mandated by the publishing team which can slowly erode this spontaneous humour. This is then much harder to replace at later stages.
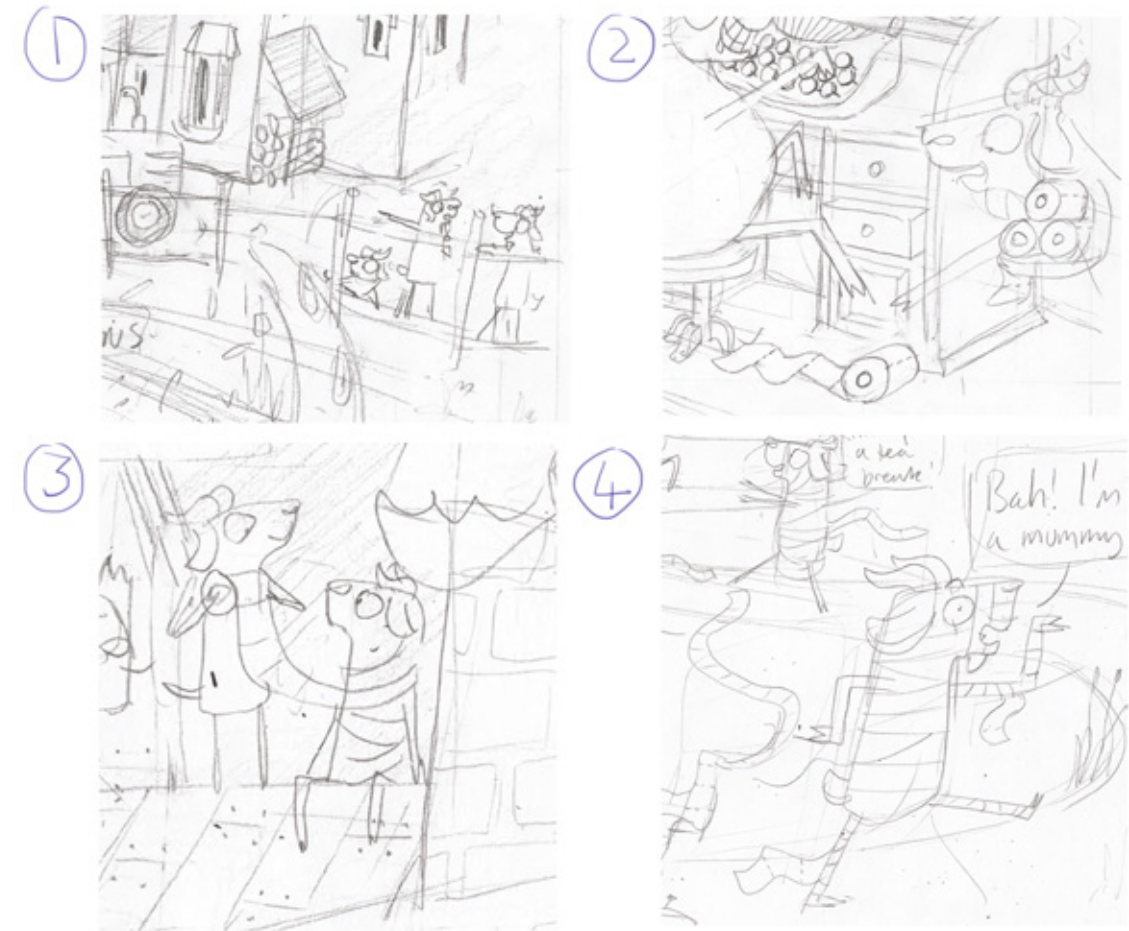
Fig.10 Subplot involving goats stealing toilet paper to dress as mummies. Developed during the roughs stage.

Fig.11 Artwork for spread 1.

Working within the Publishing Industry

I discovered during the process of creating this book that working with a publisher had a huge impact on the kind of humour I could use and how it emerges. The two major areas that stood out to me where the cross-cultural implications of certain kinds of humour and how editorial input can distract from the book having a single clear voice.

Cross Cultural Issues With Humour

Ghosts and Monsters:

Looking at my sketchbook work (fig.12) it is evident that I intended this book to be a darker than it became over the development process. It was certainly the intention that there should be real ghosts. I was developing a phantom chicken character that I had imagined could be at the centre of the haunting and I wanted to title the book *The Poultrygeist: Curse of the Phantom Chicken*.

In my reflective journal on 16/05/14 I note that I created a new plot for Haunted Farm where, instead of a sham haunting, all the ghost and monsters are real. It involved various horror film clichés such as a curse, a legend surrounding it and a central ghost. I commented that '[t]his plot, although dramatically different from the previous one, is quite a bit closer to the concept I was working with in my sketchbook when I first came up with the idea'.

Reflecting on it now, I believe this would have been the most amusing plot and is indeed closest to the original humour I developed in the sketchbook stage. I think this is the book I would have most enjoyed making, though I acknowledge there would have been a risk that it could have become too adult-centric.

The publisher flagged up cross-cultural issues regarding the use of ghosts in an email on 22/05/14:

We really do need to steer clear of the demonised/possessed angle, and I'm very worried that this might take things too far, particularly with the eggcorism moment. The Americans are extremely fussy (they are very puritanical about appropriate picture book content) and we would hate to alienate this part of the market, particularly when your style works so well in English-speaking territories.

I asked for clarification about what is suitable for the American market regarding ghost and hauntings. In another email, also dated 22/05/14, I received this response:
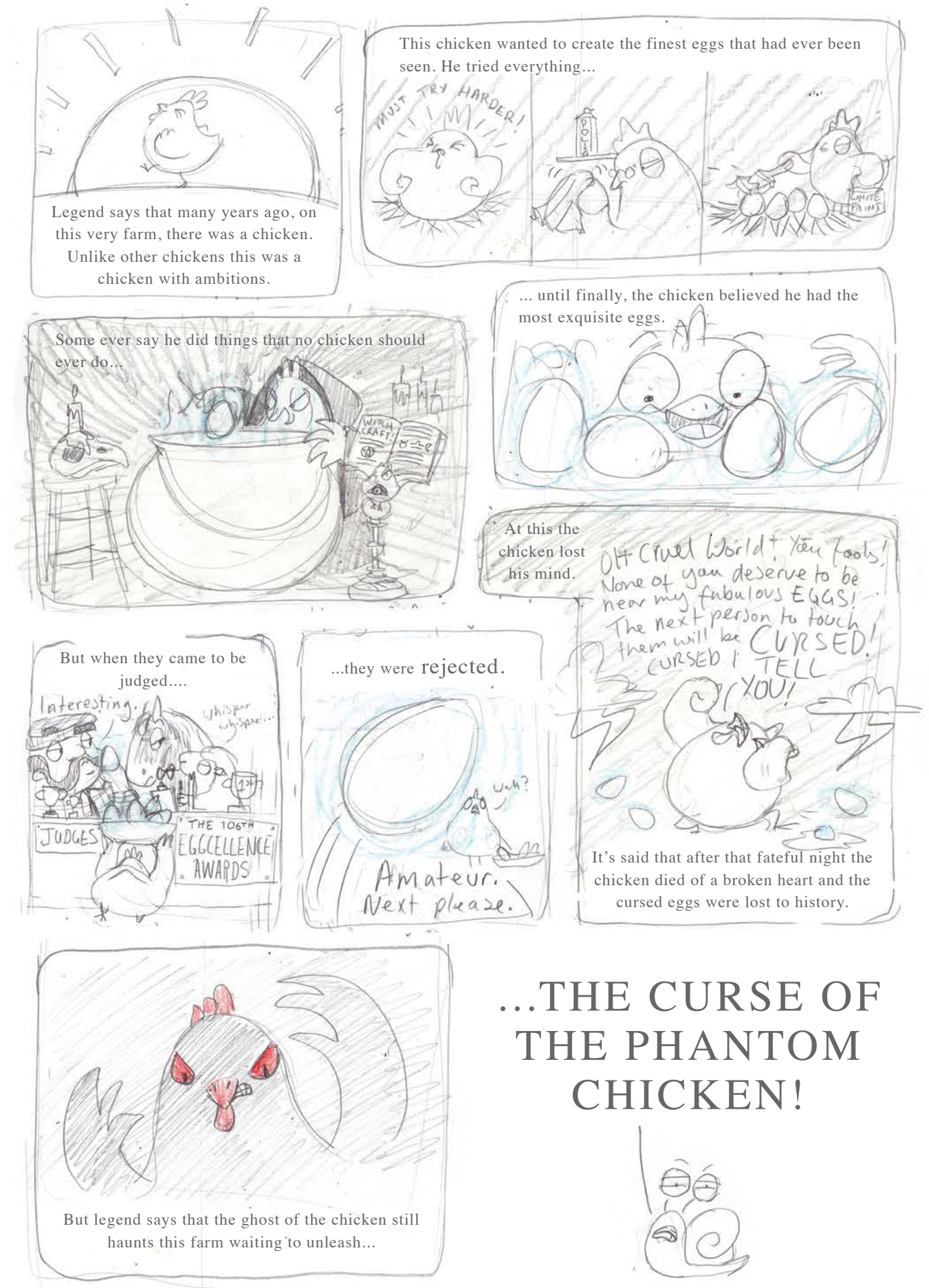
Fig.12 *The Curse of the Phantom Chicken* sketchbook work.

So, in terms of what we mean by "haunting", I think you can have a fake haunting where you have a living thing pretending to be a spooky thing, (maybe characters pretending to enact the curse) or you can have a real haunting i.e. a real ghost which is an actual dead thing. If we can steer clear of possession altogether, or even characters pretending to be possessed, then, on reflection, I think that's best.

As a result of this I made major changes to the plot. I believe this had a substantial effect on the humour because I envisaged much of it would come from the incongruity of the combination of something traditional perceived as scary, in this instance ghosts, movie monsters and the conventions surrounding them, with mundane farm animals. The American market's intolerance of anything perceived as scary meant I would have to tone down that element therefore reduce the incongruity.

As a professional practitioner I need my books to be published in as many territories as possible for financial reasons and so that my work can reach the biggest audience possible. It is for this reason that I decided to take the advice of my publisher and not pursue this storyline, even though if I had been creating this book as speculative work I would have. I am constrained by the market in which I work and have to balance a sustained career with artistic integrity and making what I believe is the best book possible.

Dog Poo Debacle:

There was some concern from the publisher about the inclusion of the toilet humour-based joke concerning dog poo (figs.13,14). I received an email on 29/07/14 that read:

I know it's less fun, but can we have a puddle instead, and see Greg looking suitably hang-dog with his tail between his legs? (If it's a puddle, I think it's crucial to see Greg here just so that we know exactly what kind of "puddle" it is.)'

I respond on the same day:

There are so many books out there featuring poo, some entirely about poo. Is one tiny little mess on the carpet really that bad? It's just the prefect pay off and I'd be very upset to lose it. Is there any way of checking with the Americans (much like with the werewolf situation) to see if it's okay? Can someone ring [the American publisher] Candlewick? If we had a puddle it could be yellow so that we don't have to show Greg. It's more of a satisfying realisation for the reader if it's obvious it was Greg without him being there, that's what I think makes it an effective payoff.

Fig.13 Set up for dog poo joke
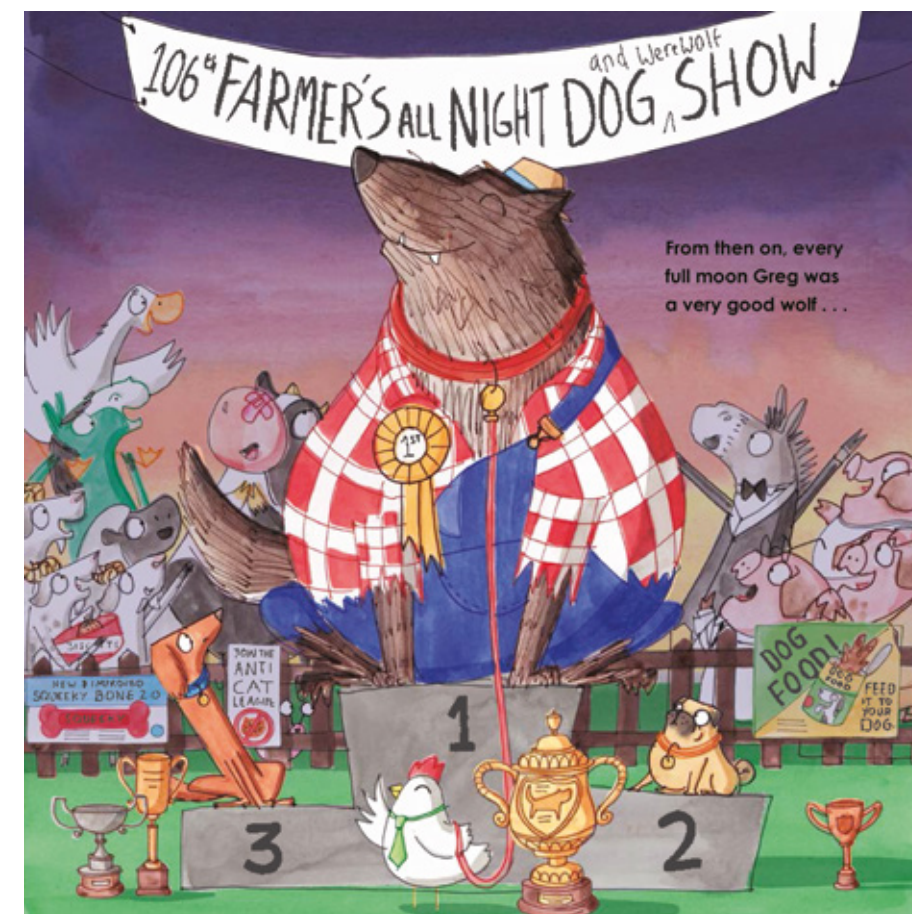
Fig.14 Pay off for dog poo joke

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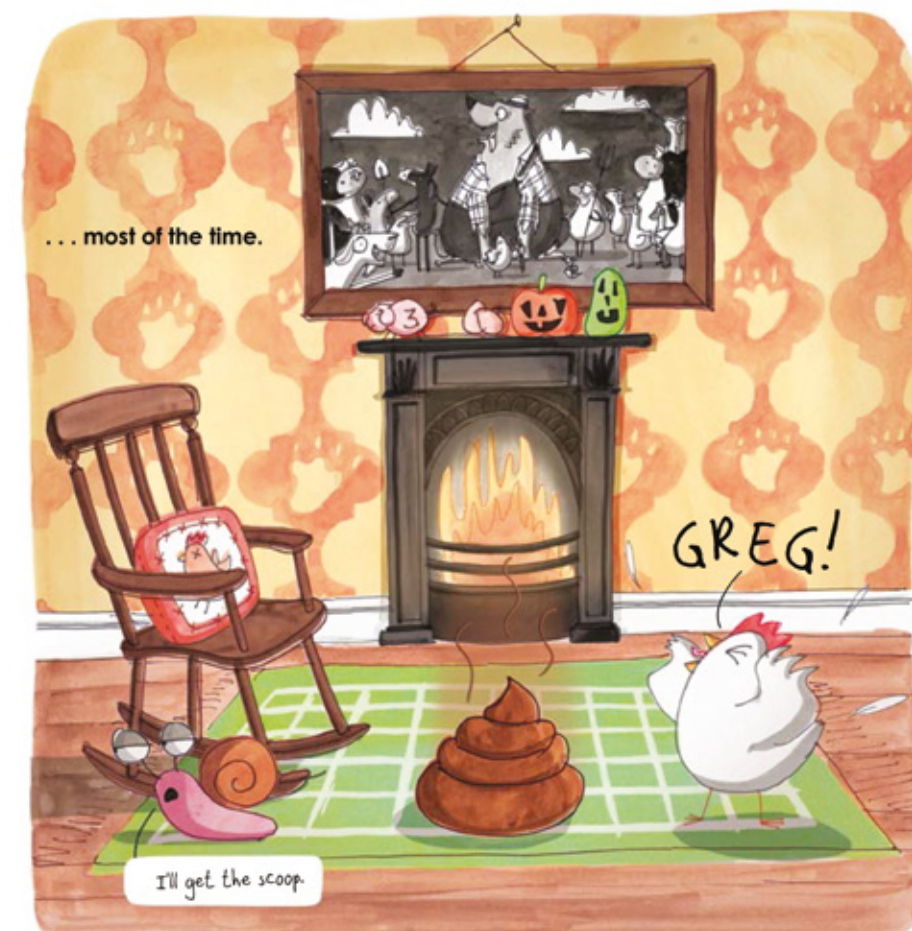
I learnt on 06/08/14 that Candlewick approved the dog poo on the condition that they review the roughs. In hindsight, I am relived that the dog poo could stay because it provides a good visual joke to end on. I feel through the writing process that this narrative has lost its edge because of having to remove and tone down the spookier and more threatening elements and to lose the dog poo, even though it is barely edgy at all, would have made it an even less compelling and less amusing book.

Both these incidents caused me to realise how sensitive this publisher is about offending foreign markets, especially the USA. This means when working in a publishing context the content of a book will inevitably undergo editing to be considered appropriate, particularly in relation to humour because the route of a joke comes from pushing boundaries or confounding a norm. This concern about the American market and especially toilet humour is something I subsequently encountered again when working with a different publisher.

Editorial Input

There were extensive editorial changes throughout the course of making this book. It is not unusual for a book to go through a range of changes when working with a publisher but in this case I found the attention to detail unprecedented. Through the course of these changes I made some observations of how it affected the humour which I believe are significant.

A clear individual voice for the creation and communicate of humour:

The sheer number of changes to both text and artwork began to change the tone of the book. The editor I was working with has a different writing style to myself in the use of vocabulary and the overall tone. We also have a different sense of humour which means she is more likely to suppress the jokes that I find amusing and visa versa. As this editor is highly involved and edits my text heavily, I found that the text and plot structure lacks a clear voice. I note in my reflective journal on 01/05/14 that:

What I do find limiting is the creative suggestions where bits of the story are being written for me… If the humour and story doesn't have one very individual voice it seems to fall flat and not fit together.

Importance of a clear but entertaining plot when creating humour:

During the course of this project I have learned it is important to have an entertaining plot but one that is simple enough to be understood by the reader without excessive effort. As I intended this

book to be highly detailed in its imagery, with much information to be gained from reading the asides, the addition of a complex plot would make the overall experience too taxing for the reader. This is especially important in relation to humour because, as I have mentioned previously, the humour is at its best when it is created spontaneously and so appears effortless to the viewer. I felt that additional complexity would be detrimental to that effect.

This book went through 5 major changes to the plot and, with the exception of the final one which striped out some extraneous detail, each change made the story stray further from the original concept and became more convoluted and, in places, harder to understand.

At the time I did not realise that having a clear foundation of a plot was key to making all the humour that hangs off it function. The central narrative has to be convincing and have an internal logic, so the more surreal and absurd humour is easily accepted and does not appear strange and out of place. On reflection, I now believe the narrative events that occur after the farmer turns into a werewolf, such as the pig's training and the dog show, were convoluted elements of the plot and, as a result, the humour seems laboured and perhaps out of place.

Enjoyment of a book effects humour creation:

I identified through my practice that to create spontaneous, natural humour that does not seem laboured or contrived I need to enjoy the process and find the work funny myself.

Looking back through my journals and the other materials I produced during this process, it has become apparent that the periods where I produced the most comic content were the points when I enjoyed myself most (figs.1,2,4,5,6,9). I identified through my practice that the humour I consider most effective and natural is created spontaneously and unconsciously. To achieve this, it appears to help if I feel a sense of excitement and enthusiasm about the project and do not feel excessive pressure to be funny. If I am not in this state of mind the humour can seem laboured or contrived, which I believe contributed to the less than effective humour in the latter half of this book.

Conclusion

As the first book that I made in the context of this research, I found the experience to be a learning curve. I have had to learn reactive methods of recording and analysing my practice as it has progressed. I believe the insight I have gained from this will contribute to filling gaps in our existing knowledge of humour in picturebooks..

I have not only identified the kinds of humour I utilised in this book but also devices I used to achieve them, at what point in my practice humour emerges and the conditions most conducive to producing it. It will be interesting to see if I have similar findings when working on my next picturebook project.

Perhaps the most significant realisation during this project was the importance of the publisher's input in relation to the humour. In *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm* the requirements of working within the publishing industry dictated a substantial amount of the content, comic or otherwise. When undertaking future book projects for the purposes of this research I will pay close attention to the publisher's influence to ascertain whether it is equally important and if the requirements are different when working with my second publisher.

Overall, I believe I have gained substantial insight into both my own practice and the nature of humour in picturebooks in general that I can carry forward into future book projects.

References

Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror. 2020. [film] Directed by F. Murnau. Germany: Prana Film.

Psycho. 1960. [film] Directed by A. Hitchcock. Los Angles: Paramount Pictures.

The Shining. 1980. [film] Directed by S. Kubrick. Burbank: Warner Bros.

The Amityville Horror. 1979. [film] Directed by S. Rosenberg. Los Angeles: American International Pictures.

Appendix 2

Steven Seagull Action Hero: Critical Analysis

Introduction

This document was brought together from review, reflection and analysis of the processes of creative practice used to make *Steven Seagull Action Hero*. This includes rough sketches for the development of ideas in sketchbooks, colour tests and experiments, correspondence with publishers, larger developmental drawings, rough dummy books, final artwork and the published book. Along with this, a reflective journal was kept to record decision making and analytical processes as well as keeping a timeline of events.

I began *Steven Seagull* in August 2014 whilst still working on *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm*. As this book was to be produced with a different publisher, Oxford University Press, the intention was to create a more character-led book with less detailed artwork, to contrast with the books I had been making with Nosy Crow.

Therefore, much of the humour would have to come from the central narrative and characterisation, instead of the subplots and asides I had relied upon in *Haunted Farm*. As I had struggled with plot during the making of *Haunted Farm* I was concerned about how successful the humour would be here.

I was also interested to observe whether the type of humour that emerged in the process of making this book, the way in which I achieved it and my motivation for including it, were similar to the previous book project. Alongside that, I was keen to see if the publisher-author relationship would be equally influential.

Humour and Creative Practice

Here follows a description of how and when the humour emerged in the creation of *Steven Seagull*. Similarly to the previous analysis, I have broken this down into what I identified in my practice as the four main stages of creating a picturebook. This is to compare with the process of creating *Haunted Farm.*

1. Sketchbook work and the development of ideas.

Similarly to creating *Haunted Farm*, I found a considerable amount of the humour was established in this stage of the process. I comment in my reflective journal on 12/02/15 that 'sketchbook work is integral to creating humour. It gives me space to test out new things and make those seemingly disparate connections that lead to amusement and jokes'.

I found that this stage was even more fruitful than when making *Haunted Farm* because, along with establishing the characters and the concept, one of the first things I developed was the opening spreads (fig.1). These remained almost unchanged in the finished book. This is the kind of dramatic, narrative-led, humour I had hoped to include in this book to contrast with the subplots and asides in *Haunted Farm*, so it was a relief I was able to develop this from the beginning.

Here I believe the humour comes from the incongruous contrast between the initial image of Steven appearing as a sullen, normal seagull and him standing at the prow of a dynamic speedboat having been revealed to be a cop. I instinctively knew that this humorous effect would be intensified by the anthropomorphisation of Steven because a seagull as a cop is so unlikely it only intensifies the incongruity (as is concurrent with Incongruity Theory). This is offset by the physical comedy that comes from Steven's very serious expression contrasting with the absurd situation he is found in.

At the time I was not conscious of the points I raised in the above analysis and believe that if I had been, the comedy could have become overly knowing and diminished the humorous effect. Previously when I have deliberately tried to be funny 'I became overly self conscious. What I was doing probably became a little pretentious and the humour itself was just too knowing.' (reflective journal entry 18/09/14). So I was inclined to just let the humour emerge naturally and not over analyse during the creative process.

There is a strong strain of parody coming through in these early sketches (as seen in figs.1,2,3,4,5). My frame of reference when developing the characters was cop shows such as

Fig.1 From sketchbook.
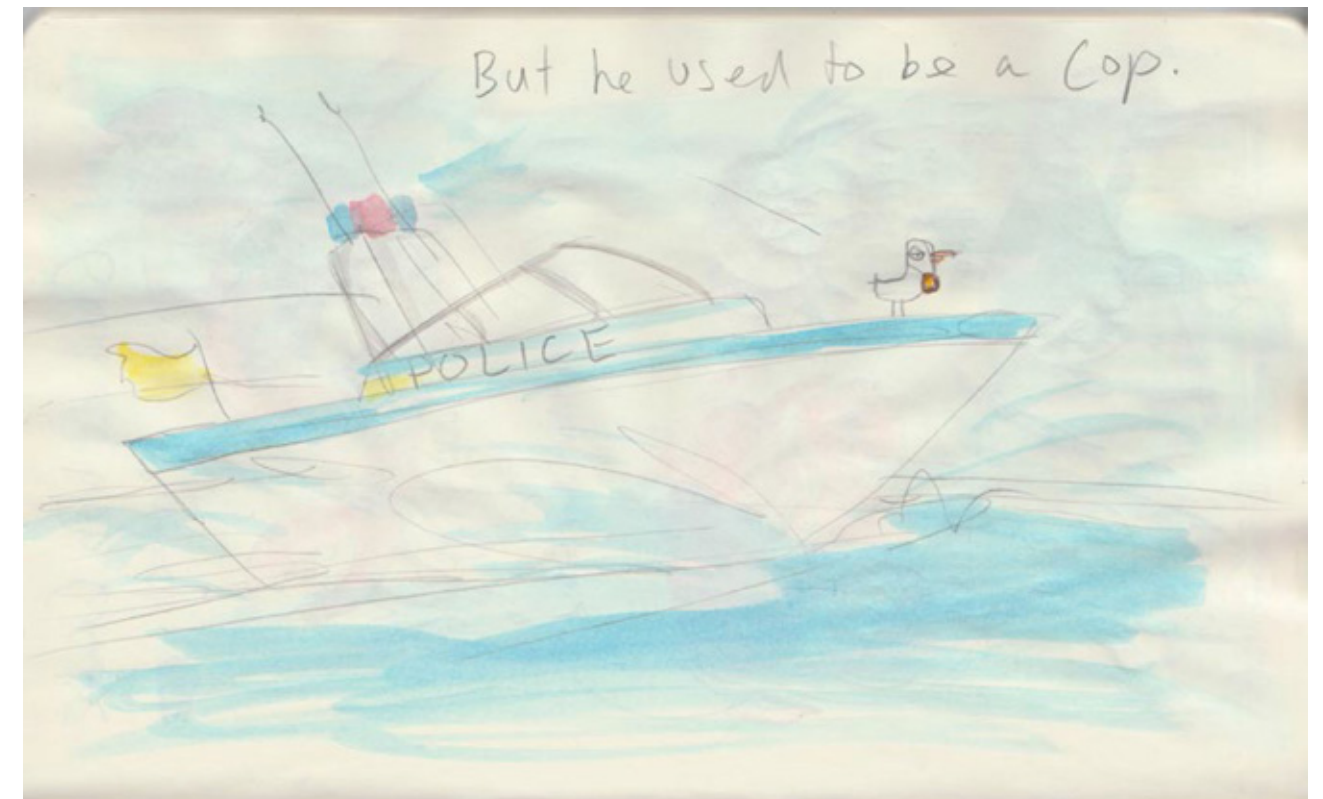
Fig.2 Sketchbook. Steven and Mac defuse a bomb.

Fig.3 Sketch book. Lola Lifeguard.
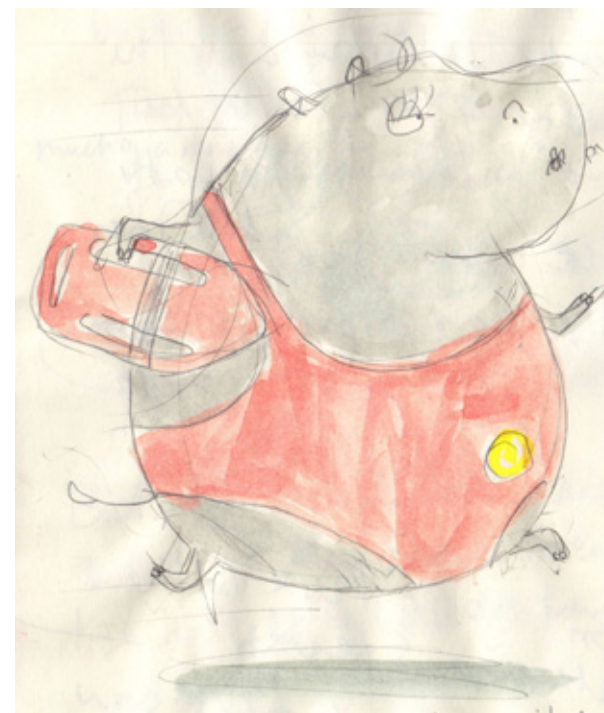
Fig.4 Sketch book. Explosion.

Fig.5 Sketch book work Ice Cream Harry.

Miami Vice (1984-89) and films such as *Die Hard* (1988). The trope of the renegade cop and his partner can be seen coming through in the characters of Mac and Steven (fig.2). There is some obvious word play at work in the title *Steven Seagull Action Hero,* drawing parallels between the lead character and the action movie star Steven Seagal. Much like the parody I included in *Haunted Farm*, I do not necessarily expect younger readers to get the parodic jokes and, on reflection, I believe I put them in to entertain myself and make the process of writing this book more enjoyable. I discuss the appropriateness of the inclusion of parody later in this analysis.

It can be seen from this early sketchbook work that I am beginning to introduce physical comedy. Fig.4 shows a slapstick moment as Steven and Mac are caught in an explosion and there is exaggerated physicality in the large character of Lola the Lifeguard (fig.3).

There is more than one comic device at work in the character of Lola. As well as physical comedy she parodies the character played by Pamela Anderson in *Baywatch* (1989-99). Along with that, she displays incongruity because hippos are not life guards and her hippo physique contrasts dramatically with that of her cultural reference point, Pamela Anderson.

The use of a combination of comic devices seems to emerge regularly in this book and could be seen as a method of intensifying humour. In the characterisation of Ice Cream Harry (fig.5) humour is achieved through the contrast of dodgy dealings with the perceived innocence of the ice cream van, the incongruity of a rat working as an ice cream man and the parody of other wheeler dealer characters such as Del Boy in *Only Fools and Horses* (1981).

I did not consciously aim to combine various comic devices but on reflection I think this is beneficial when trying to ensure that the viewer will find it amusing by including various funny elements. This could be especially useful when the audience may be of varying ages with different levels of sophistication and so will find different things amusing.

