

Culture through Children’s Picture Books: A New Kind of Reading or a New Kind of Child?

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Abstract

Children’s picture books are anything but neutral. As culture moves ahead, technology within society gives and it takes away. The purpose of this paper is to explore how changes in the foundational patterns of life can be seen through the pages of a picture book, and how patterns of recognized change become harbingers of a quasi-prophetic voice pertaining to the future. Through a modified content comparative analysis coupled with the learning heuristic of epistemological shudders (Charteris, 2014), this paper examines three older children’s picture books and their revisions in a later decade. In evidence of the resultant cultural changes, questions emerge. What view of culture, both past and current, do children’s stories portray? How has writing in a picture book changed the perception of child and adult relationships? Results consider the perception of the family/child relationship, and what is now perceived to be a typical family life. This investigation reveals some interesting ground to be held as part of an overarching narrative, not just through the historical evidence of picture books, but within the larger fabric of hope and direction for future readers who may experience a cultural worldview that encourages them to become the stories they tell.

Keywords: picture books, modern, post-modern, tech-fictive, family, culture, worldview

Introduction

Picture books are not neutral. They display the life of humans and how they live in the world. It is not surprising that researchers have been interested in the field of children's picture books as narrative vehicles that represent change in culture, and form a particular kind of literary history. Research on picture books has included themes of social interest such as family (Belcher, 2008, 2010; Heath, 1982; Johnson, 1999); culture (Owens & Nowell, 2001); social issues (Dyches, Prater & Heath, 2010; Johnson, 1999); education (Wolfganger & Sipe, 2007); and currently, media and narrative/special needs (Maich & Belcher, 2012; Maich, Belcher, Sider, & Johnson, 2015; Belcher & Maich, 2014). The common thread in all the above research lies in examining how picture books written in a specific time, history and culture, engage current life.

Picture books engage culture in modern, postmodern, and what I call, "tech-fictive" modes of writing, because in my knowledge, this style of writing has not met the criteria of other forms of children's literature. For the purposes of this study, these modes are defined in the following way.

In the modern story, there is a beginning, middle and end that presents a logical conclusion. The setting is relatable to daily life. Modern stories, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, relate to, or are characteristic of the present and immediate past of modern American family life. Such stories may unfold in a traditional story form (beginning, middle, end), or model conduct, such as the binary opposites of good/evil, or moral aspects found in original fairy tales. This mode is representative of the bedtime story, (Heath, 1982), where parent and child have central stage. Being read to paves the way for early literacy for a child at home, and fosters a love of shared reading (Fox, 2001). In the post-modern story, the narrative engages a social issue and has two audiences (adult, child). Two stories run parallel. The adult identifies one, and the child relates to the other. The largest difference between modern and post-modern story is what Gergen (1994) refers to as the "abandonment of the traditional commitment to *representationalism*; the assumption that there is (or can be) a determinant (fixed or intrinsic) relationship between words and world." (p. 412). Gergen goes on to add that in post-modern writing, "the language of values all but vanishes from serious debate" (p. 413). However, this does not imply that post-modern thought discourages moral deliberation. Rather, it can serve to provoke it by engaging relational discourses and promoting a reflexive stance linking to broader cultural and historical context.

In what I have coined the *tech-fictive* mode, the child is guided to see technology as something to be desired. Humor, satire, irony or parody often abound in such writing. Images are more prolific than words, and words may relate more to the slang of the time than "proper English". These books subversively create desire or appetite in the reader. The story does not have to be deep or invasive. The "setting" includes a virtual realm that is technologically alluring.

Picture books are significant. As humans, the stories of our youth stay with us, engaging us to live and view the world in certain ways. They are not only intellectual experiences, but heart forming experiences as well. Naugle (2004) declares that every story is read through the lens of a worldview:

A worldview, then, constitutes the symbolic universe that has profound implications on a variety of significant human practices. It digs the channels in which the waters of reason flow. It establishes the hermeneutic framework by

which texts are interpreted. It is that mental medium through which the world is known. Human life in its variegated aspects, so it seems, proceeds “kardiopically” – out of a vision of an embodied heart living in the world. (p. 27)

The books in this study re-engage former ideas of an author, and subvert these into a modern parody or third-person representation. I consider modern and later narratives of three comparative examples of six picture books in this study. The first engages children’s author