2) Thumbnails

When working on *Haunted Farm* I found this stage to unproductive in the emergence of humour. When creating Steven Seagull I found this to be dramatically different because, on reflection, it was a vital stage.

I comment in my reflective journal on 12/02/15 that '[m]aking Steven Seagull has been an interesting one because its a much less detailed book and more like a traditional children's book in the way that it reads. This means the humour comes more from the pacing and physical comedy of the characters.'

Fig.6 Extract from thumbnails demonstrating where comedy has emerged in this stage.

A sedate and classic beach scene is established here.

The page turn reveal presents a surprising contrast.

Here humour is created through counterpoint between the text and image.

Steven's confusion over what the sand was being used for contrasted with the image, which make it glaringly obvious, creates counterpoint. The composition is used here to intensify the counterpoint by the scale of sandcastle and how obvious and dominant it is on the right hand page.

Vignettes create a sense of building tension and lead the reader to expect Steven to have a heroic and ingenious solution to the situation.

The page turn creates a pause and sense of suspense. Expectations are violated with a surprising contradictory outcome to create a comic effect.

Tension and anticipation is increased as the reader become aware of the inevitable moment of slapsitick.

Tension is released with huge slapstick moment. The magnitude of the moment is increased by it's scale on the page, the lack of text and the pause from the proceeding page turn..

A maker can control the way a book is paced by changing the viewpoint, the scale of the images and the composition of the page. When creating the thumbnails, this is when I initially design the aforementioned elements. This is particularly significant for the humour because the pacing works as the book's comic timing.

Comedian Richard Herring says that 'Most jokes are based on surprise. They take advantage of a confusion of language, or a twist in logic, or a contradiction of some perceived truth' (Herring 2008). Fig.6 shows a sample of some of my thumbnails where I am creating surprise, twisting logic and contradicting expectations to create a comic effect.

While working on this book I was conscious of the need for the central narrative to carry and create much of the humour. What I was not conscious of was which devices I would include, such as a page turn reveal, and where to include them. I instead I let the flow of a narrative and my reactions to it unconciously dictate my choice of devices.

I was surprised by how easily I developed the thumbnails and the ease with which the central narrative emerged. I invented the theme of the story by brainstorming different forms of beach related crimes in my sketchbook (see fig.7) and weaving a story around that. In total I only created one set of thumbnails which, aside from a few compositional revisions, were changed little by the publisher.

On reflection, I think this was made easy because of the contrast with my previous project. I had found making *Haunted Farm* frustrating and inhibiting and I believe the different approach to comedy and working with a new publishing team helped me to feel an free-wheeling sense of enjoyment when making this book. I noted in the analysis for *Haunted Farm* that how much I was enjoying a project had an impact on the amount of humour created and I think my early experiences in making *Steven Seagull* support this.

3) Roughs

While making *Haunted Farm* I found the process of making roughs to be very productive for creating humour because this was when I invented the subplots and asides. As *Steven Seagull* does not have the same detailed imagery I could not include these things in the same manner and so they did not provide the humour.

Interestingly though, I did find this stage created a different form of humour, similar to that developed at the sketchbook stage. It involved the development of more humorous characters to make the world in which the book takes place richer and more convincing. These characters would

Fig.7 Sketchbook notes.
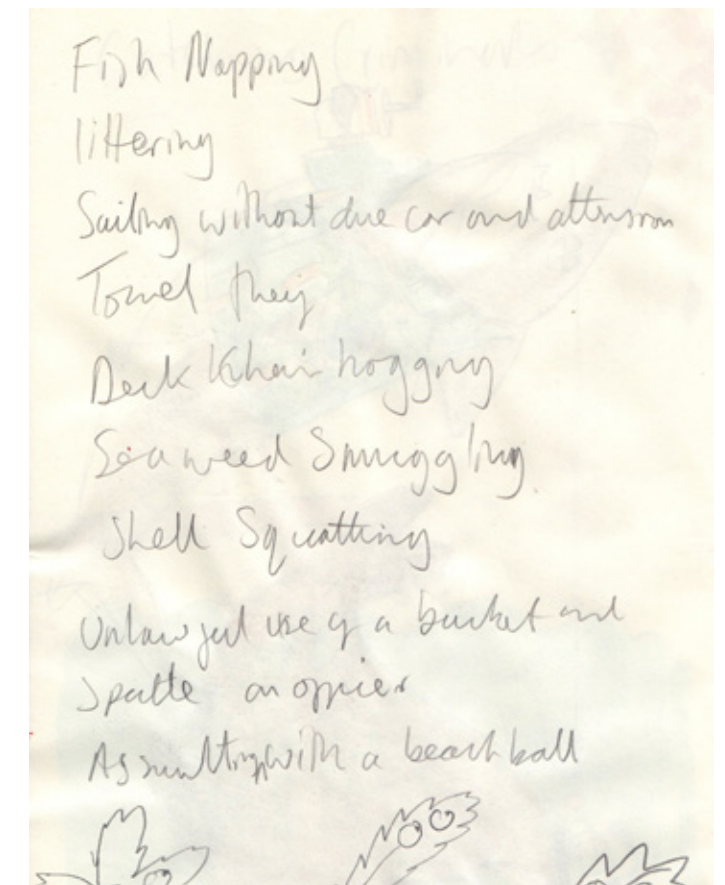
Fig.8 Analysis of character 'Dez' from my reflective journal.

later appear in supporting or background roles within the book.

One of these characters was Dez the Seal/Personal Trainer. The analysis of Dez from my reflective journal (fig.8) suggests he achieves absurdity because as a seal he is unsuited to the role of personal trainer, he does not even have the legs he needs to do the squats he is suggesting. He is a Miami beach gym bunny stereotype which fits in with the beach world setting. He also features some 80s styling which reflect the references to 1980s film and television. I believe this gives a clear impression of the type of humour that was emerging at this stage.

I think this new humour came about because of a more beneficial and stable publisher-author relationship, which I will elaborate on later in this analysis. On 09/02/15 in my reflective journal I comment that this had been a much more pleasant experience and observe that 'this is to some extent due to the relationship with my editor. He seemed to understand the sense of humour I envisioned the book having, felt it was a valuable part of the book and not a kind of extra or side show'.

I also note that the support I had from my designer meant 'I felt truly prepared and informed to proceed with the roughs. This gave me a certain freedom to play around when doing the roughs and I think it aided the addition of more humorous detail'.

4) Colour Artwork

When I began the artwork I had a clear idea of how I wanted its visual language to augment the humour. In my reflective journal on 20/01/15 I talk about how I would approach the artwork:

> I feel the comedy works better when the artwork seems loose and spontaneous to echo the humour. I want Steven Seagull to look almost as if a competent child did it and the bold pencil lines and loose, unruly watercolours seem to provide this.

I think this approach to the artwork has been successful in retaining and enhancing the existing humour. Though I believe the imagery appears competent and the colours and compositions are pleasingly bold, I think it retains a feel of effortless spontaneity and does not appear laboured. This is achieved through the use of thick pencil lines, misregistration of colour and line and highly textured watercolours that give the impression of an element of accident. An example of this can be seen in fig.9.

When planning how to colour each spread I was still conscious that the pacing of this book was important to the humour and I wanted the colour artwork to enhance this and not undermine it.

Fig.9 Pages 12 and 13.

Small mistakes left in so the artwork does not look too precious or laboured.

Further misregistration.

The use of watercolours bring texture to areas of flat colour. This gives it a slightly flawed look and steers it away from appearing overtly digital or too perfect.

Misregistration between the line and watercolour to give the artwork a loose and spontaneous feel.

I created a set of colour thumbnails so I could test how my plans for the colour might effect the pacing. Along with this I could be sure of the colour scheme for each spread before approaching the final artwork. This is because, as I note in my reflective journal on 02/03/15, 'if I start messing with the colours once the artwork was done it might start to look laboured'. This is something I wanted to a avoid because as, I mentioned previously, I believed it would be detrimental to the humour.

I had these conscious objectives before I created the colour thumbnails but I did not have any specific methods in mind to achieve them. The methods I used evolved through trial and error as I created the thumbnails.

An example of this can be found in the spreads where the atmosphere needs to be seemingly serious and po-faced to set up the joke (spreads 1 and 7 as seen in fig.10) I have tried to keep the colour palette limited and restrained in comparison to the other spreads to emphasise this effect.

Fig.10 Colour test thumbnails.

Working within the Publishing Industry

Whilst creating *Steven Seagull* the publisher-author relationship has proved to be equally influential on the creation of humour as when making *Haunted Farm*, if in different ways. I did not encounter the same cross-cultural issues with certain kinds of humour as I did with *Haunted Farm*, but some interesting points about age appropriateness were raised.

Age Appropriateness and Humour.

Too much of a renegade:

During the creation of *Steven Seagull* I encountered a couple of issues concerning the register of some of the language and how accessible this could be for a younger audience. On page 9 (fig.11) there is a line that reads 'I can't come back,' said Steven. 'Sargent Starfish fired me for being too much of a renegade,' On 24/02/15 my editor queried 'is 'renegade' meaningful to children?' I responded with the following:

Perhaps not but the way that new words become meaningful to children is encountering them and books are of course the obvious vehicle for that. I think as long as we're on the age range for the majority of the text we can throw in the odd curve ball.

My motivation for trying to keep the word 'renegade' was because I felt it added to the parodic humour. It echoes the kind of dialogue you might find in a cop or detective film. My editor did allow it to stay in. This instance demonstrates another example of me adding in aspects that could be considered beyond my primary audiences' understanding.

Police Brutality:

A similar editorial change was made on the title page where there are several jokes concerning Steven and police misconduct (fig.12). On 08/05/15 my editor requested 'Would you be open to revising the text 'Police Brutality' to 'Police Force' or 'Police Trickery' or something else less 'Brutality' like?'

On reflection, introducing the concept of brutality to a younger audience might have been hard for them to grasp and could distract from the humorous core of the book, so I decide to remove it. I wanted the charges against Steven to sound authentic to make sure the cop parody still worked and that it would not sound patronising or pandering.

Fig.11 Pages 8 & 9 where 'renegade' is used.

Fig.12 Pages 2 & 3 where 'police misconduct' is used.

On 11/05/15 I responded with 'Can we replace 'brutality' with 'misconduct'? That way it's still a real thing but sounds less violent.' This was agreed on and I believe it still delivers the right effect while not alienating younger readers.

Steven Seagal:

When I proposed the concept of *Steven Seagull* my editor commented on 14/08/14 that perhaps the title might not be appropriate.

I wonder whether the book/series title should be something other than 'Steven Sea Gull'? The title relies on a funny pun, which won't work so well for foreign translations. It also relies on people knowing Steven Segal, which may sound ridiculous but book buyers aren't always that groovy.

My thoughts at the time were as follows:

...even if people didn't get the pun it's a book about a seagull called Steven and there's some amusement in giving animals really blunt human names like 'Dave' or 'Phil'.

On reflection, I maintain there is comedy in giving animals workaday human names but I do wonder whether excluding some people from that joke has damaged the success of the book. *Steven Seagull* has sold well in the UK but did not get a US co-edition and I speculate whether this is because cross-culturally they did not appreciate the humour of the pun. Those who did 'get it' though seemed to enjoy the joke and the reaction to it on social media was positive.

It has become obvious from both *Haunted Farm* and *Steven Seagull* that I include humour that not all of my audience will understand, even if I am doing so unconsciously. I am compelled to ask myself why I do this. In the analysis of *Haunted Farm* I commented that this was because I find it funny and I seek to amuse myself. I believe this is still true but from creating and analysing *Steven Seagull* I would now say my motivations are perhaps more complex.

I try to avoid talking down to or patronising my audience. Though I suspect some younger readers may not understand some of the humour, I cannot guarantee this and so I would not want to exclude certain types of humour because of it. My instinct is that I should create comedy true to my sense of humour and allow the reader to understand or not understand what they can. My concern is if I stray away from my own humour the work I create would not be funny and would also be patronising because I am changing the register due to my unsubstantiated preconception of audience response.

I am aware that my audience is not entirely made up of children. The book needs to appeal to parents, publishers, teachers, librarians and booksellers to even get into the hands of a child. Therefore, I speculate that I retain some of the more sophisticated humour to appeal to these subsections.

Editorial Input

The experience of working with this publisher has been markedly different from working on *Haunted Farm*. This reflective journal entry from 20/05/15 explains that difference:

[Making Steven Seagull] *has been smoother, fewer changes, quicker and less traumatic for me. I put this down partly to encountering fewer cross-cultural issues with the narrative but mainly down to my relationship with my team at OUP. I feel listened to and that my opinion is valid. They're happy to debate things and come to decisions that way so I don't feel like I'm being dictated to. My creative input is seen as valid. I also feel that they understand the tone I want to achieve in this book and share the sense of humour which makes it a lot easier to 'riff off' them and come up with ideas together. Overall this creates an environment where it's much easier to be funny and come up with humorous ideas.*

As a result of this overall positive experience I have perhaps learnt less about the impact of the publisher on the book's humour than with *Haunted Farm*. This is because I have found it harder to identify where things have gone right and what that can be attributed to as compared to identifying where things went wrong.

I believe I can reasonably conclude though that the publisher-author relationship has been equally important here but, instead of being detrimental, it has served to augment and streamline the humour.

For instance, I discovered that a reasonable, give-and-take, relationship aids the effectiveness of jokes. An example of this can be seen on 02/12/14 when my editor suggested adding hair to Lola the Lifeguard to draw more of a parodic similarity to Pamela Anderson. He commented 'I actually think it may help sales – because it is an image that will stick in the minds of foreign publishers and customers. It's so important to leave an impression'

I agreed that the addition of hair could enhance the comic effect so I did some sketches, the most resolved one can be seen in fig.14 overleaf. Looking at the sketches I suspected that Lola was no longer recognisable as a hippo and feared this would make understanding her character confusing to the reader and thereby nullifying the comic effect. I was so overly familiar with the image though

that I could not be sure. I asked my editor's opinion who agreed and decided to canvas for opinion. I did the same and asked some of the artists I share a studio space with who concluded 'it looks a little weird, perhaps more like a troll than a hippo'. After feeding this back to my editor we mutually agreed that the joke worked better without hair.

The publishing team made suggestions that enhanced the comedy in ways I had not thought of. For example, there is a moment on pages 21 and 22 where Steven looks as if he is about to come up with an ingenious plan to foil the bad guys but in fact appears to just panic. On 02/12/14 the publisher suggested a change to the thumbnails through the addition of a page turn before revealing the panic (fig.13). This improves the pacing and intensifies the humour.

Fig.13 Page turn before and after publisher intervention.

In my original version there was not a page turn between Steven thinking what to do and reacting.

In the version suggested by the publisher there is a page turn which creates suspense and then a reveal, so intensifying the comic effect.

Fig.14 Lola with hair.

Conclusion

The process of making *Steven Seagull* differed dramatically from that of making *Haunted Farm*. The biggest contrast is perhaps that I feel satisfied by the finished book. I began this project concerned that I might not be able to achieve the same levels of humour through simpler artwork where I could not include extra subplots and asides. I was surprised at how easily I was able to create humour using the pacing and reveals within the central narrative and feel it has been an effective approach.

When making *Haunted Farm*, I identified the sketchbook stage as key in creating parody and physical humour. In *Steven Seagull* it proved to be as fruitful if not more so. By contrast, because of the different humour utilised in *Steven Seagull,* the thumbnails were more important in developing the narrative-led comedy. Whereas in *Haunted Farm* the roughs yielded more humour because that was where the subplots and asides were added.

The publisher-author relationship proved to be equally important but had a dramatically different effect on the humour. The publisher seemed to share and value my sense of humour and so they created an environment that allowed me to freely pursue the things that I found funny. As a result I believe *Steven Seagull* is a funnier book than it would have been without publisher input.

Overall, making *Steven Seagull* has expanded my insight into the creation of humour and the publisher-author relationship.

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Appendix 3

The Doughnut of Doom: Critical Analysis

Introduction

This document was brought together from review, reflection and analysis of the processes of creative practice used to make *The Doughnut of Doom*. This includes rough sketches for the development of ideas in sketchbooks, colour tests and experiments, correspondence with publishers, larger developmental drawings, rough dummy books, final artwork and the published book. Along with this, a reflective journal was kept to record decision making and analytical processes as well as keeping a timeline of events.

The Doughnut of Doom was created with the same publisher as *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm*. When I begun work on *Doughnut of Doom* I found myself apprehensive after my previous experiences working on *Haunted Farm*. I was concerned that the working methods I encountered would have a similarly detrimental effect on the creation of humour in *The Doughnut of Doom*. I was determined to identify methods that would help me retain humour whilst preserving a positive publisher-author relationship.

I was compelled to return to an intensely detailed way of working during the creation of this book because that was one of the publisher's requirements. Despite this return to familiar methods I wanted to experiment with creating humorous characters in a way I had not before. Previously, I had created incongruity by anthropomorphising animal characters but I wanted to see if I could push that incongruity further by anthropomorphising food. The motivation behind this is that animal characters are common in picturebooks but is food less so, therefore the surprise and unfamiliarly of food behaving like humans would be even more incongruous and therefore more amusing.

Humour and Creative Practice

Here follows a description of how and when the humour emerged in the creation of *The Doughnut of Doom*. I have broken this down into what I have identified in my practice as the four main stages of creating a picturebook.

1. Sketchbook work and the development of ideas.

While working on the previous two books it became apparent to me that this is the most fruitful period of humour creation within my practice. Again, it was particularly productive for creating humorous characterisation, incongruity and wordplay such as puns.

I initially concentrated on developing the concept of 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Doughnuts' and other anthropomorphised food characters within my sketchbook (fig.1). On reflection, I feel this stage was a productive period for the creation of humorous characters because I think I achieved the sense of increased incongruity I was striving for. I believe characters became even more amusing when an element of observation was added to create an 'it's funny because it's true' affect. I took existing stereotypes about food, e.g. vegetables are healthy, and used them within the characterisation. This can be seen in fig.2, which depicts gym obsessed vegetables.

During this stage I struggled to develop a central narrative and a setting. In my reflective journal on 17/04/15 I note that 'I was having trouble understanding the wider world that these food characters inhabit and I felt that maybe this would come naturally if I worked on making the characters interact [with each other] and get to know them better, so the characters would dictate the setting by their nature'. I tried to do this by creating a mini comic with one of my ninja doughnut characters (fig.3).

On reflection, this did not resolve my setting issues was possibly detrimental to the development of the humour because I was only concentrating on characterisation. It became apparent that I must utilise all elements of a picturebooks in humour creation, such as setting, relationship between work and image etc., to create a variety of humour types.

While in conversation with a fellow illustrator it become apparent that the concept of the Super Ninja Hero Doughnuts might not be working. On 22/04/15 I note that 'Matt said that he felt it would be more amusing if the doughnuts existed in the human world because of the incongruity of tiny doughnuts trying to be heroes in a world where everyone is trying to eat them'. I agreed that this would probably be funnier than these specific characters inhabiting a world populated by the other food characters I had created.
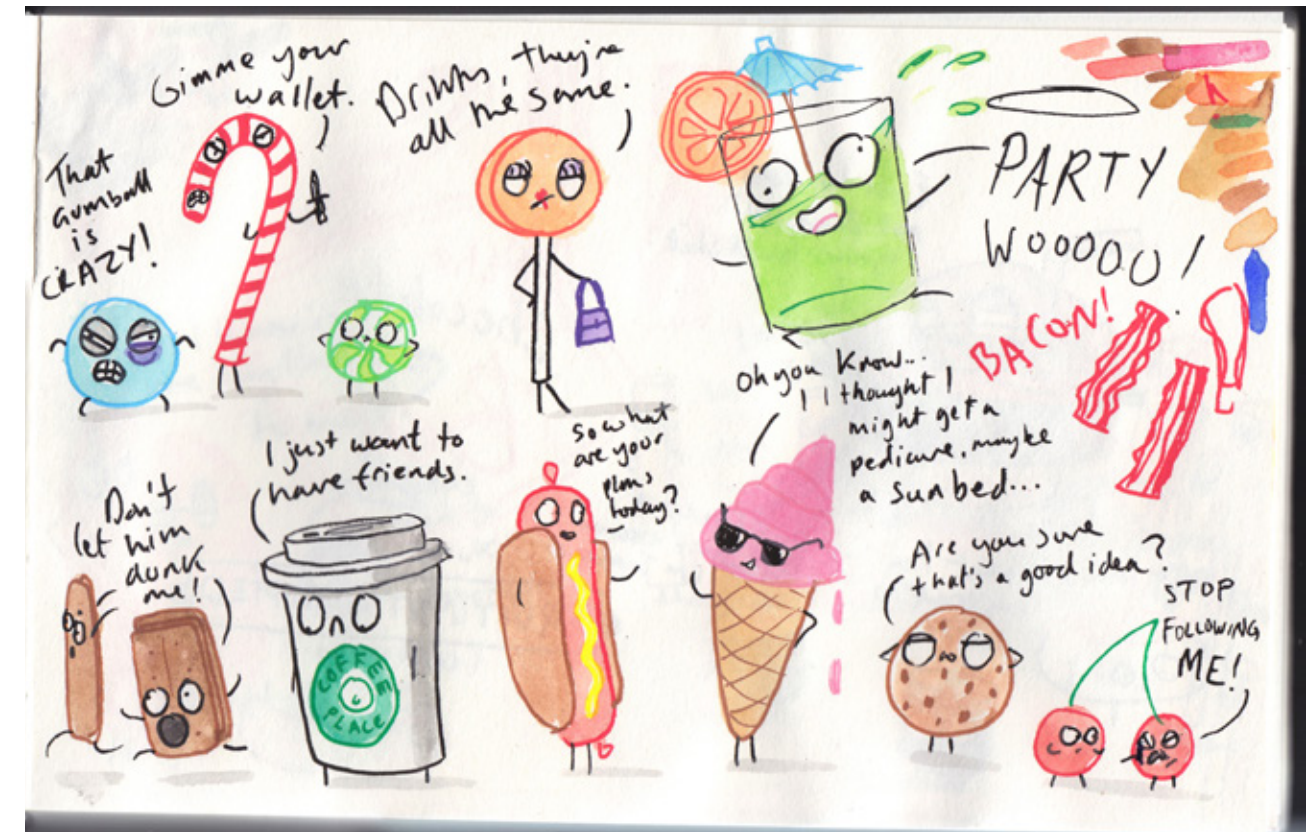
Fig.1 Food Character. Sketchbook.
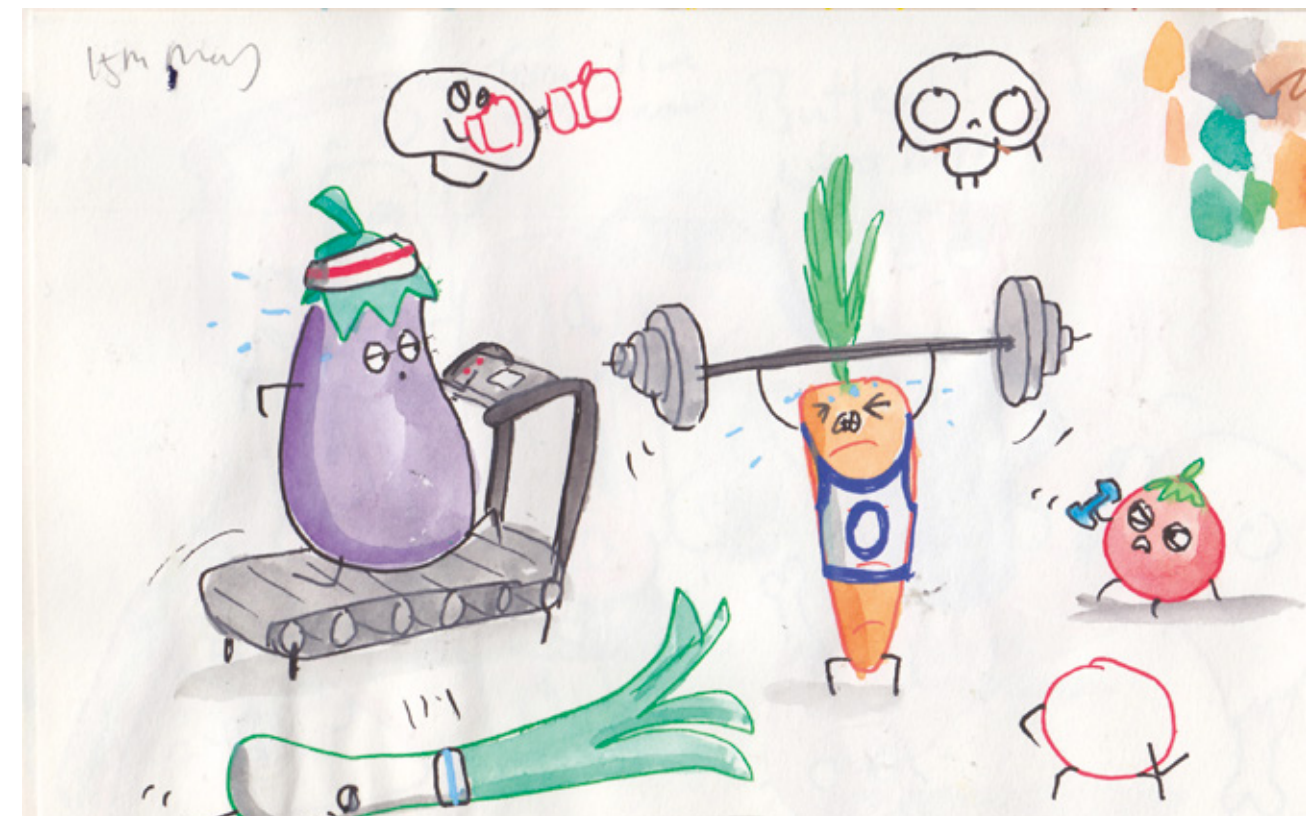
Fig.2 Developing food characters that reflect their stereotypes.

I chose to abandon the Super Ninja Hero Doughnuts concept and pursue the anthropomorphised food world. On reflection, I believe this was the right choice for the humour because the parody of the Ninja Doughnuts was referencing the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* franchise in a way that seemed too heavy handed and so diminished their comic effect.

I was losing enthusiasm for this project and needed to develop a setting for my characters. Inspired by how 'freeing and productive in terms of ideas' (reflective journal entry 18/05/15) creating the large Easter egg factory image (see appendix 4) had been I decided to created a large street scene involving my food characters, drawing one building at a time (fig. 4).

Embarking on this large image was a very successful period of humour creation. Making a fully formed, intricate world through drawing before trying to construct a narrative allowed me to make new connections and different types of humour to come through as the humour emerged naturally. For instance, creating various different settings allowed me to think how different foods would react in these situations, which resulted in humour that could be likened to the situation comedy found in film and television (fig.5).

This big picture provided the catalyst for the central narrative. I added a laboratory to the street and 'as I was drawing it I started to imagine that they were up to something dodgy [inside], that they might create a monster. This put me in mind of monster movies like *Godzilla* and *King Kong*' (reflective journal entry 05/06/15). So, from the idea of a monster attacking the city, the narrative emerged and provided the addition of parody, referring classic monster movies.

The inclusion of the monster allowed for plenty of slapstick through its destructive nature. I wanted to continue with this strain of physical comedy and gave early versions of the monster a large, exaggerated mouth to emphasise the way it gobbles everything around it (fig.6).

I originally designed the monster to be an classic, nondescript, monster, not a food like the other characters. This meant it lacked the incongruity of the other characters and did not seem to fit with the world I had created. I decided to create a monster that was a combination of foods but that was 'too convoluted' and possibly 'confusing' (reflective journal 16/06/15).

I progressed to monsters comprised of individual foodstuffs (fig.7) but they just did not seem humorous enough. Eventually, through a process of trial and error, I decided to make the monster a doughnut. I noted that 'the natural physical humour of a doughnut lends absurdity to the character' (reflective journal 16/06/15) and so intensifies it's humour.

The round, bulbous, shape of the doughnut makes it look comically clumsy and doughnuts have

Fig.3 Super Hero Ninja Doughnut mini comic.

Fig.4 'Big picture' of 'Food Town' in situ in my studio.

Fig.5 Tanning shop from 'big picture' street scene.

Small underwear details for toilet humour.

Buildings designed to echo kitchenalia and so continually acknowledge the food theme and provide incongruous combinations.

All three of these jokes reference the nature of food and how they would react in these settings, e.g. toast becomes burnt after too long in the tanning salon. The setting has now become an essential component of the humour.

Fig.6 Monster development drawings.

Fig.7 Doughnut monster.

Fig.8 Doughnut reveal thumbnails.

an association with novelty and frivolity. This creates an incongruous contrast to it being a terrifying monster.

Throughout this development stage it became apparent that although I create some jokes spontaneously which are successful without need for further refinement, others require a process of trial and error to discover how to make them the most effective. In this case the development stages such as sketchbook work have proved a successful arena in which to conduct this testing.

2) Thumbnails

Similar to *Haunted Farm*, this stage was less productive in the creation of humour. Where this stage was significant was in creating a clear narrative that would support and explain the humorous characters, settings and concepts.

When creating thumbnails for *Steven Seagull* it became apparent that the thumbnails were a useful stage for creating humour that relies on comic timing. I have also capitalised on that in *Doughnut of Doom*. An example of this can be seen in the way that the doughnut is revealed. (fig.8). Having a page turn before the huge, ridiculous doughnut character is revealed creates a pause, and so tension, before the reveal. There is then surprise and a bathetic effect when the absurd doughnut character is revealed because the reader was led to expect a serious, Godzilla-like, monster.

3) Roughs

Similar to *Haunted Farm* I found that the detailed imagery utilised in this books meant that during the roughs stage I could add additional jokes and subplots that run along side the central narrative. Many of these additional details were extra food puns, some new and some translated from my sketchbook or the big picture. I found this point in the process of creating a book allows me to collate and curate the existing humour and combine it with new comic moments that emerge while drawing the roughs. It is a valuable stage for refining the delivery of the humour, for instance, where in a narrative or composition would a specific food pun have it's best effect.

The roughs also allow me an overview of the types of humour I am including in this book. I identify in my reflective journal that I am utilising incongruity, physical comedy, parody, surprise, visual and verbal puns and recognisable clichés.

The additional details created at this stage mean more crossover humour that appeals to different age ranges, such as an adult audience, can be included because they do not interfere with the central narrative which must cater towards the primary audience of younger readers. These often

Fig.9 Subplots. Haircut pineapple started in the development work and evolved into a subplot during roughs.

Fig.10 Crossover humour.

Fig.11 Scan of posca pen outlines and watercolour combined on one sheet of paper.

take the form of background details that an adult reader may spot as they go (fig.9).

4) Colour Artwork

Similarly to the previous two book projects, this stage was mainly concerned with preserving and enhancing the humour developed in previous stages. Here, I was concerned about enhancing how the artwork can support the humour and developed techniques accordingly.

I mentioned in my analysis of *Steven Seagull* that when my artwork appears loose and spontaneous it echoes the feel of the seemingly effortless humour I am trying to achieve, and so intensifies the humorous effect. While creating *Doughnut of Doom* I wanted to test new ways of achieving this and I began using Posca paint markers. These pens produce the coloured lines I favour but are not water soluble. Therefore, watercolour can be applied directly over the lines without them bleeding into the paint (fig.11). This 'allows me to created more finished images spontaneously' (reflective journal entry 10/04/15).

This was a significant step. Previously, I found during the transition from roughs to finished artwork that I lost some of the spontaneity in my colour work. When working on *Haunted Farm* and *Steven Seagull* the line work and colour fill were created separately and then layered together with photoshop to avoid colour bleed. Posca pens let me to do both colour and line by hand on the same sheet of paper. This eliminates one of the steps that gradually strip away spontaneity.

Working within the Publishing Industry

At times while working on *The Doughnut of Doom* I struggled to balance creating effective humour with publisher requirements. The limitations I encountered mainly concerned issues surrounding food, eating and preoccupations around gender in the children's publishing industry.

Food politics and stereotyping:

I have observed previously that when working within the publishing industry there is a sensitivity to different cultural values. I encountered similar experiences here. I note on 14/07/15 in my reflective journal that the publisher was concerned 'that the police being depicted as cakes and biscuits portrayed a negative stereotype of them being fat, lazy and ineffective and this would be unpopular in the American market'. One of my aims for this book was to use the stereotypes and characteristics of the foodstuff to create humour and the connection between the cops and doughnuts, pastries, cakes etc. fits this well. I was concerned that if I were to change the police to different foods this would diminish the humourous effect.

The publisher considered this and decided if the police were portrayed in a positive light, but remained cakes and biscuits, it would not be offensive. It became apparent though that there were further issues with the cake characters.

It concerned the cookie police chief and his dialogue 'The monster won't eat us, we're too fattening!'. The idea behind this is that each foodstuff that tries to stop the monster has a reason why they think they will not be eaten. These reasons relate to the type of food they are, so continuing the theme of the humour related to specific food characteristics (figs.12,13,14). I felt this worked well here because something being fattening is a logical reason not to eat it, but when contrasted with the idea that this ravenous monster would be concerned about healthy living could be seen as amusing.

The publisher felt this introduced the topic of bodyweight and could relate to 'body-conscious issues' (email with my editor 14/07/15) and felt that 'it implants the idea that certain things are fattening (and therefore bad and must be avoided) and it could be something that parents write in about as a point of principle'.

The decision was taken to change the wording from 'fattening' to 'sugary' and remove any references to weight. I felt that this had a slightly detrimental effect on the humour but here it

Fig.12 'Fattening' police.

Fig.13 Hot and spicy fire fighters.

Fig.14 Vegetable soldiers.

felt it better to conform to the publishers wishes and avoid any possible conflict.

Doughnut colour and gender stereotyping:

During a meeting on 25/07/15 the publisher suggested that we should change the colour of the doughnut monster's icing from pink to a different colour. The reasoning behind this was that pink might not appeal to boys and, as a result, make them less likely to read the book.

I previously mentioned that the reason I felt the humour was working in the character of the doughnut monster was the incongruous combination of a terrifying monster with a frivolous novelty food. On reflection, I think part of the way I captured this feeling of frivolity was using bright colours, such as the pink, and echoing the stereotypical pink doughnut design from popular culture. Changing the icing colour to white or brown diminished its similarity to the stereotypical doughnut and so diminished the comic effect (fig.15) so I did not want to change it.

The publisher did eventually decide to retain the pink, commenting in an email on 04/08/15 that 'Doughnuts in *The Simpsons* are always pink and all the cultural references point this way. Can we go for a deeper, more magenta/raspberry pink than sugared almond pink?'. To accommodate the publishers requirements I changed the pink to the colour depicted in fig.16. On reflection, I think retaining the pink was the right decision because it augments the humour of the doughnut monster and I did not want to contribute to the gender stereotyping of colours.

Crossover humour: cherry loss.

I included cross-over humour in *The Doughnut of Doom* to appeal to an older audience for the same reasons I detailed in the analysis of Steven Seagull. Some of these instances were considered more appropriate than others by the publisher. The Shakespeare references went unremarked upon but a possible double entendre on page 21 was considered unacceptable. Originally, the cup cake character was saying 'My cherry! It's gone!' which could be likened to the euphemism 'to pop your cherry'. On 21/10/15 the publisher asked me to remove it because it was not felt to be age appropriate despite the fact that a younger audience is perhaps unlikely to make that connection.

Fig.15 Other doughnut colours.

Fig.16 Doughnut colour testing to find a comprise between the stereotypical doughnut colour and a pink not considered gender specific.

Processes that aided the creation and preservation of humour

Presenting a well resolved concept from the beginning:

I believe that developing a highly resolved concept before presenting it to the publisher helped to preserve the original tone of the humour I wanted to achieve in *Doughnut of Doom*. Even though I did not have an resolved narrative, the big picture showing the street scene already established the cast of characters, the type of humour involved and overall tone of the book. In addition I had a broad concept for the narrative, involving a sandwich reporter investigating a huge monster destroying the city and eating the food inhabitants.

On reflection, I think having made my vision clear at the beginning meant there was less opportunity for the publisher to misinterpret the nature of the humour I wanted to achieve and push it in a different direction. Therefore, I was able to avoid many of the gradual changes that warped the humour in *Haunted Farm*. In turn this allowed me to retain and create more of the humour I originally envisaged would characterise the book, while preserving a positive practitioner/publisher relationship

Managing stress:

My experiences of working as a professional author and Illustrator have demonstrated to me that it is often a stressful occupation. There is continuous pressure to meet tight deadlines, produce a high volume of work and pressure to create new ideas. Some of my experiences when working on *The Doughnut of Doom* suggest that this is perhaps not conducive to the creation of humour.

I note in my reflective journal that I originally had the idea of anthropomorphising food in the form of 'super ninja hero doughnuts' when visiting my parents. I mention on the 06/04/15 that I felt that the 'fairly low stress environments seems to help with the creation of ideas' and I reference how I created the concept for *Steven Seagull* while on holiday.

On the 18/05/15 I note that 'I had been working very intensely on professional projects since Christmas and I was starting to feel burnt out both creatively and physically' and this is why I chose to take a month out and allow myself to develop new ideas. This month off led to a possibly the most fruitful period of humour-creation during this project, where I worked on the big picture.

These experience suggest that more humour will emerge through practice if I cultivate a

low stress environment. The previous analyses have led me to believe that my humour is more successful when it is created spontaneously. If I do not feel pressured, such as in the instances mentioned previously, I can create this spontaneous humour without it becoming contrived or laboured.

Conclusion

One of my objectives for this book was to see if I can create humour through the incongruous anthropomorphisation of food characters. I believe this has been successful. Through tacit trial and error in the 'big picture' and sketchbook stage I found that I could exaggerate the humour with the addition of observational comedy, making the food's occupation or situation relevant to their nature or to an existing stereotypes around them. I believe this has a 'it's funny because it's true' effect.

The comic devices and types of humour utilised were similar to *Haunted Farm*, including subplots and asides, slapstick, exaggerated characterisation, parody and incongruity. There was a strong element of parody throughout in a similar vain to *Haunted Farm* and *Steven Seagull*. I am beginning to worry that I rely on this type of humour too much and that after a while it will become repetitive and diminish its comic effect. In the future I would like to create a picturebook that does not rely so heavily on parody to see if other types of humour can effectively take its place.

I found a successful technique for allowing humour to emerge was through the creation of a 'big picture'. Drawing the characters interacting with each other and their surroundings allowed me to make new connections and different types of humour to emerge naturally.

I was concerned that this book would suffer a loss of humour during the editorial process, similar to what occurred during the making of *Haunted Farm*. I managed to avoid this by developing the concept thoroughly before presenting it to the publisher. This is an approach I would like to use in subsequent projects.

Overall, in terms of the final outcome, the types of humour included and their execution is not dissimilar to *Haunted Farm*. I do consider *Doughnut of Doom* a more successful book because throughout the process of making the book the humour remained true to the original vision created in the development stage while maintaining a positive relationship with the publisher.

Appendix 4

Mr Bunny's Chocolate Factory: Critical Analysis

Introduction

This document was brought together from review, reflection and analysis of the processes of creative practice used to make *Mr Bunny's Chocolate Factory*. This includes rough sketches for the development of ideas in sketchbooks, colour tests and experiments, correspondence with publishers, larger developmental drawings, rough dummy books, final artwork and the published book. Along with this, a reflective journal was kept to record decision making and analytical processes as well as keeping a timeline of events.

This book came about when I created a large cross section image of the Easter Bunny's chocolate egg factory (fig.1). I created this image as method of finding a way to create humour through an single image that does not include a linear narrative. I had initially planned to create three of these such images centring around what I felt were the three main childhood mythologies, The Easter Bunny, Father Christmas and the Tooth Fairy. As the focus of my research changed it became apparent that it was no longer relevant to create the other two images.

My editor at Oxford University Press saw the image and asked me if I could develop this concept into a picturebook. I felt I had created a well-formed and detailed world within this image and a narrative was starting to emerge naturally. Having noticed that parody of popular film and television had featured strongly in my previous books I wanted to make a book that did not rely on this for humour and felt this concept had the potential to fulfil that objective. So, I agreed to develop the idea. The big picture was created between *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm* and *The Doughnut of Doom*, but the rest of the practice was undertaken after the completion of *The Doughnut of Doom*.

Fig.1 The Egg Factory 'big picture'. Actual size 108cm x 87.5cm.

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Humour and Creative Practice

Here follows a description of how and when the humour emerged in the creation of *Mr Bunny's Chocolate Factory.* I have broken this down into what I have identified in my practice as the four main stages of creating a picturebook.

1. Sketchbook work and the development of ideas.

In keeping with the other book projects I have undertaken in the course of my research this stage has again proved to be the most productive in terms of the emergence of humour. The most beneficial single piece of work was the large cross section of the Easter Bunny's egg factory (fig.1).

On reflection, creating the big picture provided the opportunity to design a fully-functional world and find out how the characters within it would interact with their setting and each other. Being able to see how all elements of the world connect, identify what tensions there might be and what conventions the characters adhere to allowed me to rework these predicaments for comic effect, creating situation comedy.

The act of allowing myself to intuitively draw with little planning and see what emerges from that was liberating. Humour, varying from slapstick to incongruity and satire, naturally emerged without conscious attempts to put it in. Freeing myself from the pressures of having to construct and pace a narrative could be said to have helped stimulate the creation of humorous content.

As in previous book projects, refining the concept and characters in my sketchbook was a productive period of humour creation. Various funny moments that made it into the final book were created here (fig.2). I comment in my reflective journal that I felt this productivity was 'because the ideas are still fresh and novel in my mind and I've not yet been bogged down by the anxiety of having to create a functional story'.

Despite this, it did become apparent that the novelty of sketchbook work does not always ensure the creation of effective humour. There was an episode that led me in a direction where I created humour I considered ineffective.

Originally, I created a narrative that involved Mr Bunny hiring other egg laying creatures, such as fish and lizards (figs.3,4), to cover for the striking chickens.

Fig.2 Comic moments developed in the sketchbook.

Fig.3 Development of fish factory workers within the sketchbook.

Fig.4 Development of lizard factory workers within the sketchbook.
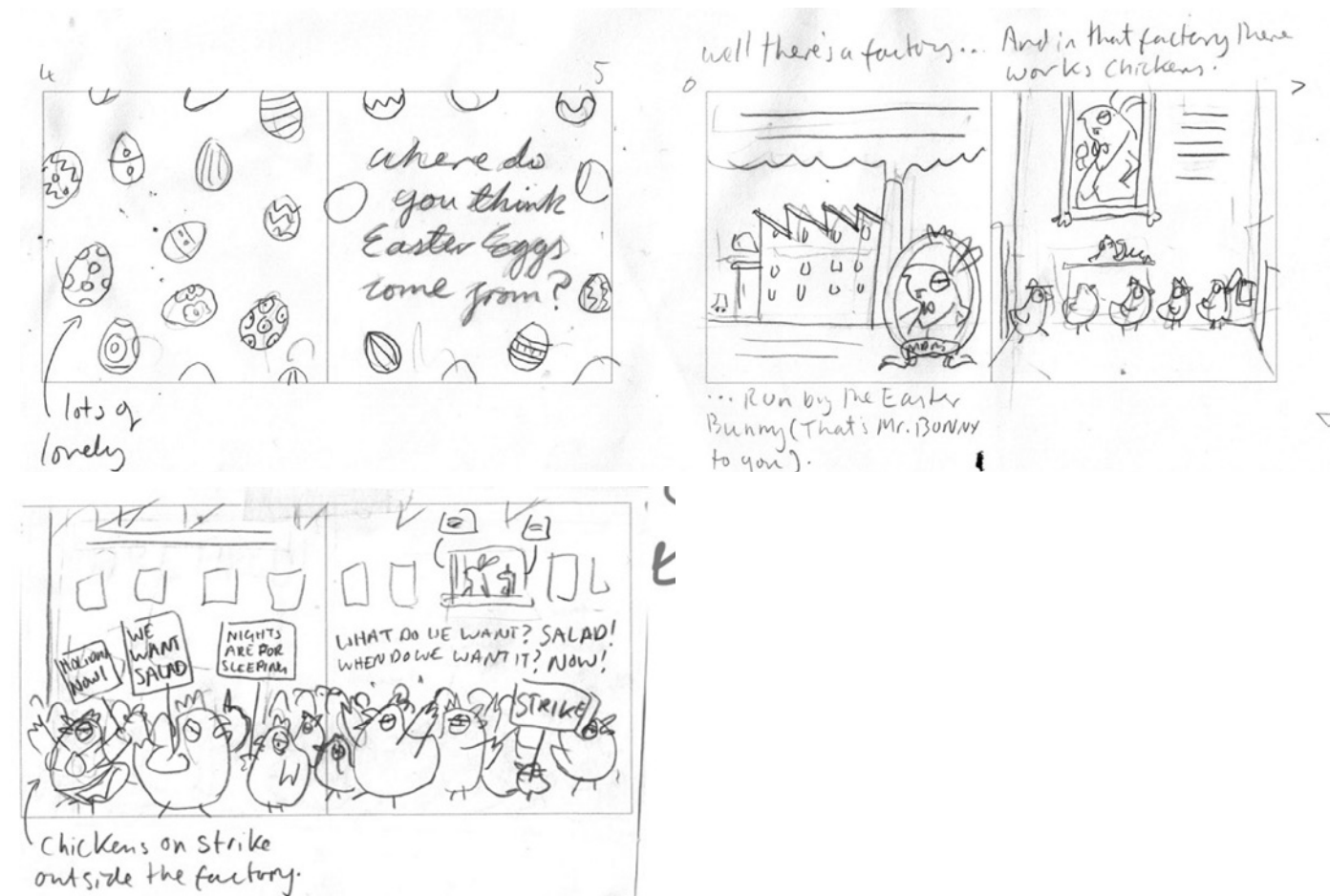
Fig.5 Thumbnails dated 28/07/14.

I commented in my reflective journal that:

There seems to be a kind of internal logic here and the other animals give scope for interesting animal characters being bad at their jobs, in turn providing lots of opportunities for humorous factory chaos and slapstick.

On reflection, I believe this could have provided those slapstick opportunities but the overall concept of introducing different egg layers did not fit with the internal logic of the world. This made them feel strange and misplaced instead of amusing. I believe I pursued this strand of dysfunctional humour because I was unable to be objective due to the pressure I was under to complete an outline of the narrative before a meeting with the publisher later that week. I have commented in previous analyses that such stress is detrimental to the emergence of humour through my practice.

I came to the realisation that this version of the narrative was not working after talking it over with a fellow picturebook maker, who commented that it was 'weird, but not good weird' and observed that thing they had found amusing about the original big picture was the community of chickens at work. It seemed unwise to remove them from a substantial portion the book (reflective journal entry 12/11/16).

This event confirmed the importance of informal testing of my jokes and humorous concepts, especially during periods of high stress. This helps to compensate for the lack of objectivity caused by stress and time pressure.

2) Thumbnails

I discovered during the previous book projects that creating the thumbnails is an opportune place for humour that relies on comic timing and pacing to emerge. I do not think I had managed to incorporate this kind of comic timing very effectively in previous books that included many double page spreads filled with detailed imagery. This is possibly due to the difficulty in conveying the passing of time through such imagery, where the reader is consumed by individual details more than the composition as whole. I believe this is something I overcame in this project.

I found myself making use of composition and pacing to create and augment jokes. For example, I wanted to create a surprise and reveal effect to intensify the comic impact of the depiction of Mr Bunny and his factory. To do this I created a double page spread of brightly coloured Easter eggs and typography that referenced *Willy Wonker and the Chocolate Factory* (1971). This creates a whimsical feel and could lead the reader to expect a fantastical and magical method of egg

Fig.6   Mr Bunny presented in gold framed portraits to emphasise his vanity.
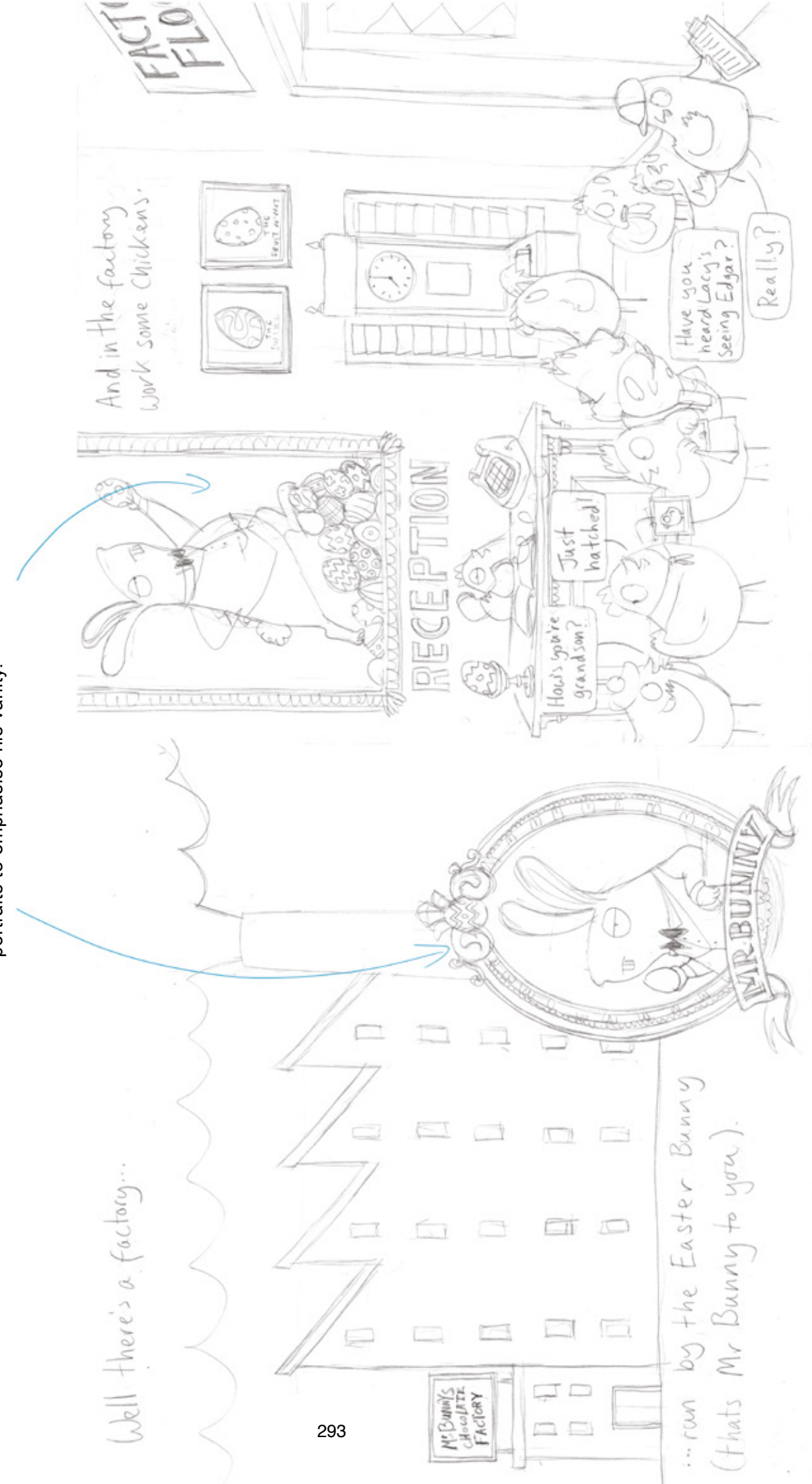
production.

The pause in the pacing that a page turn creates intensifies the suspense and surprise before the industrialised truth is revealed (fig.5).

There is an inherent humour in the incongruity of the Easter Bunny being a smug industrialist in a Victorian style factory but this set up helps to create a contrast with our existing preconceptions of the Easter Bunny. It is the undermining of these expectations, their 'benign violation' (McGraw & Warner 2014) that intensifies comic effect. It could be said that this demonstrates the importance of utilising the methods of communication, or 'tools', inherent to the picturebook, in this case a page turn, to effectively deliver humorous moments.

As well as pacing and reveals, I used the composition of the page to affect the delivery of humour. The humour of the chicken strike page (fig.5) relies on the incongruous relationship between the serious nature of a strike and the humour of the chicken characters. It is my experience that in picturebooks the more space an image is given the more significance it is afforded within the narrative. Giving this joke a double page spread to emphasise its significance intensifies the incongruity because it affords even more importance to the ridiculous situations that is a flock of chocolate egg-laying chickens on strike.

3) Roughs

During the creation of the roughs I noticed the addition of a type of humour I had not previously included, satire. On reflection I believe this came about because of the addition of themes around rights and fairness, which I originally included unconsciously. Satire, a type of humour that uses ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, seems an effective way to present Mr Bunny, and the stereotypical authority figures his character echoes, as unreasonable and unacceptable.

On reflection, I achieved this satirical effect by including various stereotypical elements that were developed in the roughs. For example, on the factory spread (fig.6) Mr Bunny is portrayed in a manner that betrays his vanity. Similarly, in the spread seen in fig.7 he is surrounded by all the trappings of a business fat cat and various corporate clichés.

In addition, I included a certain amount of satire in his characterisation. I exaggerated his facial expressions and actions (fig.8) to echo the stereotypically unreasonable boss and make this behaviour seem absurd. It is the exaggeration of these stereotypes and clichés that creates the satire and so the comic effect. I will discuss how effective I believe this satire to be later in this

Corporate clichés. Presentations, graphs and charts and a board room.

Mr Bunny depicted with all the trappings of big business. Large desk, plush office, money and certificates.

Fig .7
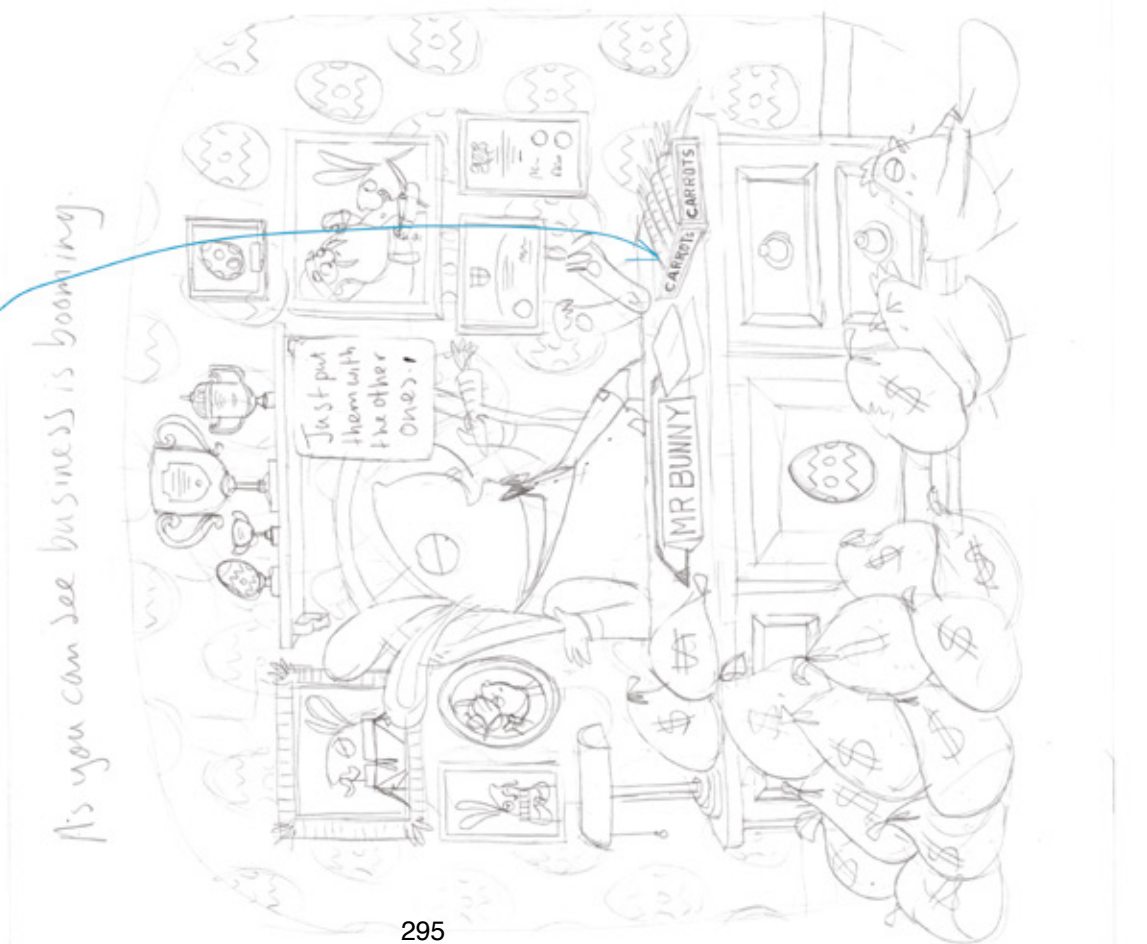
Fig.8 Mr Bunny's
exaggerated
expression of fury
at his employees.

Fig.9 Mr Bunny hit by a wave of chocolate.
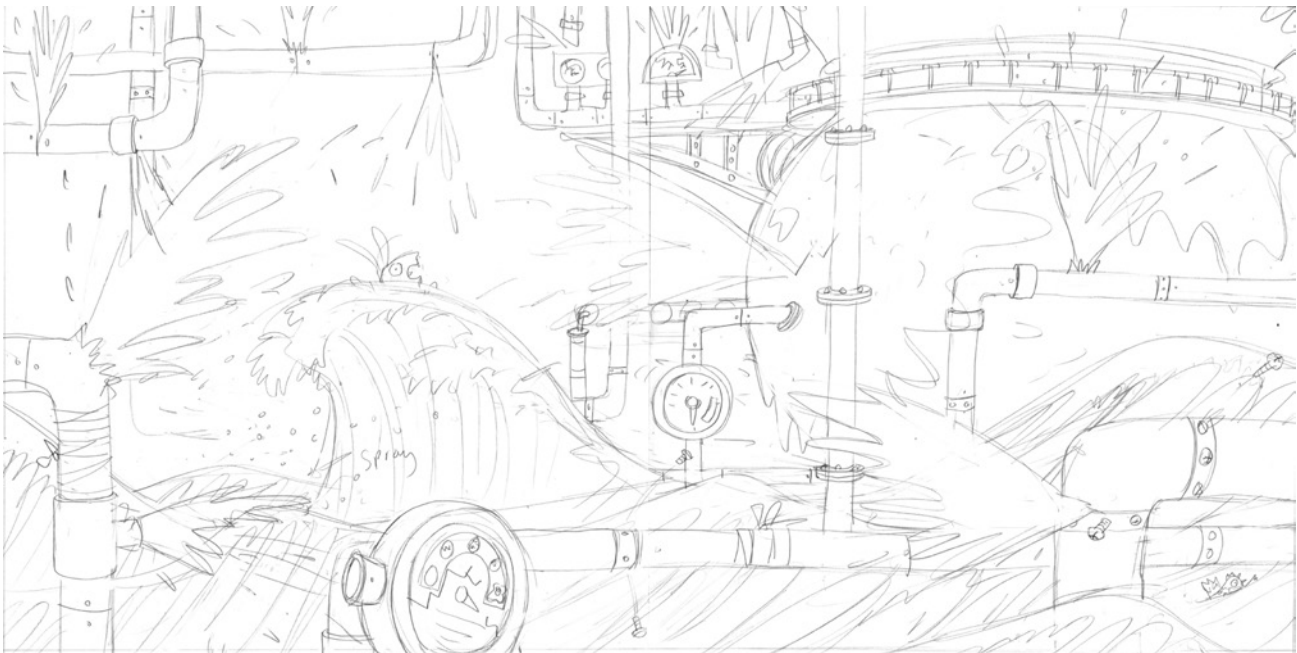
Fig.10 Colour thumbnails.

analysis.

During the roughs stage, I refined Mr Bunny's character to be the ultimate authority figure with the intention of reducing the audience's sympathy for him. On reflection, this seems to intensify the comic effect when he is put into a slapstick situation. When Mr Bunny is hit by a wave of chocolate (fig.9) I believe this has a comic effect because the reader feels some animosity towards him. I do not believe the same effect would occur if it was a character we felt sympathy for, such as one of the chickens or Edgar the Quality Control Unicorn.

Similar to previous book projects, I found this a productive stage for the creation of comic elements such as subplots. Throughout the book you can follow the journey of Debbie the lost chicken who fell in the chocolate vat on her first day on the job. This provides a vehicle to include extra slapstick and the surprise and recognition when the reader spots her in the background.

This stage also allowed me to introduce comedy through callbacks, which involves referring to or expanding on a previous joke. An example of this is Vera, the chicken who has booked a holiday in the Maldives just as Mr Bunny cancels all holidays. She is referred to repeatedly, such as when during the strike she has a placard demanding more holidays and at the end when she has sent a postcard from the Maldives.

4) Colour Artwork

This phase of the process was illuminating in terms of whether particular colours augment a comic effect. The publisher requested that I used a muted palette that echoed 'Farrow and Ball' colours (emailed dated 10/12/15). I was concerned by this because I realised that 'I always associate wild and over the top colouring with anarchic comedy' and that I 'didn't want the muted colours to mute the emotions' (reflective journal entry 18/01/16). On reflection my fears were unfounded. After creating a set of colour thumbnails to test the 'Farrow and Ball' colours (fig.10) I believe I created a sophisticated palette that pleased the publishers and I identified no detrimental effect on the humour. I have no experiences to suggest an overall colour scheme can effect humour dramatically but I have observed that making the correct colours choices in specific areas can augment humour.

I found that this was particularly the case for visual parodies. The colours of the Union of Chickens badges (fig.11) worn by the striking chickens deliberately use colours and shapes from real trade union logos (fig.11) to emphasise the parody. The final spread showing the new and improved factory (fig.13) is brightly coloured to reflect the interiors of trendy technology companies (fig.12) and make that reference recognisable.

Fig.11 Trade union logos that inspired 'The Union of Chickens' badges.

Fig.12
Technology company interiors that inspired the colours for the new and improved version of Mr Bunny's factory. Google campus Dublin (n.d).

Fig.13 Mr Bunny's new factory which references technology company interiors.

Working within the Publishing Industry

The process of creating *Mr Bunny* combined with my experiences detailed in the other analyses has led me to believe that the publisher-author relationship is one of the most influential factors on humour after my own personal taste and sense of humour.

When examining the process of creating *Mr Bunny* I identified a variety of instances where publisher input has changed the humorous content of this book. Making *Haunted Farm* demonstrated that this input can sometimes negatively affect the outcome of the humour but in this case my analysis has led me to believe it had an generally positive effect. The following examples demonstrate why.

Sacrificing jokes for narrative.

I was encouraged to edit out a particular spread I had included for comic effect. It involved the chickens in the staff canteen (figs.14,15) and utilised observational and physical humour. My editor suggested that it would create a more functional narrative if it were removed, commenting 'not sure the canteen spread is quite necessary in the context of the story' and suggesting that if Mr Bunny needs the chicken to eat chocolate to lay eggs why would he want a canteen? (email 27/10/15).

I agreed that removing the canteen page in favour of allowing a double page spread for the over feeding of the egg layers would contribute more directly to the overall narrative. This meant losing the observational and physical humour the canteen would have provided and drawing more of a focus to the satire provided by the central narrative. On reflection, I think the satirical element is one of Mr Bunny's strengths, which I will discuss further later in this analysis, so this piece of editorial impact had a positive effect on the humour even if it somewhat altered it's tone.

Toilet humour and the removal of bum holes.

I originally included small pink dots on the backsides of the laying chickens to suggest bum holes. I included these because I felt they provided a small touch of toilet humour, which my experiences of reading with children has led me to believe they would find amusing.

Once I received the proofs for *Mr Bunny* I noticed that all of these pink dots had been removed (figs.16,17). I asked why this had been done but I never received an answer.

Fig.14 Canteen sketchbook image.

Fig.15 Canteen page thumbnail.
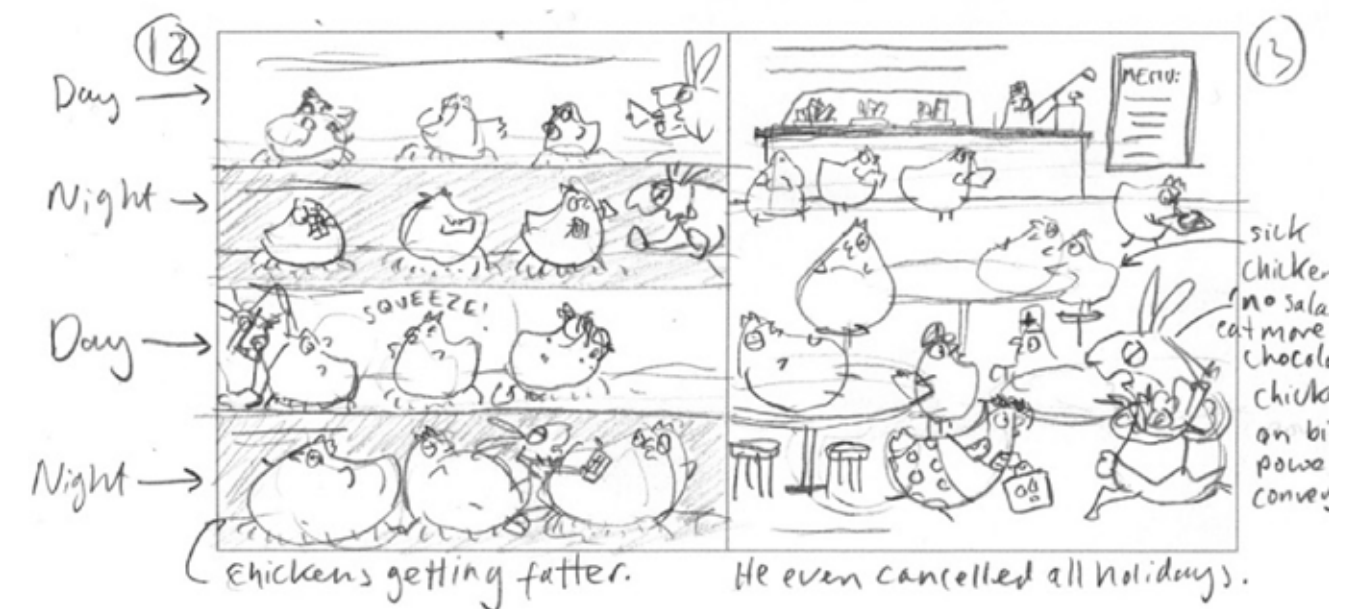
Fig.16 Original PSD file. Chicken with bum hole in place.
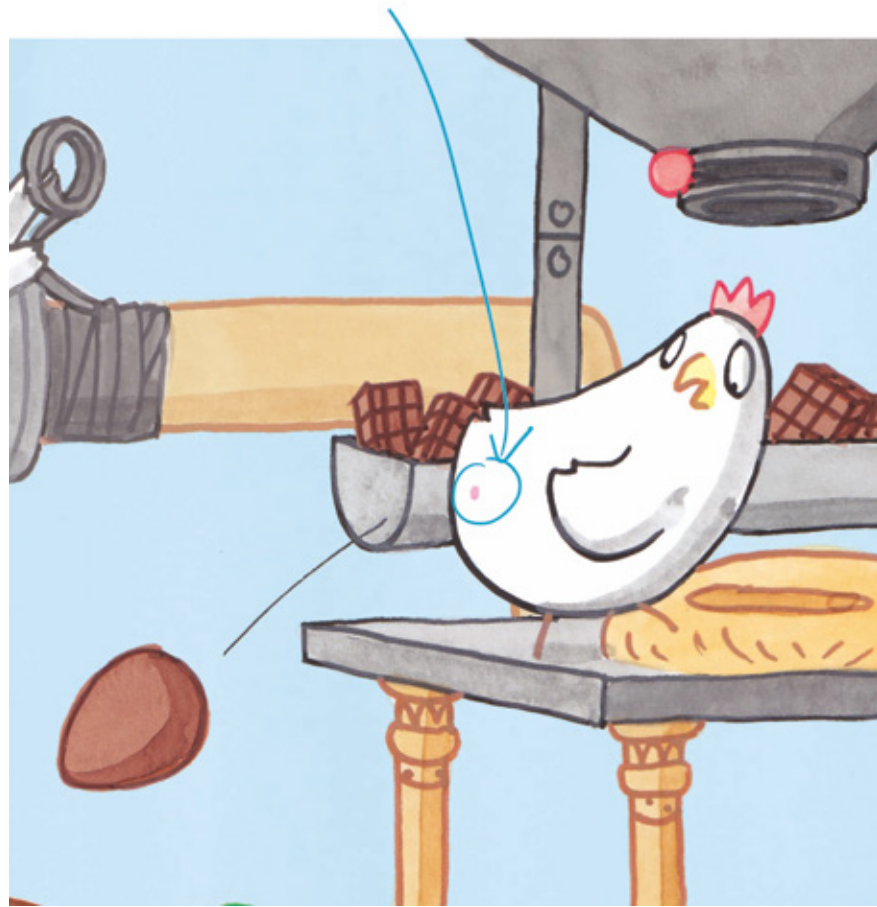
Fig.17 Printed proofs. Bum hole removed.

Fig.18 Rough of the original composition of the wave spread.
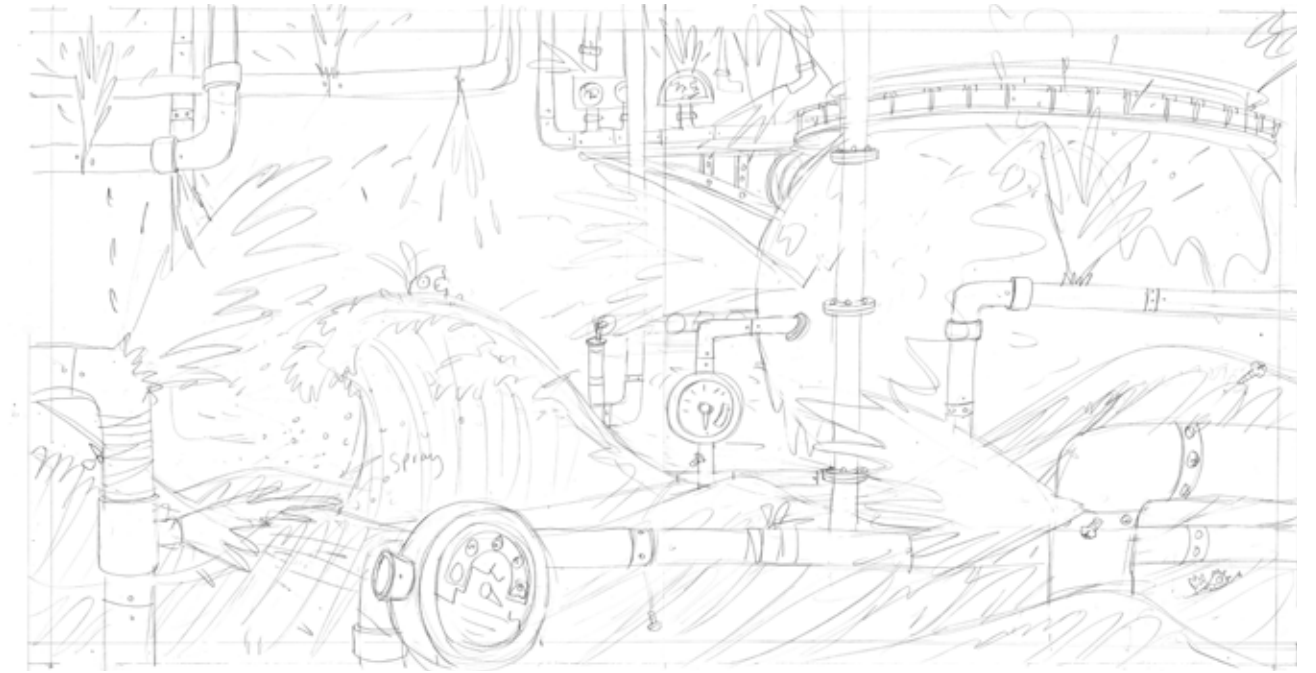
Fig.19 Revised composition of the wave spread.

Based on my other experiences of including toilet humour in children's books, I speculate that this might be concerned with the perceived sensitivity of the American market to toilet humour. While making *Haunted Farm* the publishers felt that poo-related humour would not be acceptable in this market so I believe a bum hole might provoke a similar reaction.

I chose not to fight to get the bum holes reinstated because I felt that in isolation it would not have a major impact on the overall humorous effect of the book. Along with this it was nearing the end of this project and I had become exhausted trying to meet the tight deadlines. This made me less motived to enter into discussions over seemingly minor elements.

On reflection and consideration of what occurred with *Haunted Farm* (see appendix 1), it was the combination of many such small changes that created a dramatic change in the overall humour. Perhaps a method of safeguarding against this could be to question each small change and decide if it is valid.

Layout changes to augment comic effect.

I cannot identify a limited range of specific elements that controls the humour. My experiences suggest that the maker must change and tweak every aspect of the book, from the layout to the colours to the image content, to achieve a humorous effect and alter how well it functions.

One example of this was a minor layout change to one of the spreads that I believe substantially augments a joke. The spread where Mr Bunny is submerged in a wave of chocolate (fig.19) relies, in part, on contrast to achieve its physical comedy. The spread preceding it shows a comparatively calm scene with a few suggestions of the explosion to come. It is the surprise caused by the page turn revealing that scene reprised in total chocolate chaos, contrasting the calm, that helps create that comic effect.

The publisher suggested that to augment this effect the original spread design (fig.18) should be cropped inwards to zoom in on the action. On reflection, this did emphasis this feeling of chaos because it makes the wave seem larger and brings the reader's viewpoint close into the spray and splashes. I believe I had not picked up on this effect myself because extended exposure to the work had made me overly familiar with it, so it became difficult to identify approaches different to those I had already taken. This shows the importance of receiving feedback from people familiar with the mechanics of children's books to enhance humorous effect.
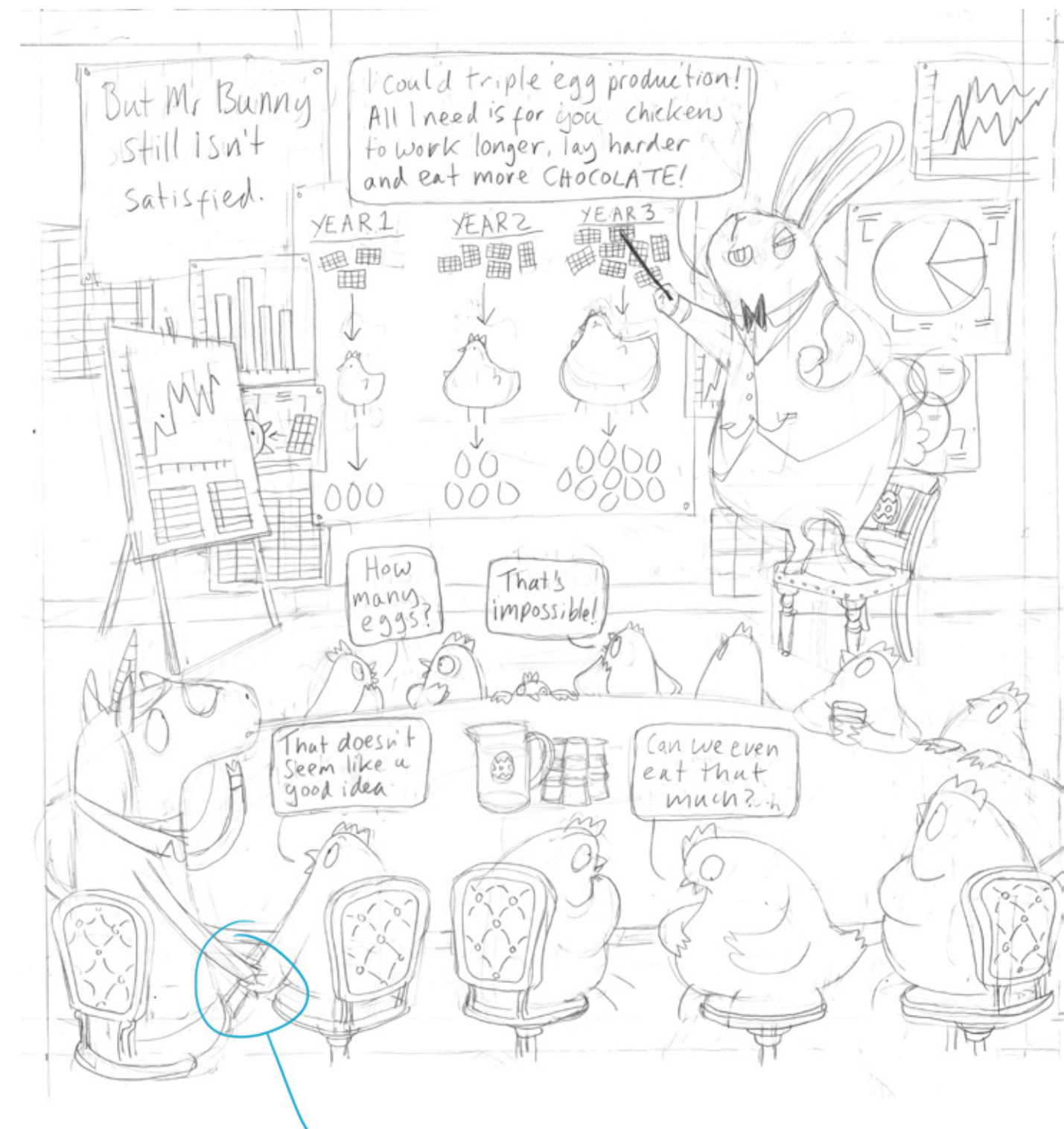
Fig.20 Example of the Lacy and Edgar love story subplot. Holding hands.

When I created the roughs I added a subplot that was going to chart a love story between a chicken called Lacy and Edgar the Quality Control Unicorn (fig.20). My motivation behind this was that I wanted to include some crossover humour that would appeal to older readers and thought I could do this though an incongruous parody of the classic Romeo and Juliet forbidden love story.

On 14/01/16 I received an email from the publisher asking for this subplot to be removed:

Please replace the joke about Lacy and Edgar with something more child-centred. Sorry if I seem like a kill-joy, but while adults may find it funny, I know that this sub-plot will reduce the market for your book and limit the number of foreign publishers that will buy it. The book is very strong without this sub-plot and already packed with jokes that adults will enjoy. Removing the sub-plot won't weaken your book, but it will give it a much greater chance of success.

As I have mentioned in previous analyses, I want my books to reach as wide an audience as possible. To ensure this I decided to sacrifice this humorous subplot as advised by the publisher.

On reflection I do not believe this changes the overall nature of the humorous content considerably. I have found previously that multiple minor changes can distort humour and diminish its effectiveness but in this instance I do not believe there has been enough minor changes to have this detrimental effect. In addition, I believe it is the satirical humour that is the strength of this book and so removing an instance of parodic humour did not diminish this asset.

Funny Meets Serious

In previous books projects I have not utilised humour as a tool to talk about issues that could be perceived as serious, instead using humour purely to elicit an amused reaction. During the creation of *Mr Bunny* this changed.

An unexpected result that occurred through the creation of *Mr Bunny* is that I have used humour to talk about what could be seen as serious issues. To an adult these issues could be seen as workers rights but 'children will probably see this as more of a matter of fairness' (reflective journal 03/01/16). This initially emerged unconsciously during the process of creating the book.

Previously I have consciously steered away from including a moral lesson in my work because there is a perception that children's books should in some way be improving to the reader, what Rosen (2014) describes as 'saving the child'. I feel that this can often come across as patronising. I did not want the more serious themes 'to overwhelm the humour by making the book too moral or preaching' (reflective journal 13/11/15) and inhibit the comic effect.

Once I noticed that the humour emerging was dealing with serious issues I was surprised to find that this moral basis to the story provided an essential vehicle for comic aspects, taking the form of satire. On reflection, I believe having humorous overtones made what could be quite dark or dry issues understandable and relatable for my readership. The exaggeration of Mr Bunny's unfair actions, vanity and authoritarian character (figs.9,10,11) made the nature of his behaviour clear but also seem absurd and unreasonable while still inherently comic.

I believe that this unexpected content stems from a change in my own personal interests. I have become increasingly politically dissatisfied recently and I find that the content I consume unconsciously comes through in my practice, such as my interest in classic horror movies emerging in *The Mystery of the Haunted Farm*. I believe these new influences were allowed to come through in this book because of the good relationship I have with this publisher and the creative freedom I am allowed. As a result, the content of the books I make for them is more spontaneous and unselfconscious, which not only allows for a better quality of humour but, in this case, for me to use humour as a tool to talk about other issues.

Conclusion

I originally set out to create a humorous book that did not rely on a parody of a cultural reference point or genre as the core of the humour. I believe this analysis has shown how I capitalised on other forms of comedy such as physical comedy, incongruity and observational comedy. I also introduced satire, a new type of comedy that I had not used before, which I believe stemmed from my own changing interests. The introduction of this type of humour allowed me to present a criticism of certain behaviour but without it becoming moralising or patronising, and also provided a point of difference from the other books created for this research.

The early stages of developing the book proved the most productive for the emergence of humorous content. Situation and observational comedy emerged most readily in the big picture and sketchbook stage. The thumbnail stage was more successful for developing comedy that relies on timing and reveals. This is in accordance with what I discovered during previous projects. On reflection I can see the satirical elements emerging during the development thumbnail stages but they did so more strongly during the roughs stage, which is when I became conscious of it.

The use of the big picture to allow instances of humour to emerge proved successful for this project and for *The Doughnut of Doom*. Much of the content from it was included in the books and is an approach I will use in the future.

Working with the publisher has presented new instances of humour perceived as inappropriate, relating to instances of toilet humour and age appropriateness. This suggests a sensitivity towards particular types of humour, which in turn impacts on the kind of humour I can use within my practice. Overall though, the publisher/practitioner relationship was positive.

In terms of the humour, I consider *Mr Bunny* to be more successful than the previous book project, *The Doughnut of Doom,* because it caused me to expand my repertoire and include new types of humour. I fear that to continue to reuse the same techniques, such as parodies of genres, would cause my books to become predictable and so diminishing the humorous effect.

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Appendix 5

Interview with Nadia Shireen

A digital interview conducted via email. Responses received on 18th October 2019.

Interviewer: Elys Dolan
Interviewee: Nadia Shireen.

What does your book making process look like? For example, do you write a text, then do character drawings, then do thumbnails, then do artwork etc.

It's quite chaotic, I haven't nailed a firm process yet and maybe i never will! But generally,it starts with sketchbook doodles. I try and relax, i try to remember to enjoy myself. I will find a character i like and then draw he/she/it over and over. slowly, the character may reveal itself, or i will draw an emotion - sad, pensive, delighted - and then try and figure out why that emotion may have happened. Then it develops, snowball-like. My wediot (editor?) has learned how to /read. my thumbnails and ideas and has faith i'll make it all look pretty by the end, which is great. Maybe if i was working with lots of different editors, it would be different and i'd have to convince them i know what i'm doing a bit more.

Do you intentionally try to make your work funny or does it emerge naturally during the making of the book?

I think it's a natural impulse for me, because my other natural impulse is melancholy, so they balance each other out a little.

If it is intentional, do you have a specific audience in mind who you're trying to make laugh? For example: Parents, kids, yourself, a specific person you know?

I always want to make myself laugh, because that's the only barometer i can accurately gauge. Often the stuff that makes me laugh makes other people laugh. theres no other way of knowing. Sometimes when i do readings, there will be the odd stony-faced child (or adult.)

Are there any factors that affect whether the work you make is funny or not? For example, whether you're enjoying the project, time pressure due to deadlines etc.

Time pressure is always there, but is no excuse for not making the book funny! So hopefully that

doesn't affect things too much. I mean, just having a deadline is essential to get the thing done. Certainly if you're enjoying it then i think that can carry over into the work. But usually i lay the gags down quite early on in the process - the point at which i'm losing the will to live is usually very near the end, when i'm tweaking final bits of artwork.

Is there a part of the process of making a book that you enjoy the most and why? For example, creating characters, doing the artwork etc.

I think all parts of the process have their own joys and challenges. trying to create a story from nowhere is both thrilling and daunting. i love it when i've got all the scaffolding in place - the pages are laid out, the editor thinks it's great, and i get to just throw myself into artwork. That stage is fun.

Your stories often have an incongruous or slightly surreal premise (e.g a lost space cow trying to commune with sheep). Why do you choose these situations for your stories and how do they develop?

I don't know, is the honest if unhelpful answer. i often worry my ideas are too 'normal'. I don't try to give my stories a message, i just try to make them interesting. Kids deserve a good yarn. also i have a very bad attention span, so i'm trying to keep myself interested.

Your characters are often humorous in their design (e.g. a bear in a bee outfit), and their expressions, movements and postures (e.g. Fatcat). How do you go about creating these characters? For example, do you do any research? Do you have to draw them repeatedly to get them right?

I don't really do any research if i'm honest. That's terrible to admit but it's true. i don't have time! When i was a student i had this idea that i'd have loads of time to be thoughtful and arty and develop my practise in sketchbooks, but the reality of my life at the moment is that i sit down at my desk and just go for it. Dive straight in. When i have more hours to work maybe that will change. I do draw characters over and over again, but i still have a huge consistency problem that my art editors always pull me up on.

Do you know how your publishers feel about your use of humour in your work? Is it something they encourage?

Yeah, they seem into it! I have a great relationship with my editor and we both like jokes.

Does the input you receive from the publisher, such as editorial and design feedback, influence the humour? For instance, do they help you refine and develop the jokes?

Not the jokes specifically. I do get editorial help with just the flow of the whole project, maybe she'll point out if a sentence is a bit lifeless. But i tend to do the funny stuff myself.

Have you encountered any cross-cultural issues to do with international co-editions that have affected your use of humour? For example, jokes, imagery or wording that's had to be changed because it didn't work in a different language, or things that we might find funny in the U.K that are not as funny in a different culture.

Not that I'm aware of… but i'll look out for it. i haven't really spoken to anyone overseas about how my work is perceived. that would be interesting!

Appendix 6

Interview with Meg McLaren

A digital interview conducted via email. Responses received on 24th November 2017.

Interviewer: Elys Dolan
Interviewee: Meg McLaren

Do you intentionally try to make your work funny or does it emerge naturally during the making of the book?

I'd say it's a little of both. I think humour is a really great way to warm an audience to a character and a good way to expose their flaws. By drawing my characters as I'm writing I find their personalities uncover themselves, often in humorous ways. I don't strive to be funny or think too hard about it, not that the humour isn't important but I try not to force it in. Instead of thinking how to make something funny I aim more for a sense of lightness and fun. My books tend to be filled with background details which provide much of the humour and these are rarely thought out in the initial writing process. I only add them when I come to do the final artwork so the humour grows as the book is made.

It's in my nature to respond to situations with a joke so it's partly just the way I am that I try and incorporate humour into everything but I do bear in mind that I am writing for a young audience. One of the notes to myself in my Pigeon P.I. sketchbook said 'Is it going to be fun to read?' I try to keep that in mind while I'm re-reading each draft of a story.

If it is intentional do you have a specific audience in mind who you're trying to make laugh? E.g. Parents, kids, yourself, a specific people you know?

Selfishly, I am writing for my self. Humour is so subjective and so specific to each individual that it's very hard to write a joke with a particular audience in mind and have it land exactly how you thought it would. I write and draw things that amuse me and I am willing to aim for a titter, a smirk or a chuckle, it doesn't need to be a laugh. There are some jokes in Pigeon P.I. that are specifically for detective fans but as I myself am a detective fan they're sort of just for me too. Very few of my jokes are consciously crafted but there are times when you have to make a decision about what is the funniest option. For Pigeon P.I. I had to decide what is the funniest quiet-but-impractical food. Obviously, the answer is jelly but that is only my opinion. You might think it's soup. In the case of that particular joke I can tell you why I think jelly is funnier than soup.

Everything in my books, whether it's grammar or logic, has to make sense to me because my name is on the front and if anyone asks I have to know the answer. The same is true of the jokes, I have to know why these things are funny and so really I can only write jokes for myself. But my sense of humour is quite broad so hopefully there is something for everyone

The majority of my jokes are really there to fill some sort of space, they're decorative, and so I cram the background with jokes for the 15th read. There's a real mixture of visual jokes, word play, silliness and some so simple that they'll barely register as a joke. These are for the adults who are tired of reading the same story over and over again and for the kids that didn't notice that pigeon had an ice cream the first 14 times, in the hope that with every read they'll discover something new. I know very young readers won't understand every little detail but I hope that as they grow older and their language skills develop they'll get more and more from the book. I want my books to draw readers in, to keep them there exploring the pages, and humour is a great way to do that.

Your books are full of appealing characters who are often funny in both their physical appearance and the way they move and act. A good example of this can be seen in the chaotic, backstage antics of the huge cast of rabbits in Life is Magic. How do you go about developing these characters?

For me, Houdini was the hardest rabbit to draw because he has a certain posture and if his dimensions are off it can easily make him look wrong. He is poised and presenting like a magician's assistant as opposed to the bad-postured, marshmallowy background bunnies. They appeared in my sketchbook exactly as they are. They're hardly life-like but I think their soft appearance makes them instantly inviting because there are no harsh edges. They are slightly ridiculous, non-threatening lumps. I don't know that I could make a realistic rabbit appealing in the same way.

What I like to do is to make sure that all the background characters have their own narrative or their own motivations and relationships within the group. Most of them have names too. These aren't important for anyone else to know but it helps makes sure that everyone has something specific to do. This also helps with the continuity of the book. There aren't random rabbits on every page, they can all be seen time and again doing different things, usually interacting in the same friend groups. I think it's important that they have their own inner lives to make them characters in themselves and not simply a faceless group of rabbits. My favourite joke in Life is Magic is one that probably no-one ever notices and it's that there are two rabbits named Hide and Seek who are playing hide and seek throughout the book. When they appear, one of them is always looking for the other until the last few pages where they have important magic work to do,

and then they finally find each other. This is not important, or even that funny, but it gives those rabbits something purposeful to do and that gives readers a reason to be interested in them as characters.

In Pigeon P.I. you create a wonderfully amusing parody of noir detective films. Did you deliberately set out to create an ironic take on this genre or did that developed unconsciously?

What I set out to make, whether I achieved it or not, was a proper noir (or possibly it's neo-noir, I guess.) My publisher and I discussed early on the tropes and plot points from this sort of fiction and established that we didn't want to make a parody and we didn't want a book full of very specific jokes that only fans of old movies would understand. We wanted the characters, the world and story to be satisfying in themselves. I am aware that by exaggerating certain characteristics and devices, and using a pigeon as a detective, we are doing so to humorous effect but this isn't a spoof of a noir, it is a noir. It just happens to be for children. It's a book inspired by my love of the genre. I'm a huge fan of detective books, films and I love an afternoon mystery TV show most of all. If anything I wanted to make an homage, and to hopefully inspire a few readers to fall in love with detective stories just like I did.

How do you choose which details to include that create that noir detective film feel? For example, putting Murray in that bowtie and particular style of hat. Did you have to draw many versions of him to get the right look?

The world of the book actually came quite easily because it's really a case of me picking and choosing my favourite elements from noir films. It's a world built up of a hundred little pieces of things I've half remembered. It's my memory of a fictional world. I wanted to keep the dramatic lighting because I find it so appealing but I wanted these elements to serve a purpose where they could. Silhouettes, for example, are a great way of showing the feather thief and building to a great reveal without actually having to hide him from the reader. But the shadowy, rain-drenched city only works when balanced with the humour in the book, the brightness of the stolen feathers and Vee. Vee is purposefully much brighter, both in personality and visually, than Murray and she should look a little out of place in his environment because she's there to let the light back it.

Murray has been pretty much the same since the first time I drew him. I was sketching and watching detective shows (which is traditionally how I write) and in a flash I knew what I wanted to write a film noir detective book and I was going to call it Pigeon P.I. or Pigeon Pie. I immediately researched Humphrey Bogart because he's who I think of when I think of film noir, and I drew a pigeon version of one of the posters I saw in which he was wearing a hat and bow tie. I also drew

a version of Murray wearing a tie but to me a tie suggests the need for a shirt collar where a bow tie doesn't. It's a little neater on a bird as the length of the tie wasn't pleasing and I found myself giving him almost a whole suit to make sense of the tie. Drawing characters helps me get to know them very quickly and visually the tie wasn't sitting right, but also he didn't look like the Murray I knew in a tie.

His hat has stayed more or less the same except it's been simplified every time I've drawn it. That's the sort of hat I imagine when I think of classic film noir and it doesn't matter if young children don't understand that this type of hat is a reference because all they see is Murray's hat, and really that's exactly what it is. On a page full of pigeons he's immediately easier to find because he has a hat. I found that hats were a great visual shorthand to single out important characters or, in the case of the police, to show their profession.

Vee has always had a beret because I based her on a young Faye Dunaway (in Bonnie and Clyde) and I wanted her to look preppy. Her 'hair' was shortened because the longer curl I'd given her was too grown up. She was the hardest to capture. My art director and I worked very hard on Vee. I'd draw her over and over and we'd talk through them trying to decide what it was about a particular body shape or a certain eye shape or colour that made her look young and friendly, and an appealing character.

When I pitched the book to Andersen I only had a title, a sketchbook full of characters and the world they lived in. It was after discussing the possibilities of this that I went back and wrote the book, and could fill in the blanks. Stanley took a while to find because until it was actually written I had no idea what the mystery was or who the culprit would be. I initially had a more exotic bird in mind but once I knew why the feathers were missing it made sense to use a very plain bird, and Stanley was already present in the first few pages as the partner who had left town. His bowler hat is designed to distinguish him instantly from Murray and, in my opinion, it's little more roguish.

It's possible that younger children might not recognise the references to detective films because they won't be familiar with them first hand. How do you feel about this?

The short answer is the references don't really matter. The long answer is much longer! To answer this question, which I think is important because books like this can so easily be dismissed as style over substance and then adults assume that children wont 'get it', I think you have to look closely at what the references are, the specificity of them and where they are placed on the page and within the context of the story.

I think that a lot of what are assumed to be film references in Pigeon P.I. are actually the tropes,

'rules' and tonal building blocks of the noir genre. My book has to contain certain elements to make it part of this genre, and so it has a lot in common with noir films. My book will always remind readers of the films, as opposed to noir novels, because picture books are a visual medium. We are both using the same visual vocabulary and my approach may feel heightened because I'm limited by my book's length and so have to communicate this in a short number of pages. I'm using a cynical detective, first person narration, a corrupt police force (corrupted by doughnuts!) and atmospheric ideas such as harsh shadows and rain drenched streets, among other things. Because these elements are so widely used in classic detective films they are sometimes mistaken in my book as direct references to one particular film whereas actually they're used in almost all of them.

The noir references are important to me because I wanted to create a specific tone and world for my characters to exist in, and to tell the story in a certain way but it shouldn't matter that young readers haven't encountered this before. It simply means that they have nothing to compare it to and so in their eyes it is not a reference at all. They will hopefully accept that this simply is the world of the book, and that this is how characters talk, dress and interact here. If young children haven't seen any detective films then this book hopefully serves as a great introduction. If readers have seen any films then anything they recognise is hopefully like a finding a little piece of the book written just for them.

I do reference some particular films. For example, the noodles on the last page are a nod to Blade Runner and Murray standing over a newspaper on the ground is a visual nod to Chinatown but these are incredibly specific and I wouldn't expect most detective fans to catch them either. There are other specific, silly jokes, for example a tin can labelled 'The Big Shrimp' instead of 'The Big Sleep,' but these are rare and this is where I think their positioning in the story is important. This joke is on a tin can that has nothing to do with the story, is not drawn attention to and won't affect a reader's understanding of the book. It's a throwaway joke and not integral to the plot. These background jokes take the form of building names and advertisements on walls and are there to reinforce the world we're in, to make it seem whole. They're also used on the title page and endpapers where they don't form part of the narrative. There are almost as many bird references in the book as there are detective ones and I don't expect that many young children will understand all of these either. But hopefully as they grow older these minor jokes will make more sense to them. What I'd like children to take away from the book is an understanding of what a detective is and the basics of how a mystery story works. I'd like them to get to know the characters and to understand the friendship dynamics within the book and, most of all, to enjoy reading it. I worked very hard to ensure that all of the important plot points, the characters, and the main thrust of the story are understandable to young readers and that that part is full of jokes for them. The references are just set dressing to help build a world for the characters to exist in.

I find that hard to judge, mainly because I can't remember, but I do think jokes inspire jokes. It's not always easy to think of yet another pun to write on a postcard but often my pages have a whole host of signs and adverts that add humour. Deadlines, or just a bad day, don't always help you get in the right frame of mind but I find that once I have one half decent idea then it'll cheer me up and then joke follows joke. That's how you can tell it's a good one, if it can lift you out of a terrible mood then it's sure to be a winner. Some of my favourite jokes are the silly little signs that I thought of on a random afternoon.

Do you know how your publisher feels about your use of humour in your work? Is it something they encourage?

Because there is so much to discuss when making a book we don't often talk about the humour directly unless it's getting in the way. We've had to cut some funny pages simply because they no longer made sense within the story or were taking up much needed space. We tend to refer to the humour as detail. My dummy for Life Is Magic, even when I began the final artwork, was very blank. I'd drawn all these rectangles to signify where posters would be and it was only when I began the final artwork that I realised I actually had to fill that space. It didn't really matter what I drew and I found it was more fun to fill them with silliness. There was a point where I thought Pigeon P.I. would be less detailed but every time I seem to get carried away and fill every gap I can with a joke. After working with Andersen Press over the course of three books they seem to trust that wherever there's a blank space in my dummy I'll fill it with something funny.

As we've gotten to know each other they have become more confident in pitching jokes or pointing out gaps where they think I'm missing one. In Pigeon P.I. there's a spread of birds on a washing line with laundry pegged to it. Originally, I handed in the artwork with some very bland tea towel patterns and my editor got back to me saying they thought I was missing an opportunity here. I went back and redesigned the tea towels and now they're much funnier and far more interesting. Sometimes I just don't feel like I need another joke but in that case I didn't see the opportunity and I'm glad they pointed it out because it lifted the whole spread.

Does the input you receive from the publisher, such as editorial and design feedback, influence the humour? For instance, do they help you refine and develop the jokes, parody and other comic moments or are you on your own with that?

I'm very lucky that my editor and art director seem to trust me to get on with it joke-wise. So far

they haven't told me anything wasn't funny enough. I think that mostly the humour is mine but picture books are very collaborative and we are always striving to make the very best book we can. If I'm stuck then they're the first people I'll ask. If a joke or the timing of something doesn't work then they'll let me know, especially if it's affecting the pacing of the story. Timing is very important. I love using comic panels because it allows you to reveal so much about characters by breaking down their reactions and because this becomes so much about the layout of the page, if it doesn't work we edit it exactly the same as everything else.

The thing is, the humour doesn't exist by itself. It happens at the exact same time as we're introducing characters and plot points and creating environments, and so it's woven so much into the fabric of the book that I find it hard to separate it out on its own.

When it comes to little throwaway lines there is the occasional aside where my art director or editor will say 'Oh we're missing something here, maybe they could say something like…' and then they'll say something perfect. I don't waste time trying to out-funny people. If I have a great line I'll write, if they say something hilarious I'll tell them it's great and I'll use it, but I will always remember that that joke wasn't mine.

Have you encountered any cross-cultural issues to do with international co-editions that have affected your use of humour? For example, jokes, imagery or wording that's had to be changed because it didn't work in a different language or things that we might find funny in the U.K that are not seen as amusing in a different culture.

Not many that I'm aware of. There's a part in Pigeon P.I. where Vee says 'Pleeeeeeeee-ooh snap!-eeeeeeeeeeeease!' This was discussed at length with the American publishers because they didn't think that Snap was a card game that was played there, and so the joke wasn't as funny. They were looking for an alternative card game that had the same effect but I don't think they actually found one. In the end I think it stayed as Snap.

For the French edition of Life Is Magic we did try to see if we could fix Houdini's instruction board, where the first letter of every word in English then spells out the word EARS, so that a similar joke would be made in French. That wasn't a problem the French publisher presented but we were re-doing the hand-lettering for them and set ourselves that challenge because it would've been nice for the joke to travel. Sadly, we didn't manage it. I speak no French whatsoever so I was no use.

Follow up questions sent via email on 4th December 2017. Response received on 11th December 2017.

Interviewer: Elys Dolan
Interviewee: Meg McLaren

In your first answer you mention that the background details provide a lot of the humour and that you only add them in the final artwork. Do you mean you add them when you're doing full sized roughs or when you're doing the colour artwork? What do you think it is about that particular stage of the process that lets you bring those details in?

Anything that affects the main plot is added in the roughs stage. When we first meet Murray we need to establish that he's a private eye so he has a certificate, we need to know that birds are going missing and that his detective agency is currently closed so all of these are included in the roughs because they are important things for the reader to know. Things that are small and insignificant, are mostly added when I'm doing the final colour artwork. My roughs can be just that, pretty rough. They vary in detail and the accuracy of their scale. Because some are very scratchily drawn I don't necessarily have the whole environment completely mapped out on the page yet and so the posters, cans and other objects that will contain detail don't necessarily exist yet. I think that so much time is spent in those early roughs stages trying to make everything in the story work that I don't focus as much on these smaller things, although often there'll be sketches and notes in my sketchbook about them that I'll rediscover later. Some tiny details are added at this roughs stage if I have already thought if them. For example the names of the buildings in the bird house street are all on the roughs. Some of the unused names (Flaming O's) were recycled for ads in the title page. 'The Big Shrimp' can on the last page is just a can with a fishbone on it in the roughs and was detailed in the colour art.

I draw all my images in pencil and colour digitally which works really well for adding detail in this way. I don't need to have every little detail prepared before I begin colouring because working digitally makes it easy to add, subtract and move things around as long as I'm not interfering with the overall layout or with the space for the text. I can colour most of a page and then work on another before coming back to add all the lettering to the first one, or wait until I have an idea for a poster and come back to it when I'm ready. Not having to have every little thing organised before I can begin colouring a page allows me to feel less pressured and be more creative because I'm working at my own pace.

What I think provides much of the detail in both books are the title pages, and in Pigeon P.I. the endpapers. These are always made after I finish the rest of the artwork and I think by that point

I've really gotten into my stride with the book and, apart from adding all the essential copyright information, I'm really free to make them as fun and informative as I like. I think they're great spaces to introduce readers to your world and to round it out.

On the subject of these background details, would you count Hide and Seek from Life is Magic and their sub-plot as one of those details?

I guess I do consider Hide and Seek to be one of these details because it's so informal. They aren't important characters and they're not on every page so I don't know if they even count as a sub-plot. They just pop up now and then playing their game and then disappear. In my roughs there are often rabbits hiding but I don't think anyone in particular is ever looking for them. I don't do roughs in colour, and as you'll see in the attached sketches not all of the rabbits are present in the roughs, so it's only when the rabbits got their individual markings that this became the same rabbits time and again.

They first appear on the page where we see all the bunnies together and this was the first colour artwork I did. This first page was a case of finding fun things for about 40 rabbits to do, and I named them to make it easier for myself remember to put them on other pages. The veg box was a late addition to this page and so having a rabbit in the box and a rabbit looking for them seemed funny. These two were known to me as Hide and Seek and that became a joke throughout just to amuse myself and to give them something to do. They were never discussed as a plot point with my publisher or as having a plot of their own, but I included them on the dust jacket flaps with their names so that if anyone wanted to they could follow them through the book and their names would make now sense.

Appendix 7

Interview with Jarvis

A digital interview conducted via email. Responses received on 28th January 2018.

Interviewer: Elys Dolan
Interviewee: Jarvis

Interview questions for Jarvis

Do you intentionally try to make your work funny or does it emerge naturally during the making of the book?

My instinct is to always make something funny, I'm one of them annoying people who tries to make a joke all the time. Then now and again ill want to do something a bit 'serious' but i always get drawn back to comedy.

If it is intentional do you have a specific audience in mind who you're trying to make laugh? E.g. Parents, kids, yourself, a specific people you know?

When I started out it was just me. But then when I started reading to kids and parents, i began to try and play to that audience a bit. So first I think 'do I like this?' and if I do 'will a room full of kids like it?'. Its all a gut feeling though! i don't try things out before making the books. Sometimes the humour isn't necessarily on the page but it can be in the telling of it. For instance my dad used to tell me a story about a spider as a kid and he would pretend to be a spider and throw his arms around and we just couldn't stop laughing at that, so i try to include sounds or potential actions. In fact, actions and sounds go down a lot better than word play for a 4 year old!

Your books are full of appealing characters who are often funny in both their physical appearance and the way they move and act. A good example of this is in Alan's Big, Scary Teeth. Alan looks hilarious with his teeth out but it's also small moments, such as when he's meticulous filing his nails, that contribute to an overall humorous character. How do you go about developing these characters?

I try and keep the main characters really simple. If they can look simple and convey emotion and look 'alive' then I'm happy. I actually like simple bold geometric shapes…from furniture to clothes, i like simple looking things, so fundamentally the work i make is actually very simple. They can

become quite complicated when i layer it all up but at the root of it, its all very simple. The 'alive' feeling i think can come down to making one drawing that just captures an essence of a character, i can't quite explain it…sometimes a line slightly to the left or an eye slightly higher on one drawing can spark the character into life. I have no idea how this works, but if i try it a few times one usually hits the spot.

My favourite characters are usually 'oblivious' to something, they can't see something we can. Those characters are always in my favourite tv shows- Mr Bean…The Office…Tommy Cooper. Characters getting it wrong, without realising, and often glancing at the viewer in frustration or confusion. And all the viewer wants to do is tell them where they're going wrong but we can't so… we laugh (i think!). Its a bit like a pantomime, and the 'its behind you' part.

• In Mrs Mole, I'm Home! the pacing of the book feels so important to the humour. Having the page turn between Mr Mole thinking he's home and then revealing where he really is such an effective way of delivering that joke. How did you develop that rhythm? Do you use techniques such as thumbnails/story boarding to figure it out and did you have to experiment with different variations to get it spot on?

This book was written very quickly, and my initial idea was visual- a mole popping up somewhere he shouldn't. So actually the delivery of the joke was all i had, and it was more shaping a story from it. I do like the page turns in the book- i also had in mind a kind of American sitcom, each page turn could have its own 'Seinfeld' musical accent. And because that page turn was completely part of the idea from the beginning i actually sketched out the book entirely before presenting the idea (Usually i just show the text)

In Mrs Mole there's a sub-plot where we can follow two hat wearing worms through the book. How did this come about? Were they part of the initial idea for the book or did they come about somewhere during the process of making it, for example when you started the colour artwork?

I actually think i had them on one image and Audrey at Walker books thought it would be nice to see them throughout, and its a nice little thing to spot.

Are there any factors that affect whether the work you make is funny or not? For example, whether you're enjoying the project or not, time pressure due to deadlines etc.

Im not sure. I haven't been doing this long enough to see a pattern! But i know that some of the books i am most proud of haven't had the same reaction from the great reading public! And some which i wasn't sure of really took off.

Do you know how your publishers feels about your use of humour in your work? Is it something they encourage?

Yes they want me to make funny books, but importantly with 'heart' which is sometimes a weakness, sometimes I'm trying to chase a laugh so much i forget about the heart (See 'Fred Forgets' !) But if you can get both, thats the interesting spot. If you can laugh and feel something for the characters then thats what all the best funny art has.

Does the input you receive from the publisher, such as editorial and design feedback, influence the humour? For instance, do they help you refine and develop the jokes and the parody or are you on your own with that?

Im writing this just as i have submitted a batch of ideas to my publisher. My texts are always a real mess. The jokes are there and the story is there, but not necessarily in the right order! So yes the publishers help to shape them. And sometimes when we chat through things in meetings a new joke comes up. For instance in one meeting for my upcoming book 'Tropical Terry', i had a line which ended on 'seaweed salad', Audrey mentioned a 'sand sandwich' and it just sounded so much funnier so we swapped it out. Im very much about making the best picture book, If someone has a better suggestion to a joke I'm happy to use that! After all the people I'm working with have been living and breathing picture books for decades, i'm just at the beginning and still learning.

Have you encountered any cross-cultural issues to do with international co-editions that have affected your use of humour? For example, jokes, imagery or wording that's had to be changed because it didn't work in a different language or things that we might find funny in the U.K that are not as funny in a different culture.

Hmm well i like to have some little references to pop culture which may get lost in other countries- I'm thinking 'Gordon Ratzy' here in my book 'Mrs mole I'm home' which is really only thrown in for the parents. But the main elements of a story and the funny moments i try and make quite 'universal'.

Appendix 8

Interview with Sarah McIntyre

A digital interview conducted via email. Responses received on 3rd December 2018.

Interviewer: Elys Dolan
Interviewee: Sarah McIntyre

Do you intentionally try to make your work funny or does it emerge naturally during the making of the book?

The reason I didn't make comics as a kid was because I thought they all had to have a swift, clever punchline, like in the newspaper comics, and I could never think of one. But I found that when I start making comics or other narratives, life intrudes and it just IS funny. Or sometimes the setup will make things naturally funny. For example in Vern and Lettuce, a person running for a bus isn't funny, but a sheep running for a bus is, and looks even funnier if it's carrying a tuba. It's introducing an unusual element to the everyday.

If it is intentional do you have a specific audience in mind who you're trying to make laugh? E.g. Parents, kids, yourself, a specific people you know?

Everyone, I guess. Sometimes I know the more basic poo and fart jokes will go down a storm with the kids, but often adults laugh, too. And sometimes I do jokes that I know will go over the kids' heads, but as long as the story works well without getting the joke, that's fine.

Are there any factors that affect whether the work you make is funny or not? For example, whether you're enjoying the project or not, time pressure due to deadlines etc.

Yes, it's hard to make a story funny if editors keep trying to make it 'safe'. So much of humour is about at least a slight bit of transgression, and a lot of editors are too careful and tailor a funny story to be simply cheerful and perky. That's frustrating. And tone is very important; not everyone gets tone, and when an editor doesn't understand a tone I'm trying to achieve, it makes me wonder if anyone else will. That really dampens my spirits. Luckily I have a few trusted friends that I can run things to, to make sure things aren't only funny to me.

In 'There's a Shark in the Bath' the shark characters could have come across as threatening but in fact they are very funny. How did you go about designing these characters? Did you deliberately try to make them humorous? Did you have to refine that design to get it right?

I made them not very realistic: Papa Shark has a moustache, Mama Shark has eyelashes, Baby Shark has braces on his teeth. And there's no way those things could fit up a tiny plughole. I didn't want it to be TOO realistic because the story was inspired by my sister who, for awhile as a kid, was too scared to go into a swimming pool because of sharks, much less the ocean.

There's something about the incongruous combination of dinosaurs and the emergency services in 'Dinosaur Police' and 'Dinosaur Firefighters' that I find innately funny. What made you decide to combine those two elements in these books? Is it something that you found funny?

That was my editor's idea! Her kid loved Dinosaurs and police, and firefighters, so she gave me those two titles and I ran with them. Same with There's a Shark in the Bath, actually. It was much easier working that way with Scholastic, her coming up with the titles and letting me write relevant stories. When I introduced my own more subtle story, and we didn't agree on a title straight away, that whole process was MUCH harder to agree, particularly with input from the Sales team. I kind of wish I'd just stuck to Dinosaur Ambulance, but I wanted to try something different.

In 'Dinosaur Firefighters' a lot of physical comedy comes from Dipsy as she struggles to contend with her size in her new job. How did you come up with these moments? Are there processes that you use to invent them e.g. experimental character development drawings?

Not really! I can instantly relate to the problems Dipsy encounters because I've always been a big girl. But I let her push right to the borders of the page, so she feels a bit constricted. The two best examples of this are when she's interviewing for the job, squeezed in front of a little desk with a much smaller Chief Firefighter, and when she's miserable in the staff room, hunched over and being offered a mug of tea by a tiny Lesothosaurus. (I had to look at my character sheet on the studio wall to check it was a Lesothosaurus.)

'The New Neighbours' arguably deals with quite sensitive subject matter, such as judging people based on stereotypes and the fear of the unknown. This is a very poignant message considering the times we find ourselves in. In tandem with this serious theme there are humorous details throughout such as the chaos of the bunnies, untidiness of the pigs, the shocked expressions on the polar bears faces, a yak in a purple silk dressing gown etc. Along with this the growing exaggeration that occurs throughout the narrative, culminating in the threat of being buried alive in 'rat poop', adds a humorous element to the story. Did you consciously include these more humorous moments? From your prospective what purpose do they serve?

I mostly wanted the story to be funny; it's set in the Vern and Lettuce world, where everything is faintly ridiculous, but that makes everyone that much more loveable. I took inspiration several things, including a Norman Rockwell painting called 'The Gossips', which is a rather amusing progression of a bit of gossip from one person to another. I studied that picture in great detail when I was a kid, and loved the way it was a long story, but all in one picture. Rockwell is an absolute genius at capturing people's thoughts with their expressions. And as the build-up in my story gets more dramatic, I wanted to show how ridiculous it was, because none of the neighbours have actually met the rats yet, it's all conjecture, and they're kind of half-enjoying the build-up and the way it brings them together with a unified purpose.

Do you know how your publishers feels about your use of humour in your work? Is it something they encourage?

That's a David Fickling book and David definitely let me have free rein with that one (and Vern and Lettuce) and welcomes humour. At Scholastic, they're much more careful in the picture book area and they prefer things to be jolly rather than laugh-out-loud funny. It's a challenge to get the balance right between them worrying about getting in trouble and me being allowed to tell the story I want to tell. But they have a much wider reach than David Fickling Books in terms of sales. That said, humour doesn't tend to get reviews or media coverage; the books that win awards tend to be books about sad things, or refugees. I don't think I made a clear enough link for this book to win awards, I didn't want to bang on too hard about 'the message'. Maybe I should have done. But that might make it sound sad and didactic, and it's not that sort of book. The New Neighbours has sold fewer than 1000 copies and all but two Waterstone branches don't stock it; I'm worried it's going to disappear without a trace.

Does the input you receive from the publisher, such as editorial and design feedback, influence the humour? For instance, do they help you refine and develop the jokes and the parody or are you on your own with that?

The best help I get is from my friends - Philip Reeve, Gary Northfield, David O'Connell, Woodrow Phoenix, Viviane Schwarz. Jamie Smart and James Turner also really get humour, I'd ask them if I needed to. Most of them come from a comics background and they understand the structure of jokes and how to make them work. James Turner is probably the best, he knows how to set up a joke but ratchet it up one step further so something mildly funny becomes screamingly funny.

Have you encountered any cross-cultural issues to do with international co-editions that have affected your use of humour? For example, jokes, imagery or wording that's had to be changed because it didn't work in a different language or things that we might find funny in the U.K that are not as funny in a different culture.

To be honest, my picture books have done poorly in foreign markets, only our Reeve & McIntyre books have really cracked the co-edition business. The New Neighbours is the first book that's taken off with co-editions; it may not be selling well in the UK, but it's sold to at least eight foreign territories and they seem to like it. (I can't read the translations but my grownup German neighbour thought the RAT POO bit was hilarious. 'RATTENKACKA' - she kept saying it over and over and dying laughing.) I think half the reason it's sold is because the DFB rights person right now, Bronwen Bennie, is very good, whereas I don't think Scholastic even pull out my book at Bologna - they focus much more on school fairs.

With the Reeve & McIntyre books, three of the translators (Dutch - Sandra Hesselss, Hungarian - Orkey Akjay, Hebrew - Gili Bar-Hillel) often get in touch to say how much they enjoy reworking the jokes and giving the characters funny names that work in their own languages. (Feel free to talk to any of them about it, they're all on Twitter.) Occasionally Americans will leave odd comments on Amazon about how something didn't work, but it's definitely a cultural thing. (Sometimes it's just that they don't like bad things happening to characters, or the threat of bad things, because they want everything for children to be nice.) Also, the Americans like to change the titles, which we think affects the humour but they think is important. (They changed 'Jinks & O'Hare Funfair Repair' to 'Carnival in a Fix' which we think falls rather flat. But they were adamant.) We've had good feedback on the R&M books internationally, so I hope the translations are all top-quality.

Follow up questions sent via email on 19th December 2018. Response received on 20th December 2018.

Interviewer: Elys Dolan
Interviewee: Sarah McIntyre

In your answer to the first question you mentioned But I found that when I start making comics or other narratives, life intrudes and it just IS funny'. To clarify, is it through making the comics that you unconsciously start to include elements of recognizable, day to day, life which are naturally funny?

I guess it's just when I start having two characters talk with each other, situations naturally develop, and then accidents happen, and embarrassments, and flights of whimsy. I just keep them talking and usually something will eventually make me laugh. It's much easier when I have at least two characters, I find, because then I can pit their personalities against each other, which brings out their foibles.

You mentioned checking a character sheet to check that the chief firefighter is a Lesothosaurus. Possibly I'm showing my ignorance here but what's a character sheet? Are they character design drawings that you reference back to for things like consistency? I'm really nerdy when it comes to the way illustrators work.

Oh, I just call it that, I think maybe it's called a character bible? I'll attach a photo of what I had on the pinboard in front of me when I was working on Dinosaur Firefighters. It's a straight-on view of each character, preferably so they're to scale with each other. It's how I remember how many horns each has, how many stripes on their boots, etc. It helps with continuity.

Appendix 9

Interview with Matty Long

A face-face interview conducted on 28th April 2017 and transcribed by UK Transcriptions.

Interviewer: Elys Dolan
Interviewee: Matty Long.

Elys Dolan: Alright.

Matty Long: Have some great content creation here.

Elys Dolan: Indeed. Well, you know, it doesn't have to be great content creation. Can make you sound good in the edit.

Matty Long: Yes, for sure.

Elys Dolan: Alright. So, Matt, arguably, you make books that are funny.

Matty Long: Yes, okay. Arguably.

Elys Dolan: Arguably, yes. Well, I mean, the sense of humour-

Matty Long: Well, I haven't won any funny book awards, so…

Elys Dolan: No, you haven't. But it's one of the things that often comes up when you're reviewed. You've probably had audience feedback that suggests that they find it funny.

Matty Long: That's true, yes.

Elys Dolan: You know, I also occasionally find your artistic stylings amusing as well.

Matty Long: Thank you. Likewise.

Elys Dolan: But do you actually find it funny, when you read back one of your books now?

Matty Long: Find it funny? Yes, I'll laugh at bits. I'll laugh at certain bits. The thing is, sometimes,

I include jokes that I, kind of, know the audience might find funny, but that I don't, kind of, chuckle at myself.

Elys Dolan: Okay, right.

Matty Long: So, there are some things of my own stuff I find funny and, to be honest, I do, when I look back at things, I see new things and I find it funny. But there's also a case of I include things because I think that other people will find them funny. For me, it's, like, it's passable, it's amusing.

Elys Dolan: Okay. So, are you talking about other people find it funny, so that's your intended audience? So, is that kids, is it parents, is it book sellers, is it publishers?

Matty Long: Yes, it's not- I don't think about publishers or book sellers at all. It's mostly kids and parents. Like, when I get feedback from kids, the way they're attached to certain lines is really interesting. They'll find stuff funny that I don't think is that funny, but they're repeat it over and over. For example, in the first 'Super Happy Magic Forest' book, one of the kids is, like, "Who stole my frying pan?" and apparently he was going around the house saying, "Who stole my frying pan? Who stole my frying pan?"
In 'Slug of Doom', there was a bird, when Zorgoth breaks out, there's a bid and the bird is just saying- Zorgoth says, "Get out of my way," or something, and the bird is saying, "What bad manners." There was a kid in, like, Year 1, that I was visiting a school, and he kept going, "What bad manners. What bad manners," like, laughing to himself. There's a line, I'm now to the point where maybe I start to pre-empt this sort of thing, and there's a line in the new book that's pretty innocuous.
One of the goblins is holding up a fish and saying, "Buy my fish," and I just, for some reason, that sticks in my head as something that little kids might just find funny, and I can't- I'm not sure why that particular line. Probably because it's not as knowing as some of the other lines. Some of the lines are older. For example, intruders, one of the snowmen, snow guard, is shouting, "Intruders, and on market day," like, I don't expect kids to find that funny.
Is it that it's probably not that funny, but it's just the fact that the snowman is being specific as to why the intrusion is particularly bad. It's, like, "Oh, and it's market day," as if, you know…? I don't expect kids to find that funny. But older people might find it funny. Or it might not be funny at all.

Elys Dolan: So, are you always going up-? Because you're talking about not really knowing whether they're going to find it funny. You're, kind of, using your past experiences to figure out what your audience might like. Do you have any way of really knowing whether these- you know, if you've put something in that you think is humorous, whether anyone's going to find that funny? Or is it just a big risk?

Matty Long: Well, what I was just about to say was that nobody tends to come up to you and tell you the bits that weren't funny. So, there are loads of lines that I may have thought funny, I've never- and I'm lucky to get a lot of fan mail, and they'll reference specific parts, certain characters, I'll see kids in person, and there are loads of bits that have never been mentioned, so you don't know if they're funny or not. With a publisher, if there are a couple of things the publisher thinks on the page, that's fine, but I don't find it funny, are they really going to tell you?
My feedback from OUP is never, "Oh, we don't think this line is particularly funny," it's other things. It's always story-based. It's almost like they leave the humour to me and I've got to judge that. It's-

Elys Dolan: So, when you're alone, you know, at your desk, making the work, how do you judge which is the- you know, whether, "This is funny enough to leave in," or if, "It's not quite hitting the mark and I should take it out"?

Matty Long: Well, there was that one in 'Salty Dogs' that you didn't like. It's like I said, no one comes up to you and tells you things that aren't funny. But you will tell me things that you don't think are funny. So, you're left in an even harder spot, because there's you and there's me, and I'm, like, "Are people going to get that? Is it really-?" I mean, that particular line was quite… Do you know the one I'm talking about?

Elys Dolan: Is it the one, is it bird-?

Matty Long: It was the one with the turtle.

Elys Dolan: Oh, the turtles.

Matty Long: No, it was the one with the turtle talking to the narwhal and vice-versa. The turtle was hanging from-

Elys Dolan: I think we've got it here, yes.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: So, turtle talking to- oh, yes. Yes, you're right. "It is technically a tusk, but you won't be around long enough to tell my crew."

Matty Long: So, the joke here was, kind of, or I felt, was kind of that the turtle, in such a perilous position as he was, felt the need to point out that one of the members of the crazy horn crew didn't

have a horn, it was a tusk, and that he probably shouldn't be in the… It's not an instantaneous thing at all. It still might not be funny. I've never heard any feedback other than yours about that particular joke, not even from the publisher.

Like I said, my publisher doesn't tend to pick up on individual jokes. They'll say the ones they like. I don't think they've ever flagged-up a joke that didn't hit the mark, or they didn't feel hit the mark. Maybe, but I can't remember.

Elys Dolan: Do you think that's because they're just not so bothered about whether the little bits of humour work or not, or as opposed to just working as a narrative, as a story? Or is it because they're-

Matty Long: They're always very concerned with… They want, they like the jokes, but also, you know, the story has to move along at cantor. They always look very closely at, they always call it, the narrative text, i.e. that. All this is narrative text, but we call it bubble text and narrative text. They'll always make sure that it's working from page to page and that nothing's too broken up. So, they don't go to far into the actual, kind of, lines and jokes, the humour themselves. It's almost like I'm left to my own devices, and they don't want to impede on that too much. Yes, what was your question? Did I answer the question?

Elys Dolan: I think you did. I think we've moved on through a few of my other questions as well. So…

Matty Long: I know. I mean, your question was do I find my work funny, or when I look back, do I find it funny? The answer is yes, which is good. Which is good, I think.

Elys Dolan: Yes. Is it still as funny when you read it back now, the finished book, as when you had, sort of, you know, the idea in the first place?

Matty Long: Hmm. I think the distance away from it always helps. Because when you're within that process of doing it, there's just so much going on that you can't just sit back and see- you're seeing the finished thing. When you look back at your books, you're basically seeing the outcome. Whereas, when the jokes are there, it's the process, and it's harder to step back and see it in the perspective of a whole, a whole book and how it works at each moment. Because, at the time, you're just worrying about everything.

So, yes, it probably is a bit funnier when you go back and look at it. And you forget things that you did as well. So, you look back with, kind of, a genuine, you know, surprise, in a way. Or you just might like the way you drew a character, or how they're saying something, or the certain words that you chose, knowing, at the time, that you found it to be funny. But when you're doing it, the whole

thing, as I'm sure you'd probably agree, you're just so concerned with everything.

Elys Dolan: What, that you can no longer really see what is funny?

Matty Long: Yes, you can't- yes.

Elys Dolan: Well, you can't find your own humour in it anymore?

Matty Long: Yes, you can't. But it's not always the case. Like, I know the bits in the new book that are funny, but you don't sit there at your desk chucking to yourself, because you've got so much more work to do. It's not just about the jokes. Like, there are bits in this I think are funny, and I think, "People are going to laugh at this, but are they actually going to find the ending too familiar? Have I don't this right?" I'm telling myself this is the weakest of the three, you know?

Elys Dolan: Hmm.

Matty Long: That's the sort of shit that you have to put up with whilst you're making it. But when it's finally come out, that, kind of, anxiety has gone away, it's out, you've heard some nice things about it, you can look back on it, and you allow yourself- I think, basically, you allow yourself to enjoy it more than when you were actually making the thing. That would be it.

Elys Dolan: So, in the process of making the book then, so you're saying there's a lot of, sort of, pressure and anxiety involved and also, kind of, over- is it right to say there's, kind of, overfamiliarity with the things you've been doing, that-?

Matty Long: Yes, because you do it over and over, and sometimes you're staring at the page and, like, "Do I need another joke?" You've got to try and think of it there and then. You might be under pressure to deliver roughs, or edited roughs, as I was recently, and you've just got to think of something. What was the question?

Elys Dolan: It's fine, we've moved on from the question now.

Matty Long: Good.

Elys Dolan: So, you say-

Matty Long: Is this all recording okay? We can all hear?

Elys Dolan: Yes, I think it's all fine. Don't worry about the recording equipment.

Matty Long: Good.

Elys Dolan: So, if you ever think of it and, as you say, you might be under- you know, you've got the pressure for a deadline, you're working within the constraints of the publishing industry, and you say you've just got to think of something.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Are there ever times when you just can't, when it just doesn't happen?

Matty Long: Yes. You usually do a place-holder, sort of, line that may end up just being the finished line, because you still haven't thought of anything better.

Elys Dolan: When you say line, does that just apply to the writing side of things? Or, also, like, bits of imagery or characters that you might leave as they are and then go back to them later?

Matty Long: It's mostly the writing side of things. I know this might not be- it applies to the bubbles as well. I might want a character saying something and I just can't think of a snappy thing to say. So, I might just go with the first thing that comes to mind, with a view to changing it later. But, certainly, I am really guilty, when it comes to doing the main text, which also carries a lot of humour in my books, it's not just the bubbles and the characters, the narrative texts- I don't know if you, in your PhD, there's a better word for it.

Elys Dolan: No, that'll do. You know, you can use your own terminology.

Matty Long: Okay. Yes, the main text, the heading text, whatever, I am very guilty of putting place-holder stuff there. I always neglect that. Because, first and foremost, I just want to draw pictures. I draw it, I match the words to it afterwards. The speech bubbles are part of the visual language of the page, so they're, kind of, one with the drawings. However, there's always this main text that, more often than not, I will place-hold it and it bites me in the arse when it comes to delivering roughs and edits, and I still haven't thought of the right words.
I'm not one of these people that will type the whole book out, like a transcript of the book, it just does not work like that. I'm not a writer. That's what a writer would do, they would write the whole book, and then you'd to the images. I do the images first, my sketchbooks are just pictures and pictures. So, it's pictures first and then the words. So, more often than not, they're place-holders.

Elys Dolan: Is that how it works with the humour as well then? Because you do have a lot of visual humour in your books as well, that doesn't necessarily rely on, you know, the combination of word and image in the same way.

Matty Long: Hmm.

Elys Dolan: So, does that stuff come more naturally to you then, the visual humour? Like, you know, you've got plenty of slapstick, so you've got, you know, Trevor the mushroom set on fire in places. You've got, you know, Blossom falling on his arse, and all of that sort of thing.

Matty Long: Yes. It is, because, so far… You draw the sorts of things that humour can be extracted from very easily. So, even if you don't find what they're saying funny, the character itself might still look funny, and that helps, I think. Like, for example, you might not like what the narwhal is saying to the turtle, but the narwhal is wearing a bandana. That might help. There are little things that… So, yes, so the visual part of it is very important in being able to extract humour in a certain situation. It can enhance the line, for sure.
Like, the 'Salty Dogs' book, the animals, you know, animals wearing pirate outfits, that might do it for you even if… It's, like, a hedging your bets sort of thing. But it all works, it all comes together and works as whole. Yes, it is more than just the bubbles, isn't it? It's how they look, how the characters look at the same time.

Elys Dolan: Yes, and that's one of the things I wanted to-

Matty Long: There needs to be an absurdity to the situation. At least, that's how I work, yes. Interesting.

Elys Dolan: An absurdity to the situation? I mean, that is interesting. So, how do you create that absurdity? Because one of the things I wanted…

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: …which is probably connected to this, that I wanted to ask you about, is, you know, you use almost exclusively non-human characters.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: In 'Salty Dogs', it's all animals.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: So, why did you decide that these characters- why should they be animals and not just, you know, people pirates?

Matty Long: People pirates, yes. There were already enough people pirates. Why did I want them to be animals? Oddly, with 'Salty Dogs', I heard the term salty dog, and I thought, "Let's take that literally." I mean, human characters can be funny, they can be very funny. Because, I like, when looking at 'Salty Dogs', Captain Pugwash was something that I looked at and, I mean, those characters are- Pugwash's crew are really, like, round, and they're quite funny-looking. So, they can be very amusing. Why do animals…?

Elys Dolan: Is there just something, you know, naturally funny about, you know, sticking a turtle in a pirate hat, giving it a cutlass and calling them the Green Shell Gang that just makes it funny?

Matty Long: Well, you've seen the internet. Animals- yes. I mean, that's nothing something I've considered too much, why it was right to do it with animals.

Elys Dolan: So, it just seemed, like, natural, like, yes, just-

Matty Long: Well, look, a human in a pirate character- sorry, a human in a pirate costume, not necessarily funny. But put a sheep in a pirate's outfit, that is just more amusing, isn't it?

Elys Dolan: Hmm.

Matty Long: To make the human funny, you would have to- how could you make them funny, just to look at? You'd have to do it through their expression. Whereas, the actual form of an animal- like, I drew, at one point, there are sheep, a sheep trying to fit, like, a, you know, kind of, a pirate outfit around sheep, which is, like, really bulky, I mean, it's funny. It's taking two elements and fusing them together in that way. I'm trying to be eloquent here and I can't be.

Elys Dolan: No, I mean, that's fine. So, that would suggest that, as you're, sort of, working it out in your head here, that it's not something that you think, "Okay, what's going to make these pirates funny? I can make them animals and," you know, "If I put them in this kind of outfit, it's going to be funnier." Or does that just happen unconsciously while you're- does it come through drawing?

Matty Long: Well, I also don't want to draw humans. Yes, you've got to really love the characters that you're making and I just want to stay away from humans. Sorry, you just asked the question

and I went away from it. What did you say?

Elys Dolan: So, is it conscious? You say you didn't decide to do it for, you know, a comic effect. You did it because- I'm just trying to repeat back to you what I understood from what you said. You did it because you didn't want to draw humans, you wouldn't have got the same enjoyment out of the situation if it was humans. So, you thought, "Okay, I'll make it animals. That'll be more fun," for you, as someone who has to sit there and draw them, yes?

Matty Long: Yes, as someone who has to sit there, for sure. But there was also a real lack of, like- there are a lot of human- because I work at Heffers, there are a lot of human pirate books. Often, if you include humans as part of forming the, kind of, base of your story, you've probably then got to, at some point, include a child. If you just do animals, you completely remove the need. This animal could be old, it could be young. Barker, we think is- well, I show them when they're puppies, but you look at him and you can think, "Well, he could be three, but he could be 26, he could be 40-something."
Whereas, humans, you can easily tell how old they are and a lot of the publishing industry, you know, they want children, they want children as being, kind of, at the forefront of any books you do. I don't really want to draw children, because I work with humour and I think I can be funnier with animals. Like, you can do poop deck jokes with animals that you probably can't do with children.

Elys Dolan: How come you can do it with animals and not with children?

Matty Long: Because animals are just- okay. Obviously, young children could crap on the carpet. But with animals, it's more accepted, you can get away with it. If I probably wanted to do a turd joke with a younger kid, I'm not sure they would- do you think they'd allow that?

Elys Dolan: It think it would be difficult.

Matty Long: It would be, I think, because it would seen as grotesque, because we're humans. But if it's animals, it's, like, it's expected of them, that they're not as smart as humans, so they'll crap on the deck or do whatever. There's just potential for humour and fun and you'd never-

Elys Dolan: Is it because they just don't adhere to the same rules?

Matty Long: Yes, and the constraints are lifted, I think. The main characters in 'Salty Dogs' could be children, or could be very young, or they could be adults. But it's never in question, it's never a question you need to ask. Whereas, I think if you were to go for, yes, a human crew, you could have a crew of adults and, suddenly, the publisher would probably be saying, "Well, we need a

child here. We need it to relate to children." John Ryan's Captain Pugwash had- his name was, like, I think, Tom, a boy that was part of Pugwash's crew.

Now, I'm not saying the publisher told John Ryan to do that, but, suddenly, if you use humans, I think you've got to go about things differently. Also, genders play a part. 'Salty Dogs', I've got Captain Fifi as female, the rest are all male. But to look at, you might not really know. Obviously, if you read the details and listen to their names, you'll know it. But, to look at, you know, three of them could be female. Pawsworth, with the bows, and quite vain, could easily be female. Kids still think Blossom, the unicorn from 'Happy Forest', is female.

Just that, kind of, a bit of ambiguity just, kind of, helps because it's not constrained by, you know, "You need this many characters of colour, you need this many characters female, this many male, you've got to have young ones to try and appeal," you just lose all that and it's about the humour. It's an easier canvas to put humour on, when you just remove the human element. Now, that is interesting.

Elys Dolan: It is interesting, yes.

Matty Long: I literally just don't consider this stuff, because it's instinctive to me.

Elys Dolan: Yes. So, you've said all of this stuff, so obviously you know it in a way. But, yes, you've just never-

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: You know it, sort of, you're putting all of this stuff into action as you make the book.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: It's just you never…

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: So much of that's unconscious.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Because what you've just described is a really intricate and complex way of, essentially, using the tools at hand to create humour for a very specific audience.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: But you didn't think about, at the time, the appropriateness of, you know, what might be funny for that audience, "What kind of character can I design to facilitate these kinds of jokes?" Specifically, the toilet humour stuff that you mentioned. You know, making it appropriate without, you know, being-

Matty Long: Yes. But it's stuff that I never- I don't sit there at the start of a project and this is stuff I consciously decide. At the end of the day, I want to draw funny-looking characters, and it's just much easier to be funny when you remove the human element from something, I think.

Elys Dolan: So, it's, kind of, a simplification there?

Matty Long: Yes, for sure.

Elys Dolan: All the other issues, and you can just leave, you know, well, in the majority of that, you can leave the humorous bits.

Matty Long: Hmm, yes. This feels like therapy. (Laughter)

Elys Dolan: Oh well, you know, sometimes, it's just good to talk about your feelings, yes.

Matty Long: Realisations, yes, exactly. I mean, there is obviously so much more at play than I could probably describe and pinpoint. But it just does seem like a big one. Like, that's not to say I'm not going to do- I've had an idea for ages which involves humans. I think it could still be funny. Obviously, I'm still quite early on in what I'm doing, and I haven't fully-explored each side. I haven't done a book that's solely humans, or relies more on that human element. I think it could still be funny. But, yes, I just wanted to do some animals. (Laughter)

Elys Dolan: Yes. Which I think is perfectly fair.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: But, so-

Matty Long: People will get suspicious though if I'm lucky enough to be eight or nine books in and still no humans. Do you wonder about that? Because you've done some, 'The Clockwork Dragon' had humans in it, but that was a different sort of-

Elys Dolan: Yes. The fiction books are full of drawings of humans that I've done. But in the picture books, not so much.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: I think, also, for similar reasons.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Because there is just something inherently funny about putting an animal in an outfit, first off.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: I think, for me, a lot of my comedy, you know, the base of it, can rely on the kind of incongruity you get from putting a non-human thing, be that an animal or anything else, I've done stuff with food as well, into a human situation.

Matty Long: Well, that's it. The human element is actually important to the humour, even if you're not using a human itself. Like, 'Steven Seagull', for all intents and purposes, the characters in that live, kind of, human lives, although they are animals. You've got the ice cream seller, you've got the hippo in the swimsuit. So, instead of having, you know, the conventional quite slim person, and we say that because they're lifeguards, they're fit an active, a slim person being a lifeguard, "Okay, I'm going to put a lifeguard outfit on a hippo." Something which is completely at odds with, you know, what we conventionally see in everyday life as humans.
So, even if you're not using humans themselves, the, kind of, human experience and our understanding of things plays into the actual joke.

Elys Dolan: Hmm.

Matty Long: It's so complicated.

Elys Dolan: I know, you have no idea until you start thinking about it.

Matty Long: Yes. Oh God, this is what your life has been like for- since you started this. Jesus.

Elys Dolan: I know. Oh, as if I didn't have enough to think about in the first place.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Right. So, talking about you, you know, you just want to do funny drawings…

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: …and the process of actually going through and making a picture book. I find, when I do it, I can divide it up into different stages. I have a, kind of, ideas bit where I do a lot of drawings, you know, in sketchbooks, bits of paper.

Matty Long: Hmm.

Elys Dolan: Without actually, actively coming up with a narrative or anything like that.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Just getting the world, the concept, the characters in place.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Then, some thumbnailing, then roughs, then artwork.

Matty Long: Hmmhmm.

Elys Dolan: So, how does that work for you? Is it the same kind of deal?

Matty Long: Yes. So, first comes just a diarrhoea. All the-

Elys Dolan: Can you define, for the tape, that kind of diarrhoea?

Matty Long: So, the first-

Elys Dolan: Because that just makes it sound like you're a very nervy illustrator.

Matty Long: First comes the visual diarrhoea, in which you just draw a load of stuff that's on your mind. Usually, if you've had the idea for a project, you didn't have it five minutes ago. You've had the idea in your head for a while, and this is the point where it just all spills out. That will just

be drawings, it might be reckless littering. It might just be drawings, the odd speech bubble, as characters start to come out, what sort of thing is this character saying? It's basically world-building stuff, that usually starts with characters first.

You take the character, and then you give the character a home, and then the storytelling aspect is what's happening in this character's home? Is the home something the character is trying to save? Are they leaving the home? You know, and the world-building stuff starts form there. This is one of the very first 'Salty Dogs' things. For the purposes of the recording, I am showing Elys a page for-

Elys Dolan: It's not like a police tape. You don't have-

Matty Long: Oh, okay.

Elys Dolan: "Exhibit A." But I can see here what you're doing. You are just drawing your characters. There's a lot of doing it over, and over, and over, and over.

Matty Long: Repetition is- yes. Because, already, I'm trying to refine them.

Elys Dolan: Well, why are you refining them? What are you trying to find by doing all of these drawings?

Matty Long: I'm trying to make myself believe that these characters can carry a story and a book and that I can draw them, I can make them visually appealing. This was the first Sherman sort of thing. That was the first Barker, and then I came with that, and then you- the characters start off really rough and by drawing them over and over, you refine them. You start to find the shapes that you want to bring out. Barker doesn't look like that anymore, because his head is more square, the jowl things are more compact and tight. You just find the shapes.

I really liked that early drawing look of Fifi. Yes, there is a repetition that just goes over and over. But you are just trying to make yourself believe that you can do a story based on these characters, that they're going to be appealing.

Elys Dolan: So, that appealingness, is that then being relatable, or is it them being funny, or is it, you know…?

Matty Long: Funny.

Elys Dolan: Or do you-? So, funny is important when you're designing the characters?

Matty Long: Yes, there has to be a hint of ridiculousness to how they look. That's what I've done so far. So that, if they are just standing there, looking a bit dazed or confused, then they're still funny, in a way. Regardless of text, of what they're saying or what they're doing, if they're just standing there and how they look can raise a smile, then that's usually when you're winning, I guess. Like this sheep, people might find that funny.

Elys Dolan: Is that an instinctive thing again? Just, you know, going through your repetitions and finding that thing that'll, you know, make a reader smile just by looking at them? You just know when you've got it, you're not-

Matty Long: Yes. There's always something you like. You capture a certain look about a certain character, and there's something you like in it, that you can also work with as well, you know? Can this character bring about lots of humorous situations? And it works for some more than others. Some are easier. You're going to ask why now, "Why are some characters easier to work with than others?" probably. But it's true. Like, Sherman in 'Salty Dogs', he's wearing a sailor outfit. That's probably the best example I can give, is that he's- where the other are wearing more traditional pirate outfits, he's wearing a sailor outfit, which stands alone, I think, as funny if you see them as a group. They don't even need to be saying anything, there's just this difference between the way they've approached the pirates' life and the way he has. It's, kind of, an insight into his character. And he's a sausage dog as well, they already look ridiculous.

There's a reason why, you know, people like sausage dogs. They're funny, they're a funny-looking dog. It can be that simple. Sausage dogs are funnier-looking than, you know, a terrier. You know, so they can perform different roles, I guess.

Elys Dolan: So, you gave the stupidest-looking dog the stupidest-looking outfit?

Matty Long: Yes. Exactly. It would be a weird mix to have a serious character wearing quite a ludicrous outfit. That would make the humour a bit less obvious and harder to do. Because why would a character that's quite serious have made that decision? There's always a lot of fun to be had in, you know, quite- not stuck-up characters. What's the word? Dignified. When ridiculous things happen, or funny things happen, to dignified characters, that's always funny. But when they've knowingly, kind of, brought it upon themselves, that doesn't really conventionally work, as humour, I don't think. Because why would they do that?

So, you've got to give the character that's the droolingest [sic], the nearest thing to an actual dog, give them the stupid outfit, and it offsets the other characters around him, so they're funny.

Elys Dolan: How did you figure that out? Was that through the doodling and drawings, the trial and error? Or do you know that from having, you know, watched comedy yourself and you know what makes you laugh, and you can translate it picture books, or…?

Matty Long: I think everything, all my humour, probably comes from growing up watching 'The Simpsons' over and over, and just some of the stupid stuff they do. I'm talking about the ones before the year 2000, really. The ones in the 20th Century. Sherman didn't start out with that outfit. He had just the standard, sort of, t-shirt. But a lot of the other characters are quite- they're maybe not that funny to look at too much.

Like, Stewart is probably the least amusing one to look at. He's just a standard dog, he's a dalmatian, he's just a standard dog. I struggled with him, in terms of his character. I remember OUP saying, "I'm not sure about this one's character." All the others had, kind of, an identity to them. Grumpy chef, drooling idiot, he's the, kind of, big tough one, ___[00:34:52], big tough one, she's the tenacious captain. He's obviously the look-out guy and he's got these big ears that, kind of, really help his character, he's fine. This one was just, you know, what is he?

Elys Dolan: Is that because he didn't fit in with…? Because, you know, what you've just described there are a lot of clichés and stereotypes.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: And tropes from this kind of, you know, genre of pirates from other media.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Is it because he didn't fit in with the parody that you're…?

Matty Long: Yes. What was wrong with him? They all had, what one would describe as, different roles within the crew. Whether that's a role in terms of what they do on the boat, of their character role, what they fill, I just think they didn't really understand what the character was doing, what he was adding to the pot, really, the, kind of, pot of characters we had. That one there, the shih tzu was the one I- that was essentially the seventh member that I didn't think I was going to use, because I thought the book already had too many characters. But I always liked the dalmatian, but I don't think they really felt it fulfilled a role in the-

Elys Dolan: What did you like about him?

Matty Long: Why did I keep the dalmatian? I liked the design, first and foremost. He's, kind of, the tallest and thinnest of the characters. He was a dalmatian, he wasn't brown, okay?

Elys Dolan: Okay, right. So, it's more of a visual thing? It's not so much a story thing, or even a

comedy thing, or-

Matty Long: Yes. I mean, because three of the dogs are brown, and you just need a variety in your main character troop. So, he fulfilled that role of not being a brown dog. Visually, you start thinking about that as well, and you need a, kind of, mix there.

Elys Dolan: So-

Matty Long: Even now, he's not the funniest character, you know? There are not really many jokes. Some of them are just more difficult to extract humour from than others, and it usually comes down to how they look. Like these big gorillas here, like, he's, kind of, reminiscent of a jock in a gym and he's, like, talking about how big his muscles are, you know? I don't think Stewart says anything- I mean, this one, he's, kind of, saying, "Who's first? We'll take you all on," it's not a joke, essentially. "Could this day get any worse?" so that's one where you're poking fun at him, rather than him being funny, you know, himself.

Because he's one of the more dignified members of the crew, so funny things have to happen to him, he doesn't make the funny. He doesn't make the funny things. Like, he's funny, he's got armbands on, as you'd expect from a dimwit. Well that- no, as you'd expect-

Elys Dolan: Yes, it's okay. We won't use that one.

Matty Long: Yes. (Laughter)

Elys Dolan: So, thinking about the parody thing, because you use a lot of parody in all of the work that you've done so far, especially in 'Super Happy Magic Forest' where you're using all of those tropes from, you know, fantasy films and literature.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Is that deliberate? Do you think, "Alright, I want to do a fantasy book. I'm going to make fun of all these things"?

Matty Long: Yes. But it probably always comes from, like, a good place. As in, I obviously love 'The Lord of the Rings' and 'The Hobbit'. But the thing is with fantasy, and I think this is why the 'Happy Forest' thing worked was I'd grown up with it, I'd really loved it and, as I've got older, I, kind of, realised that it is also, kind of, naff. Unicorns and that, there's fun to be had, you can poke fun at it. Something that I really loved and, kind of, took seriously growing up, and I still love, but I used to- I collected, like, little ornaments of, like, dragons and things, I played video games, and so it

was a really big thing for me.

But I think, as I got older, I thought, "There's actually a lot you can have fun with there as well."
As far as, like, the tropes go, it's always fun to reference things. People just enjoy a reference because if they get it, they feel, like, "Not everyone's going to get that," and they do, and there's just something satisfying about that. Like, Easter eggs or little things you can put in.
Like, for instance, in the new 'Happy Forest' book, there's a tavern scene and the shield on the wall- like, there are a lot of little references, but there's a picture on the wall that's got a lion and four kids on it, it's a very small thing, and it's okay if you don't get it, it doesn't matter if you even pay attention to that picture on the wall or not, but some people will recognise it as Aslan and the four kids from Narnia, in a picture on the wall. That's not necessarily- it's, kind of, like an in-joke.

Elys Dolan: Do you find any satisfaction yourself, putting those things in there? Because you know this thing, and you would get a thrill if somebody else recognised it, or…

Matty Long: I've always liked hiding stuff in my work. I remember at A-Level, I used to work in pen and ink and do these really laboured, detailed pen and ink drawings, and I would hide symbols and words within the actual artwork itself, and I always really liked doing that. Because I always liked, in picture books, like, 'Where's Wally?' things that reward you for spending the time to really look at them.
So, I liked starting to hide things in my work, and it's the same here. Like, some of it's a lot more obvious. The first 'Happy Forest' book, when you see Gollum with a ring and Herbert's just looking at him and saying, "Fascinating." Now, that's quite a front and centre reference to it, so I'm not hiding anything there. You can't do a book like this, where characters go off on a quest, a humorous book like this, and not give a nod to where it's come from. You can't act like this sort of thing hasn't been done before. So, but I like to-

Elys Dolan: So, is that your motivation for poking fun at it? You know, because you want to use all of these things that you really like in your own books, from this kind of genre.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: But, because you know that people are going to recognise it, you feel like the best way to deal with that is to, kind of, poke fun at it and say, "Yes, I know what I'm doing. You know what I'm doing. But aren't we all having fun?"

Matty Long: Exactly, yes. It's exactly that, I think. I'm not sure what more I can really add to that. I just think it's something that people enjoy seeing because they feel like they get it too, and they like explaining it to their children, "This is from this," and it doesn't matter if it goes over- I know

some of it's going to go over the heads of the four-year-olds and five-year-olds that are reading it, but there's something for everyone in the book.
A lot of the reviews you see, and people are, like, "Some of the jokes aren't going to be suitable for children," and it's, like, "That's just some. Like, I know that, it doesn't matter." Because there are some that adults get, and some that kids get. That was the thing with 'The Simpsons' growing up. I only understood, some of the jokes, I got when I was 20. It didn't matter that I didn't get them when I was five, because there were other things that I liked about it. I think referencing pop culture, kind of, in that way, the fantasy side of things, I think it's healthy and it just shows a, kind of, respect for what came before.
But the actual poking fun, I mean, I'm not poking fun at 'The Lord of the Rings' or 'The Hobbit', I'm just referencing it and, in that way, it's amusing, in the way that you do it. Like, in the new book, in the tavern scene, three are three hobbits around a table, and there's a ring in the middle of it and one of them is looking really anguished, and the other, and then one of them has got a 'cash for gold' leaflet, like, under his hand, as if putting this option on the table, sort of thing. So, that's, kind of, taking something and-

Elys Dolan: Yes, that's an obviously adult joke as well.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: So, who is that for? So, is that for the parents?

Matty Long: It's- yes.

Elys Dolan: Or is it for you because, you know, you had a laugh, it's quite fun to draw?

Matty Long: Yes, it's me. Like, you've got to amuse yourself, first and foremost. That's the most important thing. I don't sit there going, "Oh, I need to do a joke for this age person. I need to do a joke for this." It was a situation that I drew and, yes, I think the joke is- that one's obviously for older people. Kids aren't going to know about, you know, trading in your gold for money. It's not something they would do in everyday life.

Elys Dolan: Well, not in Cambridge anyway. So, you said, first and foremost…

Matty Long: I'd say if they did, probably.

Elys Dolan: …you've got to amuse yourself.

Matty Long: Yes, that's pretty much it.

Elys Dolan: So, would it not be possible for you to make a funny book if, you know, the amusing content you were putting in there, it didn't appeal to you? Would you be able to still make that work, or…?

Matty Long: I just don't see how I could do that. I don't see how I could do that. I know, at the start of the conversation, I said some stuff, I might not necessarily find it funny, but I know it could be regarded as just generally amusing. A lot of the times, that's good enough for the feel of the book. There are some lines that I'll really find funny but, also, I've got my particular- the things that tickle me might not be… You don't want to do a whole book of that, because it would be quite weird stuff, I guess.
That's not to say I've got an odd sense of humour, but you've got to be quite universal in the humour, and there are, kind of, different things. Some of them-

Elys Dolan: So, is there something that, you know, really just appeals to your sense of humour and you're putting in there because you find it funny, and you know that some people out there might find it funny? But you're putting others in to almost, like, support that, because you know, you know, to appeal your full audience, you've got to put in some things like slapstick or toiler humour?

Matty Long: Yes, there's a bit of everything. But I don't think you could really do a book if you didn't believe in its humour. I think when people buy, like, a heavily-illustrated book, which is what I do and what you do, and it's all one person, author and illustrator, they really need to buy into you as a person and, obviously, what, kind of, makes you tick and what you find funny. So, you do need to put your own personal sense of humour really just on the table, because they need to buy into…
You know, if they find it funny, you find it funny. Like, there are podcasts I listen to, and the main- one of the hosts, and there are certain things he'll laugh at, like something that someone else says, and he'll laugh at it, and it's, kind of, funny to you because he finds it funny. You can tell that's his sense of humour and that, in turn, kind of, makes it funny. That's the sort of thing that has prompted this reaction from them. So, even if you weren't laughing at what the person said, you're, kind of, laughing at the other guy's reaction to it, just because it's a certain tick in their humour that they just react to.
It's their certain sense of humour that's a part of them. I think that's something that comes across in books. If you commit to something in that way, it can, I think, definitely promote the sense of humour that other people can understand. They see it as its yours, it's your sense of humour that they like. That's, I think, in the first place, that was what made me get published, was really putting it out there. It wasn't- the original question you asked was could I do a book that maybe was full of stuff that I didn't find funny, but you felt that other people would find funny. And I just don't think it

would work in that way.

Elys Dolan: So, it's got to be your particular sense of humour?

Matty Long: Yes, first and-

Elys Dolan: There's no way of faking that, it's just got-

Matty Long: No. To do a book, you're spending so much time doing the book, you've got to be constantly amusing yourself doing it, for me. Because there's so much other stuff to consider, so you need those bits where you're laughing at- you might be really struggling with the book, but there's this one joke that you really like in it, and that's enough, for that moment, to try and get you through that mind-space where it might be very difficult and you're thinking, "Nobody's going to like this book."

Elys Dolan: So, you have to find ways of- so, if you're having problems creating that humour because of, you know, the various pressures of making a book, one of the ways that you deal with that is by, you know, trying to find one of the things that you- trying to get back to the core of what made that funny for you.

Matty Long: Exactly.

Elys Dolan: So, it might be one joke that does that.

Matty Long: Yes, one joke that just, kind of, gets you- like, I really like the 'karaoke knight' joke that you, kind of, told me to make more of. Because I had it in the tavern scene.

Elys Dolan: It's very funny, that's why.

Matty Long: In the tavern scene, I just originally had it on a noticeboard, the 'karaoke knight', and you picked up on it and were, like, "You've got to do more of that." So, I've nearly finished colouring that one but, yes, he's on the table, kind of, in this, sort of, dramatic pose, singing, you know, 'Total Eclipse of the Heart', "Every now and then I fall apart." And that was actually funny because I probably chose that song based on your wedding.

Elys Dolan: (Laughter)

Matty Long: I remember your sister, [Tonya 00:49:57], was on the stage, and she might have

been on her knees like that, and she was, kind of, dramatically singing it to her husband.

Elys Dolan: That does sound like my sister, yes.

Matty Long: Yes, and she was, like, dramatically- and that was something that fed into him, and that character, and what he did. So, that's funny because-

Elys Dolan: So, it could be stuff in real life that you bring into the books and make them work?

Matty Long: Yes, and it feeds into it. But you twist around because that might be funny on its own, because knights, they're wearing armour so they don't get killed, they're carrying a sword so they can kill someone, and he's, kind of, singing karaoke in this kind of pose and, in that moment, that's very important to him, is getting this song out. And then, you've got the goblins saying, "Oh, it's karaoke knight." So, that's a joke that I, kind of, like. I think, "Even if this book is shit, even if the story falls down at the end, even if they realise, 'Hang on, in two out of three 'Happy Forest' books, the situation is solved using shovels,' at least they laughed at that bit."
There's always, "At least there are the jokes, at least there are the details, at least they might have-" it's hedging your bets across the board really. Because I don't have the balls to do a book like Ed Vere might do a book, with one character, on one page, doing one thing.

Elys Dolan: Well, maybe that's a very different kind of humour as well.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Because-

Matty Long: What, just insanity, do you think, across-?

Elys Dolan: Yes. Well, I think the detail and the different things going on, which I want to get to in a little bit. But before we move on too much, I just want- the parody thing.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Where, in your process, does that appear? So, because, looking at some of your roughs here, it seems like it's there, especially in the 'Super Happy Magic Forest', it's there from the very beginning. This is the-

Matty Long: Yes. When did I first start? I mean, this is where is started, this was the whole

'Happy Forest'. So, we can probably pinpoint, looking at this, where I started maybe thinking of parody. So, that was when I was doing a book about trees, a book about a tree that was moving around.

Elys Dolan: The unicorn.

Matty Long: So, we started- this is literally- there's a bird taking a shit.

Elys Dolan: Oh, and then you've just got a page of, well, essentially, you know, you've got some fantasy clichés. You've got a leprechaun, you've got a unicorn, you've got a gnome, you've got an ogre, it's-

Matty Long: But I would say this was the first page of 'Happy Forest'. Those most have been the first things I drew, 'Happy Forest'. Here, I've drawn a tree and he says, "So, it is settled. You will go to the goblin mountain and destroy the goblin king," that is-

Elys Dolan: Well, that's a tone, that's tone of voice, which is very much using that, you know, fantasy way of speaking.

Matty Long: But I think it's influenced by 'Lord of the Rings', when Elrond says something along the lines of, "So it is settled, eight friends will travel," I think there's a bit at the Council of Elrond that's like that. That might be the very first one. I mean, this is the second page.

Elys Dolan: So, it is very much the whole parody thing has come from the development work. It's from this drawing over and over again from the sketch-booking, that it's just started to unconsciously emerge. Or was there a moment where you turned this page and thought, "I know what, I'm going to make this like 'Lord of the Rings'"?

Matty Long: Well, it just emerges. "You have my pipes and you have my horn, and I will-" so that was, obviously, a Council of Elrond thing. That started straight away, very early on in the process. It probably comes from not being able to ignore what has inspired you to start wanting to draw gnomes. As I said, I grew up with fantasy.

Elys Dolan: Okay. So, when you realised that you're starting to parody, you know, these fantasy things that you liked, you just ran with it?

Matty Long: I played up to it. Yes, there was obviously a conscious decision not to ignore what had inspired me. That goes back to people wanting to buy into you as an author, as a storyteller,

and as a person. You've got to lay yourself on the line here. There's something, I think, very honest about comedy and humour. Like, and if you watch a comedian and how much their own personality comes out on the stage, some of them play up to the fact that they're a bit posh, Jack Whitehall does that.

Some of them play up to their accents a bit more, like Josh Widdecombe with his, kind of, West Country, almost, kind of- not, kind of, pompous-y accent, and humour, kind of, comes from that. Joe Lycett plays up to his, kind of, delicate voice, and that adds humour to it.

Elys Dolan: So, you're exaggerating your own sense of humour for the sake of the books?

Matty Long: Yes. But going back to it, it's just you're putting, yes, your own take on things, your own personality, and people buy into that, I think. I think that must- if you were to ask Pete, well, you could interview Pete and say, "What was it that stuck out?" he might say that it was my personality, and you could always see my own sense of humour. Where that comes in in terms of tropes, it's showing that I'm obviously influenced by that. I'm not ignoring that, but I think there's fun that can be had with that as well. In the original 'The Lord of the Rings' films, it wasn't a humorous moment. I'm not just replicating humorous moments.

I've taken their serious part of the film, obviously they made a joke of it afterwards, "Where are we going?" I'm taking a serious part of the film and presenting it with my stupid-looking characters, and giving that, sort of- I'm also referencing it, but I'm recycling it, in a way. I think that's… I'm not sure what more I can say on that. It's such a hard thing to pin down.

Elys Dolan: Well, it is, yes. But this is the point of the conversation, yes.

Matty Long: You've been asking me different questions on the same thing about it for a while, and I'm just not convinced I've really told you anything.

Elys Dolan: Well, it's about figuring things out.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Because so much of this-

Matty Long: You do it too. You play on these things all the time.

Elys Dolan: I do, yes. I'm trying to figure out if you-

Matty Long: Does what I say ring true to you?

Elys Dolan: Yes, a lot of it does, yes.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Which is what I'm trying to figure out. So, you know, I want to talk to other people who do parody as well, and see if it emerges in the same way in their work.

Matty Long: So, for example, 'Nuts in Space' very Star Wars, very Star Trek, even their outfits. So, when you started that, did you think, "I'm going to do a Star Trek, sort of, parody"? Or did you think, "I want to do a space book," and then think, "This would work as a Star Trek parody, or a Star Wars parody"? Or was it, "Right, I want to do a book about space animals going on some sort of space quest," and then, you know, more and more you think, "I can't ignore Star Trek, Star Wars"? As in, "I can't ignore this thing," or was it a case of, "I love these things"?

Elys Dolan: So, how it worked is-

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: So, I remember this really vividly about 'Nuts in Space' because I decided that I wanted to do a space book, because I really- and I wanted it to be, you know, like a sci-fi thing because I really liked, you know, Star Wars, I like Star Trek.

Matty Long: Well, that's it, yes.

Elys Dolan: I really liked, you know, things like, you know, things like, '2001: A Space Odyssey'.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: I knew I wanted to do it with animals, because I like making animals do people things, because that makes me laugh.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: So, I thought, "They've got to go- and I want them to go in a spaceship and I want to have a crew," so I drew my animal crew. I just, to make them look like a spaceship crew, I started automatically putting them in, like, different coloured sweatshirts with little logos and black trousers.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: I did this line-up of the crew and I thought, "Oh shit, I've drawn Star Trek," and I thought, "Excellent, I've drawn Star Trek," and just went with it and thought, "I'm going to play up to this now," you know? It's when you realise what your… And I think that's the way that I make something look like the genre I want it to be. So, because I wanted to do a space book and I wanted, you know, people to recognise it as a sci-fi thing, I automatically steal from the references that I recognise.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: And then, as soon as I realise that I'm doing that, I make fun of it.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: That's when it turns into parody.

Matty Long: Yes. But it's a major selling point also for that book, you know? So, it's-

Elys Dolan: Yes. Do you think about the selling point though when you're putting that in? Do you think, "Brilliant, people like fantasy, they'll buy it"? Or is that just a-?

Matty Long: No, I don't think about that stuff too much at all, to be honest. I just think about what works for the book itself. Selling points? Oh, okay, well, there was 'Salty Dogs' and through working at Heffers, I thought there might have been a gap in the market for a pirate world that was properly fleshed-out. A lot of pirate books will just follow a crew. You know, it will be about this crew for this one book, this pirate ship, what's happening on this pirate ship, "Oh, there's the treasure island, there's the sea monster," and I just thought, "There is a gap in the market for a proper pirate world with different pirate crews that live in different parts of this world, and a pirate book that isn't reliant upon a sea monster," and-

Elys Dolan: But was that the only reason you decided to do pirates?

Matty Long: No. But it was something that was definitely considered. I just thought there was a gap for something like that. I wanted to do pirates because I want to avoid, at all costs, doing something mundane. Like, you know, the idea of humans in mind, I'm thinking of Vikings, because I've been doing Viking stuff for a while, and I have a book idea regarding that. There has to be something that you can play up to, like the costumes and the world itself. Which is why I'm never

going to do, probably, a picture book that's just set in our modern world with human characters. I just can't imagine doing that.

Elys Dolan: Would you have to use a different kind of humour if you wanted to make that sort of book funny?

Matty Long: Different kind of humour? I think it'd be very reliant on the characters. 'Salty Dogs' is obviously reliant on the characters, but it's the world itself imbues the characters, you know, the piratical themes, you can have a lot of fun with. Because the pirate thing is a part of history, you can take it and have fun with it. It's not part of the everyday world that children and adults, kind of, know. So, you can take things like walking the plank, quite serious things back in piratical times, and you can just have fun with them. That, kind of, displacement is crucial to the humour. Whereas, I think if you set something in today's modern world, the world that everyone knows, reflecting back at them when they're opening a book, I just can't- at the moment, I just can't see where the humour is coming from, where the fun is coming from, you know? You can play on history a lot. How do you play on the modern world with human characters? This is why so many picture books will have dinosaurs and animals.

Elys Dolan: There are plenty of picture books out there with, say, a child protagonist set in the real world, but that's with a very different sense of humour to your own.

Matty Long: Do you know- oh, what's his name? Shinsuke, something. Oh, this is funny. So, this was a child set in the real world, and this was funny. I still keep meaning to tweet this, but I haven't yet. Are you familiar with his work? A Japanese artist, Shin-

Elys Dolan: I don't know that I am.

Matty Long: Okay.

Elys Dolan: But I'm more likely to recognise the picture than the name.

Matty Long: Now, this protagonist is a boy, but this is how you do it, I guess, very funny. This book is called- is it called Stuck? A Bit Stuck?

Elys Dolan: Oh, is this…? Yes, I have seen this, yes. When he gets stuck in his own jumper?

Matty Long: Yes. A child gets stuck pulling a jumper over his head, as you could do when you're a kid and you wore these tight jumpers, and it's over your head, and he starts imposing himself,

this situation, on the world, and how it could turn out, how his life could be were he to remain in this state of jumper over his head. He figures out that it's probably best, he still needs to get the jumper off. For some reason, he thinks, "Maybe it would be better if I took my trousers off first." Like, obviously, the trousers weren't the problem, yet he thought wriggling out of his trousers in that moment might be the thing to-

Elys Dolan: Well, this is a combination of slapstick, farce and sitcom, really.

Matty Long: Yes, I know.

Elys Dolan: Which is just a different kind of humour to the way that you approach things.

Matty Long: Yes, I know.

Elys Dolan: This is so much character-based as well. Whereas, you work in a big, detailed, expansive world kind of way.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: It's that detail, is one of the things I want to talk about.

Matty Long: It's a safety net, is what it is.

Elys Dolan: A safety net? Well, does it let you include, sort of, different kinds of jokes and sorts of humour that you might not be able to do in sparser artwork?

Matty Long: Yes. I guess, you've got so much more to play with. The more characters you've got, the more there is in the environment to draw humour from. The setting, there's a lot more there.

Elys Dolan: Could you do a parody in a really sparse book like, you know, an Ed Vere book, or…?

Matty Long: How could you parody something? Like, a parody of, like- what do you mean?

Elys Dolan: Yes. So, like the way that you do with, you know, you're parodying the entire world of a fantasy landscape.

Matty Long: Hmm.

Elys Dolan: Do you need that level of detail to be able to get enough information to do that?

Matty Long: It's just how it's worked for me so far. I just do a lot of detail because that's what I've always done and that's what I feel comfortable doing. So, to take all that away and just do it… Because, that's probably looking at Jon Klassen sort of thing, and that basically works within that context of sparseness and there not being- his characters exist, there's no background really in 'I Want My Hat Back', for example. His characters exist as they are, and the humour comes from the repetition and how there just really isn't-

Elys Dolan: Well, also, with that book, there is only one joke.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Whereas, you have a lot of different jokes.

Matty Long: That one works within its confines and almost makes that the joke, in a way. It's, like, "Look, we exist in this white world, as in blank world, there's nothing else. There's nothing else to this story apart from me wanting my hat back," and they make that the joke. You know, "Have you seen my hat?" because there's nothing else within the world of note, to draw from, of consequence, it's just blank and everything serves that line of, "Have you seen my hat? Have you seen my hat?"
Whereas, what I do, I'll have backgrounds, and everything exists within this world, and everything can be played upon, you know? So, 'Salty Dogs', for example, you know, like, it's all there. It's all there.

Elys Dolan: What do you mean by it's all there?

Matty Long: Well, just the whole environment and the setting. How could I take all that and just make an Ed Vere-style book or a Jon Klassen sort of one? Like, the environment really shapes the humour as well, it's what can be drawn from. He's throwing a cannonball down on him. Maybe the question is to think how could a background and a rich world have served 'I Want My Hat Back'? It wouldn't serve at all.

Elys Dolan: Yes. So, what kind of humour do you think you include within the detail that, you know, you couldn't do any other way? So, is it jokes like the 'karaoke knight' one? Which is not part of the central narrative, it's-

Matty Long: Yes, that's probably exactly it. It has to be, because the Klassen one, for example, is so fixed on that character and that lack of variety within the landscapes. It's all down to one question and one thing he wants. Like, I don't think he even change- the pose doesn't change, does it? Doesn't he just change the eyes or something?

Elys Dolan: Yes, not much.

Matty Long: There are tiny little things. Whereas, yes, this is completely different. There's just more opportunity. I keep going away from your original question. You're trying to get some sort of answer from me, and I'm not giving you the answer you're looking for.

Elys Dolan: No, it's not the answer that I'm looking for. I'm interested in hearing, you know, what's your take on that? Because, I mean, well, certainly, for me, when I put in detail, when I make really detailed work, it lets me go off-topic.

Matty Long: Yes. There's so much more room to play. I think that comes down to my sense of humour and what I want to do as an illustrator, and what I feel comfortable with as an illustrator, and that's drawing a lot of detail. I always think, "If nothing else, people will enjoy the detail. Even if the story sucks, at least they can appreciate the time it took for me to do it." So, my detailed approach means that I do have these big scenes and I need to fill them with characters, and you can do loads of asides that wouldn't be possible.
I'd certainly have to handle humour probably in a different way if I was to remove all the detail. That's something I haven't yet done, I haven't been brave enough to do. There'd just be less jokes, right?

Elys Dolan: Hmm.

Matty Long: There'd be less jokes.

Elys Dolan: So, yes-

Matty Long: Whether it'd be less powerful as a book, or work, less… I mean, is this more funny than 'I Want My Hat Back'? It's got more jokes in it so, technically, it must be.

Elys Dolan: (Laughter) Yes, let's say it is. So, when you're sat there and you're doing one of these big, expansive roughs…

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: …sort of, the funny content, so those little asides you're talking about…

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: …are they planned ahead of time? Is it stuff from your sketchbook? Or do you make it up while you're drawing?

Matty Long: It's a bit of both, quite simply. There'll be things that I've done in sketch that work. But, yes, I can take some of what I've done in practice and include it in the spread, there'll be certain instances. A lot of it is probably made up on the spot though, and can result in me just sitting there going, "Well, this character is got to be saying something. What's it going to be?" A lot of it is on the fly, and you just have to look at the environment that they're in, and thing, "What works for this environment?"
Like, an example of that is the 'Happy Forest' books, and the environments change, a lot of the time, the environments change as you go throughout the book, but the characters themselves say the same. So, it's a question of, "What new am I going to put for each-?" because a lot of the time, the main characters are saying something on each page. There'll be instances where some of them don't have speech bubbles, but you're basically having to think up a new joke for that character in-

Elys Dolan: Specifically, in that situation, or…?

Matty Long: On each spread. Yes, in that environment. "What new can I do, within this environment, with this character?" and that can be really tough. Because every time you do something, that's one less thing that you can do. In a way, I, kind of, have to make the… So, in the new one, there's a frost goblin spread, and I was drawing this spread and, a lot of the time, I felt it lacked identity, like those frost goblin characters lacked identity in themselves.
The goblins in the first book were having a tea party, that was their thing. It's not enough, a lot of the time, just to draw… Well, I needed to have some sort of spin on it, I felt, anyway. And so-

Elys Dolan: So, figuring out that spin, does that come through, you know, just sitting there and doing the drawing? So, you won't sit down and write down what, you know, exactly what is that-

Matty Long: No, it comes from doing the drawings. Like, I had them, they like doing winter sports, like, they like sledging and they like skiing. But I thought, "That can't be the whole spread that they're going through, because there's another important element on this spread, and that's

the snowmen," that's where I've introduced the snowmen as being the hostile, kind of, people. The idea of the whole land is that the ice queen clamps down on fun.

So, I can't have them all breaking the rules and having fun. So, there's one instance of them doing it, but, for the most part, they needed another, sort of, identify. And that identity was them to be, kind of, like, it's market day and they're, kind of, buying and selling, and so commerce was something that was, like, important to them, within this, sort of, spread. It was, kind of, influenced by when I was in Russia and just, like, a market street and everyone was trying to get you to buy stuff.

So, the joke in this one, and it's a very long-winded explanation, was Hoofius has- he's not saying anything, but one of the goblins is pulling at his furry legs and saying, "How much for these furry trousers?" like, trying to buy his lower-half of his body off him. So, you make jokes for each character, the environment plays a part on that. Like, another one is Trevor on fire in the lava thing, Blossom, who carried mushrooms throughout 'Slug of Doom', is toasting them in this spread.

So, in that way, it's, like, "How can I combine this character with this environment, to make a fresh joke?" That's what you're doing there and then. You might have come up with it in the development but, also, there and then, you're deciding, "Oh, I've got to think of a joke now," and often times, you rely on the environment to bring a joke out of the character. Or the actual character themselves, their design. I'm not going to be able to do that forever.

I can only set Trevor on fire once, as a mushroom. I can only have him being stretched like a rubbery mushroom once. This is a joke about Hoofius, you know, his legs. I'm not going to be able to do that again, probably. So, it gets harder.

Elys Dolan: Right. So, you think it's really important to repeat yourself, humour-wise as well?

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: You've got to keep it fresh and interesting each time?

Matty Long: Yes, you've got to keep it fresh and not repeat yourself. The environments, for me, really help. Whereas, Klassen, for example, makes jokes of the, you know, limitations he's imposed. He makes jokes of the fact that the bear looks the same throughout and then, suddenly, he's going to do shifty eyes, and that's funny because the bear has suddenly shown some sort of expression. It's so sparse. Whereas, I rely on all those environments playing a real part in bringing out humour in the characters. Yes, so it's different.

Elys Dolan: Yes, brilliant. Also, there was something you said about-

Matty Long: Can I use your toilet?

Elys Dolan: Of course, you can. Let's have a break, actually. Because this has been, like….

END AUDIO

Elys Dolan: Great. Okay. Hang on. Let me sort the other one too.

Alright. You said something really interesting just then about process. You were talking about the goblins, and how originally they were doing winter sports, but then you realised that didn't work with the central narrative of the book. Even though that would have been fun, and would have been funny, the whole goblin winter sports thing, you had to change it to support that narrative. Is that something you think is important? That central narrative has to work to support the humour?

Matty Long: Yes, exactly. Even then I think, because the idea was that no fun is allowed in this sort of world, in this north world. Yes, I couldn't just have the goblins all doing winter sports, because that's fun. There is one instance of them doing winter sports on that page, and the snowman is saying to them, "You know the rules. No fun." It establishes that narrative. It helps kind of promote that narrative of the world they've entered, and this is what the Ice Queen is about.

Elys Dolan: Are there sometimes times when you've got to sacrifice humour to make other bits of the book work?

Matty Long: Yes. That's usually something my publisher or my OUP will point out. At the end of the day it's still a story, and it's got to flow, and it's got to be strong throughout the story. You can't let, you know, too many gags get in the way. I don't mean too many. I guess humour in the way it's written, but also the actual content on the page. It's still got to carry the story through.

I mean there is the snow brawl spread that I am working on at the moment that maybe goes away from the no fun thing. I remember thinking, "I probably should have a line at one point from a snowman saying, 'You can't hold this event.' Or whatever." But I haven't got one on the page. I am just kind of winging it and hoping that I can-

Elys Dolan: You definitely have a feel that you have to have this strong central narrative?

Matty Long: Yes. The jokes kind of happen around that really. But you can't let up on it, on the story. You have to reinforce the themes and the ideas in story, and that's important, because there are so many jokes that you do have to make obvious references back to, "This is what they are trying to do." You know, like for instance in this one, Herbert is important. Herbert the gnome is important to the story because we see early on that his garden got ruined by the snow. He

references back to that during the story in the tavern scene.

Elys Dolan: Why are you having to do that all the time? Is it because if the story was a bit convoluted and confusing, would bits of it be less funny, just because there is more for the reader to figure out?

Matty Long: I don't think it's about the humour. It's about the understanding. It's about the humour getting in the way of the actual plot. In this tavern scene, I had Herbert saying, "Blossom, you are making a scene." Because Blossom is dancing on the tables. Instead, I have Herbert fist-clenched, saying, "I'll show the Ice Queen for what she did to my garden."
Try not to make the reader forget amongst the humour that there is actually a plot here, and they are trying to do something. You've got to include little reminders, because they are going to spend a lot of time in each spread. They are going to laugh, hopefully, at jokes and things that distract away from the main plot of the book. You just do little references back to remind them.

Elys Dolan: When you are creating the spread, is it easy just to get carried away then with the fun stuff and forget about actually the central arc of the [Crosstalk 0:04:17]?

Matty Long: Yes. I think I can. I have a tendency to do that. I might go for a line of narrative text at the top that OUP will then say, "Can this be more focused on the actual sort of quest?" You know, "Can this be most focused on the page-to-page flow?" Whereas I have gone for a line that might set up the page as a joke, the spread as a whole, like for example the heroes took part in the locals' customs and traditions, and then the snow brawl. It's kind of setting up, it's not a joke as such, but you are kind of making fun of the fact that, hey, they are having this brutal snowball competition. You are referring to it as their customs and traditions, sort of thing. As you do, you know, when you go on holiday or whatever.
It was kind of a play on that, but it then got changed. Before long, a chase was on, and it was just referenced, in this instance, what was happening, what was emerging. The snowmen started giving chase to the heroes, so it was a direct reference to what was happening more than slightly more ambiguous one before. It was really trying to push the narrative amongst the jokes in this one. That helped because it was a chase sequence, so you needed to build drama, the drama of the chase, so distracting away from that and not giving it due care and attention within the main narrative, it might not have had the same dramatic effect. A chase that the narrator didn't acknowledge probably might not have the same sense of drama. When it came to resolving that chase that lost out. You lost that kind of page turning element, and you suddenly need to acknowledge the chase then when you hadn't before in the previous spreads, when you hadn't mentioned it in the narrative.
You were saying they took part in the locals' customs and traditions, whereas this time you are

like, "A chase was on." Then you turn the page, and it's like, the heroes went into the lead, but then they had to find somewhere to find. We then had heroes finding somewhere to hide whilst not referencing the chase on the previous page, so there was a page turning element there that wasn't there. You have to sacrifice the humour in the main text to make sure that that when read aloud it will all make sense.
You are still getting that sense of drama, because it's not just about the jokes. It's about the action and the drama of turning the page, and you are building up to a resolution, and you need to give that due care and attention. It's fine to have these pages full of jokes and things like that, but sometimes trying to be funny in the main text as well is too much, and that can actually harm the sequence and the drama you are trying to fit in there. Good.

Elys Dolan: Yes, good. Speaking about page turns and things, there are times when you use that for comic effect, like in Salty Dogs you have the page turn reveal of the treasure chest full of bones.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: What I am interested in here is-

Matty Long: I do it in Slug of Doom as well.

Elys Dolan: Yes. That sort of reveal thing. That's very funny, and that's a good way of delivering a joke. When in the process do you come up with this? Did you come up with that idea when you were doing the roughs, or was it when you were doing thumbnails? Or was it at the very beginning, an idea that you had when you were doing all those drawings in your sketchbook?

Matty Long: Right. Okay. You might have a way for it to play out. You'll figure out the sequence, and the sequence usually involves quite a few different elements, like in Salty Dogs, you know, okay, it starts when their ship gets sunk and they've got to swim, and then they meet the monkeys on the island. Then the monkeys are like, "We are going to blow you up." Then here comes the treasure. You are always building up to that point of the treasure. That's the crux of the story.

Elys Dolan: When you are doing this building and you are figuring that out, thinking about process, about practice, what are you physically working on? How does this manifest itself, this idea generation? Or are you just sat there on the sofa one day thinking about it?

Matty Long: Well, it's a process of you have got to set it all up properly. Often, you are trying to do a lot of things within a very short amount of space to set it up. You might have that idea. You

have got to figure out what is the point? Is there a joke within this sequence? Is there a big reveal moment? I don't think the box of bones, I think there are two different reveal moments I've done. The Slug of Doom one, you turn the page and you find out what has happened to Zorgoth, and it's a splat. Blossom has crushed him on his arse. It's a big splat on the arse, so it's a reveal moment that you find out, "This is what's happened to the villain. Isn't it hilarious?" Whereas, Salty Dogs is less about humour, I think, and more about the drama of the story after this treasure, and then you turn the page and the treasure is a box of bones. I don't think people turn the page and laugh at that. I don't think that's a funny thing. What is funny is afterwards, is the monkeys' reaction to it and what happens afterwards.

But as far as reveals go like that, you've just got to make sure it has the right room. You figure out in your end sequence of what is the punchy bit? What is it building up to? For me, it was the reveal of the treasure was important there. In this one, you think it's building up to really what happens to the Potion of Power, because in Slug of Doom, Zorgoth wants to drink the Potion of Power. The Potion of Power, this big important thing-

Elys Dolan: I'm going to stop you for a moment there, because you are describing to me the mechanics of how this joke, this bit, this particular ending works. I know that. I can see it from looking at the book. What I am interested in is how did you come up with that? This is a bit of a horrible, "Where do your ideas come from?" I was trying to break it down by thinking about the stages of the process, where it comes from. When you go to colour in the artwork, you've obviously already got that planned. You've obviously already figured it out. When did you figure that?

Matty Long: Yes, okay. Its more why am I do that than how I am doing it? Is that what you are asking? Why?

Elys Dolan: It's not, "How does the joke work?" It's, "What are the things that you are doing in your practice that help you to come up with this stuff?"

Matty Long: Okay. Right.

Elys Dolan: For instance, how I do it, the thumbnailing bit is really important when it comes to things like that that involve the physicality of the book and actually turning the pages. I can't figure out how I deliver a joke like that just by drawing stuff in my sketchbook. I have got to do the little squares and see the physicality of how the book will work, because that gives me the overview to see how the pacing of the book will work, things I can do with timing. If I don't have that kind of structure of the pacing down before I go to the roughs when I am working on all these detailed spreads, I can't produce that then, because I've gone past that stage. Do you have a same sort of technique that you use for that?

Matty Long: Obviously I also thumbnail, but in terms of my last two books, a lot of the time the sequencing starts changing once I have done it full-scale. We'll decide, "This isn't working and this isn't working." I might be trying to do too many things at once. I don't often catch it like you might do in your thumbnails, which can be a problem later on, because you've got other parts of the book resolved, and then you've suddenly got to re-jig your ending.

I've had to re-jig the ending on the current book I'm working on. The Salty Dogs one went on for ages. I know Slug of Doom I'd done it one way, and then it was edited a different way. In terms of what helps me, it is just, I mean I will come up with the ending, you know, as a rough, and then it's just a case of following through on it. I mean that doesn't tell you anything at all.

Elys Dolan: Specifically thinking about the bone thing again, so you didn't get that bit of pacing right until roughs. You had to re-jig that all in the roughs.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: You couldn't see it in a thumbnail?

Matty Long: No. That one was actually okay. It was probably the stuff around the bone thing that needed a bit of work, and it was actually the ending itself that was difficult. Sometimes I'll draw the reveal as a half spread, and you just realise. It might be who realises it. It might be you. It might be OUP that that just needs to be bigger, because that's funny, and we can make more of a big deal out of that. Sometimes I won't draw it as the page turn. I won't see that during the early process, which can probably only be my own fault for not realising how to structure the ending. I don't see it a lot of the time.

But that reveal bit I had for a while. I remember with Salty Dogs I didn't know what the treasure was going to be or who got it, and then eventually you were like, "You should just do it as bones." Which was one of my first ideas, and I discarded that idea because it came too quickly and I hadn't explored it enough. Then I just went on goose chases for my ending. Once I knew that it was going to be bones, I knew that was important to the story, and I had thumbnail drawings.

Elys Dolan: If you discarded the idea in the first place, what happened for you to then make you think that, "Yes, this is the thing that is going to work." Was it when you saw it in a different context, when you started putting it together as a book, drawing thumbnails or doing roughs?

Matty Long: Yes. I remember always having that page down as a single page from thumbnails when I was still thumbnailing it. It was the things around it that changed. What was it about that page?

Elys Dolan: I think you just answered the question.

Matty Long: Yes. It's sort of a twist, I guess. You are playing on the presumptions of what the reader thinks it might be, and you just have to, full page, they turn the page, and it's like, "Ha, you are wrong." Whereas in Slug of Doom it was like, "Ha, look, he is on his arse." Sort of thing, you know. God, this is the hardest question you have asked so far.

Elys Dolan: It is difficult. Yes, I am bringing out the harder ones now.

Matty Long: Fuck's sake.

Elys Dolan: I know. The page turn thing with Blossom in Slug of Doom, was that the same deal? You had that particular page turning moment down from the thumbnails, and then you tweaked things around it?

Matty Long: Now, what was it about the sequencing in that part of my work? Okay. Hang on. I think I had… Now, I think the issue with that was that I gave a greater importance to the crash, the impact spread of Blossom sliding into the scene and crash. I had it as a double-page spread. I thought for that kind of loud crashing moment, impact wise for the story, wouldn't it be great to have a double-page spread? That was changed then to a one-page spread, to give more room. I think it was originally a small panel I had Blossom on with the arse, and it was decided, and honestly I can't remember who decided it. It might have been you for all I know. Decided to have it as a full-page spread, just to end the sequence, and it's a funny reveal. Christ. I think it was originally down as one small panel, and we had to make the room elsewhere to accommodate that on a large. Yes, I remember Pete changing a lot around that sequence.

Elys Dolan: Do you rely on a lot of publisher feedback to figure those things out then?

Matty Long: Yes. I can't always see it. It might actually be a weak point for me, because Pete changed around Slug of Doom, you looked at my recent end sequence for the book I'm working on now, and you suggested a change because you didn't think it was working correctly. It needed to be more fluent. That is stuff I probably don't get round. I can get the imagery out.

Elys Dolan: Why do you think that you can't see it? Because there are places where obviously you do know how to do page turns, you do know how to do pacing, and especially with endings, when you are that far into the figuring out process.

Matty Long: Why can't I see it myself, what's working? It's a lot to juggle at that point, and I think the ending is one of the more… See, this is, I can really enjoy the spreads that are detailed, and I am doing all the jokes, because it doesn't feel to me like the narrative is really important at that bit. It's the meat of the book, and like in Nuts in Space, it's part of their process of going from A to B. You are showing them moving from A to B, or A to B to C, and the narrative isn't resolved there, and it's not started there.
Whereas at the start of a book, and the end of the book is where I get a lot of publisher kind of feedback on, "You need to set this up in the right way, and you need to resolve things in the right way." That's probably where my weakness as an actual storyteller is. You are juggling a lot in those final moments of the book.

Elys Dolan: That's a case of at that point it's harder to see the wood for the trees and step back and look at it objectively, just because you have got so much going on.

Matty Long: You don't know what to give prominence to, and I will often put the emphasis, and by emphasis I mean dedicate the page space to maybe the wrong thing. Salty Dogs I think I did okay, but in the last two, including the one I'm working on, the Happy Forest books, I gave emphasis to the crash rather than emphasis to Zorgoth's resolution and how we could make that work as a funny reveal.
In the one I am working on now, you believed I needed a greater emphasis on what happened to the Ice Queen when she falls through the ice, like that impact spread of that final, you turn the page and you just see her silhouette in the ice. Her kind of story arc, you thought I needed greater emphasis on the fact that she had been defeated, she had ended, and thus the magic had broken. That was important to the story, whereas I had given more time over to the actual process of her freezing, you know the character.
You know, the climax, you have to pick and choose. You don't get much room. You have to pick and choose which bits you can show, and which bits are probably superfluous to the process. I have trouble looking at that, and that's where I need the feedback. From my point of view, I'm just trying to manage everything, so much information, like loads of different characters. You suddenly have to cram all these characters into the panels. The ending takes a lot of room.

Elys Dolan: Before you go off on more tangents, you are saying about there being so much information, so that information overload thing, is there-?

Matty Long: Yes. There's a lot of process involved in a few spreads.

Elys Dolan: Is that unavoidable in the process of making a picture book? Or is it just that you work in such a detailed way that there is more information there to handle, or is it just the nature of

the beast, because you have to deal with image, word, pacing, composition, content?

Matty Long: Yes. I think it's because of the sort of books I do. It's the sort of books I do. They are all adventure books, and they build up to a certain point. The Happy Forest books, there is a pattern in the ending spread which is frolic, they are back in the forest, but the climax happens away from the forest. You use spreads to build up to that, and then there is, can I think of a snappy enough…?

Like, Blossom running up sliding on some slime, crashes into the Potion of Power breaking that, and on Zorgoth, and defeating him that way. That is actually a really, really snappy ending. Could they have had a battle? Would there have been room for that? Half the book would have been them arriving at the point, he drinks the Potion of Power, and then...

I mean, the amount of information you have to convey, him drinking the Potion of Power, him changing in accordance with whatever it is imbuing him with, and then you'd have to have a battle. You have got to show the battle. Then you've got to add how is he defeated in this form? You can't have him defeated very easily, unless you are making a joke about it. That's what we did. He never even drank the potion. He was defeated very easily.

But suddenly there is just a multitude of information that you have got to do, and I think it comes from the sort of stories I make, these adventures that hinge on a certain thing that needs to be stopped and you have to do it in the right way. I can't imagine at the moment doing a book where the ending isn't like that. You know.

Elys Dolan: Is there something about a snappy comic ending then that lends itself to the medium of picture books, just because the space and the page turn and the nature of how it works?

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Because you said you can't have a big, epic battle.

Matty Long: It would just take up too much room, wouldn't it? Yes, but it's different depending on the picture book, I think, isn't it?

Elys Dolan: Okay, for you then?

Matty Long: For me. Here's the thing. I would consider to look at now the ending of Slug of Doom to be quite snappy. But if you look at it, the amount of work involved to get to that point, you know, slipping on the slime, him crashing into the Potion of Power, you have got to show the Potion of Power has been spilled out. You've got to show, you've got to have that moment where you think Blossom is dead or something, and then he's alive, so a so-called snappy ending that you think is

snappy isn't. In the first Happy Forest book they have to go back and they have to jump out, and then they have to transport the tree. It's ridiculous.

Elys Dolan: When you are actually working on it, did it take you lots of iterations in the roughs then to get that right? You know, you've just got to draw it a few times to know if it works?

Matty Long: Yes. I never know if I'm right on that point until the publisher has looked at it. I'm always wary of what I've done until you've seen it, until a publisher has seen it, and if they think it's fine. Because I think probably concluding the adventure is a really hard thing to do.

Elys Dolan: Do you think you get less objective as you go through the process then?

Matty Long: What, like fatigue?

Elys Dolan: Yes.

Matty Long: No. I don't think you get less objective. But I think fatigue plays a part, because you are always going to be scrutinising. Oh, a subjective.

A subjective? Yes, I think actually that is true. You probably do get less subjective. Just yes, like you said earlier, you can't see the wood for the trees. It might be a confidence thing as well, you know. I always put so much stock in endings, and I find them the hardest thing to do. I find them the hardest thing to do just to think of, and then actually planning it out, yes, it's a really difficult thing to do. I think I'm reasonably-

Elys Dolan: If you are doing a funny book all the way through, do you feel like you have to have a funny ending as well?

Matty Long: Yes. I do. But often it's got to be an ending that's quite clever and quick, because if you want to do an adventure, you've got to give space in the book over to the adventure, and make it seem like they have gone a long way and they have been through a lot together in order to try and finish this quest.

Yes. I do think the funniest ones are the best. I think the Slug of Doom one was certainly the best. There might be humour in the way I end the current one I'm working and in the first Happy Forest book, but I don't think they are as good as the Slug of Doom one. You can't always do it.

Elys Dolan: You said the funny ones are the best. Why? What about that makes it work as a whole?

[Aside in conversation 0:27:18 – 0:27:32]

Matty Long: I think the funniest ones work best because if it's not funny, which funny is something I've become comfortable with, and that's almost now like a safety net, just like the detail is a safety net away from the actual storytelling aspect of it. If you are making someone laugh, that feels like a result. If there is not a joke there, that puts greater emphasis on how it is resolved, because it has to be resolved narratively. It has to be satisfying in another way if it's not making you laugh.

Elys Dolan: Are you saying then that you can have a slightly crappier story if you make it funny?

Matty Long: Yes. I think so. Probably. A crappier story if it's funny? My publisher is always trying to make me think of the stories. Story is an interesting one, because I read feedback on it, from people, and people will say, "The story is quite weak. There's not much of a story." I look at the other picture books I see, and I think, "This has got no fucking story at all." You can quote me on that for your PhD.

Elys Dolan: I will.

Matty Long: Some of them are just characters on each page. You know, like Please, Mr. Panda or something else, there is no story here at all. Why are you targeting me for the story? Like, the story here is this happens and then they go here and they go here and they go here. Then, oh, there is a twist, and they've got to go back here. But I consider that the story, so why is it weak when I've got these twists and turns and all these different environments? That's all part of the story.
Why do I get targeted for the story not being too strong? I don't understand what people want. What do you want? Do you expect more of a story just because of the type of book I am trying to do? Do you understand that there is only so much room?

Elys Dolan: I am getting a bit off topic from talking about humour here, but just because it's interesting, if you are doing a book, like Super Happy Magic Forest ones, the echo, the epic nature of Lord of the Rings that have very strong plots and very involved plots, does that set up an expectation as well, because you are using that same style?

Matty Long: It could do, but they also have to look at the limitations of the medium that it's in. This isn't a three-part trilogy like Lord of the Rings. It's 32 pages. I don't understand. What is it from a story they expect? Is it more the character itself goes through a change? My characters, they remain the same pretty much throughout. They have a knees-up at the end once the quest is over.

Is it because I'm not paying enough attention to what they learnt? There is no overriding kind of moral?

Elys Dolan: If you are spending so much time in a book about, you know, going on a journey, you adding a lot of humour and jokes in there is taking space, can you do everything?

Matty Long: Yes, you can't. It's a juggling act as it is. Story, I don't understand it when people say that.

Elys Dolan: I think, you know, you may have had that sort of feedback from three or four people, but say 50,000 people have read your books.

Matty Long: Fifty thousand?

Elys Dolan: Yes. Well, you know, if you include co-editions and UK sales.

Matty Long: Yes. I mean this are just some reviews I see, and personally I don't understand it. It might not be an issue, but it's interesting that people point it out. What do they expect from story? Is it character development? How much do my characters develop? Not much. They are there for the ride really. Maybe that's something more that they want, and I thought I'd try to handle a bit more in Salty Dogs. Yes, sorry, I kind of went away from humour there.

Elys Dolan: Yes. I think you have got to choose what to focus on, because I don't think you could do funny… Well, could you? Do you think you could do funny and also poignant, character development and adventure?

Matty Long: It's all a balancing act, isn't it? That's no more balancing when it comes down to the final sequence of something, because is there the room to imbue this with humour when it's such an important part of the story in that arc? The story itself might not be that amusing, so you can have that amusing end.
I think your original question was do I find amusing ends important? Is it more important to have a funny ending? I think it is, because if you have gone for humour throughout the book, then why not conclude it with one big punchline, which is essentially what Slug of Doom does, but it can't always work out that way. I don't think the ending of the one I am doing now is particularly funny, but I think I've less confidence in it because of that.
Yes, that's being honest. I don't think it's particularly funny. It's a resolution. I don't think it hits the same notes.

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Elys Dolan: You think it will be a weaker book, because it doesn't have that continuous spread of humour all the way along?

Matty Long: I think so, yes. Why wouldn't you want a big funny punchline at the end than something that's more just shows the process? Because you can't have that punchline at the end without showing the sequence that came before it. It's a conclusion, but it's also funny.

Elys Dolan: Well yes. The punchline has got to make sense. You've got to set it all up.

Matty Long: Exactly, and it did. Slug of Doom just came together well. But in this one, I think it's a conclusion. I don't think there is a big laugh there. That puts a greater emphasis on the conclusion itself being clever, you know being maybe a bit of a twist, being really sequenced well, and the ending of this book is the issue I think I have with it. But it was the same with Salty Dogs. But that was more because I spent so long trying to figure out the ending. It's true of this one, but the sequencing at the end, I do wonder about it.

Elys Dolan: You managed in some of the books to create very effective, funny endings. What about the process of working on the other ones that has got in the way of that? Is there any rhyme or reason to it?

Matty Long: Can you rephrase that? I'm not sure I understand.

Elys Dolan: You have done it once, the funny endings. Why can't you do it again? What's different?

Matty Long: Yes, what's different? It's situational for a start. If you look at the elements involved in Slug of Doom, for example, there is a slug in a cape. That's funny. Look at what you can do with slugs. You can stamp on them. They get flattened. There is slime. Slugs emit slime so you can slip over. That's slapstick. There are elements within the characters and the situation where you've held it that work in its favour.

Elys Dolan: You need to put those things in?

Matty Long: Well yes, all the elements just come together.

Elys Dolan: Why didn't you do the same thing in Super Happy Frozen Forest?

Matty Long: Yes, why don't you do the same thing there? I spent ages on the ending trying to figure out how is the best way to do it, because it's also got to be very quick, because it's going to take some setting up. You know, pages given over to them arriving, you having this dramatic moment of them, you know, interacting with the enemy. Then the thing has to happen, and usually it can't be a big battle because there is no room. It's got to be something punchier.
Why can't it happen? It's different circumstances. In the development process, I am obviously in control. I can change the circumstances, and I did, to suit the ending. I made it take place on a bridge so that the bridge can crack and she can fall through. That was a way of finishing her off. It just so happens it is not very funny, I don't think. One kid might find it funny that she is just falling to her death.

Elys Dolan: But with the other books you deliberately put in devices that were going to facilitate a funny ending?

Matty Long: No. It just happened. Slug of Doom, I didn't think, "I need to set it here in order for it to be funny." It's just I'd set it there, and because we had slime throughout the book, they followed the trail. In the end he slips on the slime and crushes the slug. It just made perfect sense. Everything was there for it to work and still have a punchline. In this instance… This is bad. I am talking down a book that isn't finished yet and hasn't been realised. I am shitting on how it ends.

Elys Dolan: I don't necessarily have to put any of that in, or mention it anywhere. There isn't a way of you consciously ensuring a funny ending. You have just got to see. You have got the end and…

Matty Long: What took precedent with this one was story, because the Happy Forest is under a snow spell. I have to make it clear that that spell is broken once this character is defeated. I have to have her defeated and obviously gone in a very obvious way. At one point I thought of a hairdryer device that melts the character. I had loads of different ideas for it.
One of them was like a chilli pepper and a character that could breath fire. But then you realise you have to foreshadow that by then maybe looking for a chilli pepper. You have to give that due care and attention earlier on the book in order for it to make sense later on if you are going to use an item of some sort, like an artefact that can defeat the Ice Queen in that way.
How she is defeated is a matter of circumstance. She is on a bridge made of ice and brings down a shovel and it cracks below her. It makes sense for that part. Now, I had that idea of her falling to her death as being a way of defeating her, an obvious way that she has been defeated.
 Because you've also got to remember that it's a picture book. You can't have her being stabbed or anything. You can't have anything that is too graphic or horrific, maybe. It's got to be very immediate. I realised she needed to be in a position where she could fall to her death. Okay, let's put her on a bridge in order for me to manoeuvre this in the right way.

Elys Dolan: Just getting back to the root of the question, it's more of a narrative takes precedent over humour situation again?

Matty Long: I think so when it comes to story, because you could laugh and be like, "That was funny, but it hasn't solved the problem of this. That hasn't done this." It just happened in the Slug of Doom one, it was funny, but also resolved what happened.

Elys Dolan: Would that take away from the humour itself then, if you were like it's funny but I don't understand?

Matty Long: Yes, I think so. I mean, do you even laugh if you don't understand it? A joke that someone doesn't understand, they are just not going to laugh at. It always take precedent, like finishing off that story arc, it always takes, you know.

Elys Dolan: The order is always narrative, and then humour. You can't have humour and then narrative?

Matty Long: Yes. They are more evenly balanced during the book. In the middle section I think they are more evenly balanced, because you know, that's where you are not concluding or setting anything up. The start and endings of the books always seem to be the bits where you have got to set it up and conclude it in a way that's satisfying.

Elys Dolan: Does it give less room to be funny then?

Matty Long: Probably, yes. Looking back at my books I've done and worked on, I think only one of them has that funny ending really. The others have all been a process of defeating the villain. I mean they removed Old Oak and put him in the Haunted Forest. It was satisfying because it made sense. He was a bad guy so he had to be there. I don't think it's a laugh out loud sort of moment.

Elys Dolan: But comedy isn't necessarily a laugh out loud thing as well. Things can be humorous in that satisfying way in all sorts, gently, whimsical, so it's different.

Matty Long: Yes. I don't think it's as riotous as the Doom ending, but I think it goes some way of being funny that ending, so there are obviously different endings of it.

Elys Dolan: Great. To finish things off, I have got a couple of questions about just working within the publishing industry. Less about process, so hopefully it won't hurt your brain so much.

Matty Long: Yes. Really, really.

Elys Dolan: You said some good stuff, some really interesting things.

Matty Long: Really? Okay.

Elys Dolan: But I may have scarred you for life by the looks of things.
        Alright. We talked about before when you are working on a book for a publisher to a deadline, and you have got various different lots of feedback coming in, and you have got to go through that process of perhaps you have got to wait for weeks to get feedback, does that publisher interaction, the different way you'd approach making a book when you work with someone, does that make it harder to be funny in any way, to think up the funny stuff?

Matty Long: I don't think so. Does that make it harder? What, within the demands of the industry?

Elys Dolan: Yes, because remember when we were on the MA and you got to make books, and you didn't have to wait three weeks for feedback, and you could just potter away on something and nobody would necessarily change things?

Matty Long: Okay. I mean I haven't changed how I work so much, I guess, because I miss deadlines. I am, in effect, having that time. I wasn't making funny books really when I was on the MA course. It's hard for me to gage that. Honestly, I don't think it has an affect. I don't think the pressures of the industry have an affect on how difficult it is or easy it is to be funny in a book, if that was your question.

Elys Dolan: When you were talking about leaving placeholders in before, that's not so much you didn't get the time to think up the funny thing? You just couldn't?

Matty Long: Yes. That's I can't think of something right now. No, I don't think there is really an issue there.

Elys Dolan: No? That's brilliant.
        Alright. The publisher input then, the conversations that you have, having another bit of quality control there, so when it comes to making sure jokes work, getting feedback, is that a useful relationship then?

Matty Long: Yes. You always want to know if it is hitting the spot as you are doing it, I think. You fed back to me on Happy Forest Dummy when I was doing that the first time. I probably wouldn't have had the encouragement or the balls to try and go for, embrace the funny if you hadn't basically said, "You need to do this, this way."

I'd always try to be funny, like little bits. But, not brave enough to actually go, "Okay. I'm not going to make no bones about this. I want this to be funny. I am going to try and be funny." I want it to have funny little moments that people found amusing and whimsical, but without the burden of going, "You are trying to be funny?" "Yes, I am." Redirect me to the question.

Elys Dolan: Well, I think you have gone on to that, just about feedback generally. Is it important to get that informal feedback from people like me, other people who make books?

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Is there anyone else you show it to and get?

Matty Long: Yes. I think as illustrators we are probably quite needy, and your mood changes on things. You might be up or down on something, and so I'll call over Sarah and be like, "Can you look at this page?" There will be bits that I want her to laugh at on the page. It's like this is a test. I won't say that to her, but I might hear a laugh and be like, "What bit? What bit was funny? What do you like about it?" I'll gage from her what bits stood out, what she found funny, and I might point to a few bits and be like, "What about this bit?"

Sarah isn't really the end. A 30 year old without a kid isn't really the end user of this book. But you need little pick me ups. You know, you need little pick me ups during the making of it for sure. You are probably the same. You can't do it all in a vacuum. You need to be able to see what people are thinking at the same time. If they don't like a specific joke, you know, you just change it. That won't knock your confidence, I don't think, because you are not going to win them all. You are not going to. You just go for something different, don't you? Feedback good.

Elys Dolan: Feedback good. You need feedback. Is that the only way you know stuff is funny, or do you trust your own judgement enough with another bit just to let it go through without needing a test?

Matty Long: Yes. Do I trust? I think I trust my own judgement now. But I always did anyway. I did at the start, I think, because before even a publisher had seen it you have to trust yourself. Yes, that side of it hasn't changed. I think I have got good reason to trust myself really, just because of where I am now. But even when I made that first book, I still had to. You have to, otherwise it wouldn't have been shown to anyone. Yes.

Elys Dolan: There are always so many risks in the whole thing, isn't there, especially when it comes to including anything funny, because there is nothing worse than a joke that doesn't quite work.

Matty Long: Yes. But like I said, I don't think I've really… No one has ever said to me. They will focus on the jokes that do work. Maybe both of us have got jokes that don't really work in our books that really no one has laughed at, but the beauty of what we do is that there are always other jokes.

Elys Dolan: Is that just because of the detail and the density of content?

Matty Long: Yes. It has to be. There is probably always going to be stuff in there that may be not that funny. But because the amount of content we do have, maybe people just go over that. Yes, just ignore that and focus on stuff they do like. But maybe we are just completely hilarious and there aren't any.

Elys Dolan: That is of course a possibility, and a thing I tell myself every day.

Matty Long: Yes. Yes, for sure.

Elys Dolan: Last thing that I want to cover, co-editions, stuff being funny in other countries. I know this is something that has come up with you about the American edition of Super Happy Magic Forest, the little changes.

Matty Long: Yes.

Elys Dolan: Can you tell me about that? What happened?

Matty Long: Co-editions. Right. The one that sticks to mind for Super Happy Magic Forest and removing funny, now there is a subtle sort of humour. I remember on the first page there is a spread. The opening page of Happy Forest, you know it, where you introduce the forest and you point out loads of different things around the forest.

One of them is affordable pixie housing. The American edition changed this to pixie housing. They removed the word affordable. There was an agreeable fishing spot, was changed to best fishing spot. I think there was something quite funny and maybe British about the term agreeable here. This is the happy forest where everything is brilliant, everything is amazing, but we just described this as agreeable. We described the pixie housing as affordable. You are bringing in that real

world's idea of commerce and housing into something that is completely fantastical.

I think there is a little bit of humour in that. Agreeable fishing spot, instead of super amazing fishing spot. It's, "That's agreeable. Yes, that will do." There is something humorous in that, and they wanted to remove that. In fact, no, they did remove that for the American market. Why? I don't pry into it too much. I just complain. But I don't ask for exact help.

Elys Dolan: Is that something you can butt up against and try and keep?

Matty Long: There are battles you have to pick, and I don't think that was one of them. Like for example, Slug of Doom, the front cover and the name, they wanted to call it Super Slug of Doom or Super Happy Magic Forest story. I didn't want that too much. You know, they wanted to change this and change that.

Elys Dolan: Why didn't you want it? What was wrong with that?

Matty Long: Super Happy Magic Forest and Slug of Doom. Super Slug of Doom and Super Happy Magic Forest. Well it was just like, "What are you doing? What was wrong with it originally?" Super Happy Magic Forest. Slug of Doom. Super Slug of Doom. Something about the word super I think takes away from the immediacy of Slug of Doom.

Elys Dolan: Is there something satisfying and funny about calling something a Slug of Doom then?

Matty Long: Yes. Why do you need the word super there? It's like they used the word instead of agreeable, the word best. Why do they need to add that word in? Super Slug of Doom. It takes away from the Slug of Doom. There is humour in the fact that it is a slug, something very small and inconsequential for the most part, of Doom. You are kind of muddying the waters by just putting the word super in there. I think it takes away from the Slug of Doom. I mean, Super Slug of Doom you get a bit of alliteration, but I'm not sure it's right.

Elys Dolan: Also the crux of what makes that villain funny is that it's Doom, which is a big, evil thing, and it's a slug.

Matty Long: Yes. Slug of Doom.

Elys Dolan: It's that contrast.

Matty Long: It's quite blunt. I don't know why they did that. I am just trying to think of any other

humour things they tried to change.

Elys Dolan: Was that the Americans again?

Matty Long: That was the Americans, and it's easiest for me to compare and contract English with American, because I can't read Swedish.

Elys Dolan: They'd never make you do artwork changes or name changes and things for the international co-editions in a different language?

Matty Long: No.

Elys Dolan: Because I've had it where they've changed the names of my characters for international editions. In the Danish edition of Mr Bunny, Edgar the Quality Control Unicorn becomes [Eddie the Einhorn 0:52:19], and gets rid of the quality control bit.

Matty Long: Okay. Right.

Elys Dolan: I mean there is plenty of fun to be had from a unicorn called Eddie, but when you remove the quality control bit it takes away that slightly more adult irony. They don't do that to you?

Matty Long: No. Actually, I remember speaking with someone from, let's say it was the Danish publisher of Super Happy Magic Forest. I was speaking to a guy who I think was the editor. I don't think it was the translator. I think it was the editor, who also might have translated. But I met him in Bologna, and he went at pains to tell me about how he worked with making sure that the right feeling of the characters was carried over.

One of them as an example being Trevor the Mushroom. I choose Trevor for mushroom because he's a magical talking mushroom, and instead of giving him a magical name like Blossom, you can undercut that by giving him a very real world, quite heavy sounding name, Trevor, to say. I thought that was funny.

He told me he had to really think to himself, "What's the equivalent in Danish? What's the name of something…?" Because you know, certain names have certain connotations with them. A Bruce versus a Quentin. It's weird, but it's true. In the end he went for, I think it was [Canoot, Noot 0:53:58].

Elys Dolan: Noot.

Matty Long: Noot.

Elys Dolan: That's like the Danish equivalent of calling him Dave?

Matty Long: Something like that. It was either Noot or Sven or something.

Elys Dolan: Oh, Sven would be good.

Matty Long: Yes. I think in one of them he is Sven, one of them he is Noot.

Elys Dolan: Sven is probably the Swedish one.

Matty Long: Yes. I can't remember exactly. But they can work to make sure that they can preserve the sense of humour, because humour is universal. He was preserving the sense of humour there. The Americans, I think, were taking the humour away, but they probably were doing it for different reasons. Maybe they thought the word affordable was too big for a picture book. The same with agreeable. They would have thought, "Let's go for something more obvious."
They go for more obvious things, like Super Slug of Doom. The subtly, and yes I'll say it, some of the humour is subtle, I kind of view subtly in humour in things I do, and I think they take that away. They want things to be a bit more obvious. Yes, fuck them.

Elys Dolan: On that note, we are probably done.

Matty Long: Yes. Oh my God. Talking.

END AUDIO

Appendix 10

Participant Information Sheet

Anglia Ruskin University

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET GUIDANCE V1.0 28.04.17

Section A: The Research Project

1. **Title of project**
   Humour in Picturebooks

2. **Brief summary of research.**
   To explore humour within illustrated children's books destined for publication through practice-led research. The objective is not only to explore what kind of humour is found within illustrated children's books and conduct an external examination of the mechanics that bring it about but to gain insight from the point of view of the professional picture book maker through creative practice. Along with this it will exploring the impact of working within the constraints of the publishing industry and how this affects the use of humour within picture books.

3. **Purpose of the study**
   These interviews are being conducted to gain insight into how specific picturebook makers create humour within their work.

4. **Name of your Supervisor**
   Prof. Martin Salisbury

5. **Why have I been asked to participate?**
   You are a picturebook maker who has demonstrated repeated use of humour within your practice.

6. **How many people will be asked to participate?**
   5-10

7. **What are the likely benefits of taking part?**
   It is unlikely that there will be any direct benefits to participants. The research is intended to develop our knowledge of how humour is created in picturebooks from the perspective of picturebook maker. So the likely benefits are an increased understanding of practice

8. **Can I refuse to take part?**
   You can refuse to take part at any time without giving a reason.

9. **Has the study got ethical approval?**
   This study has ethical approval from an ethics committee at Anglia Ruskin University.

10. **What will happen to the results of the study?**
    The information gained my be disseminated in the form of a doctoral thesis, in research papers, at conferences and potential future academic publications.

11. **Contact for further information**

Anglia Ruskin University

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

1. **What will I be asked to do?**
   You will be asked to participate in one interview with a researcher for approximately 1 hour to discuss elements of your practice as a picturebook maker.

2. **Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?**
   The information that will be discussed is specific to you as a picturebook maker so you will be identified by name and reference made to your works.

3. **Use of quotes.**
   Quotes from this interview will be used within the doctoral thesis and any resulting academic papers and publications.

4. **Use of recording equipment.**
   This interview will be recorded. The recording itself will not be published or distributed in any way. A written transcript of the interview will be created which will be used as part of the doctoral thesis, academic papers and publications. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript.

5. **Are there any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part?**
   There are no costs to you associated with your involvement with this study. It is not envisaged that any negative consequences will accrue to you from your contribution in this research

6. **Whether I can withdraw at any time, and how**.
   You may withdraw at any time up until the submission of the doctoral thesis and/or of any articles or other publications in which the data has been included. To withdraw contact Elys Dolan at X or X.

7. **What will happen to any information that are collected from you?**
   The recordings will be password protected and stored digitally for the foreseeable future. The transcripts will also be stored digitally and password protected. Paper copies will be made of the transcripts and stored securely.

8. **Summary of research findings.**
   If desired on completion of the doctoral research you will be sent a summary of the research findings. This summary will be delivered via email.

9. **Contact details for complaints.**
   If you have any complains in the first instanced please contact the research supervisor, Prof. Martin Salisbury at X
   If your complain remains unresolved please contact Anglia Ruskin University's complaints department.
   Email address:
   Postal address:

PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS TO KEEP,
TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF THE CONSENT FORM.

Thank God
that's over.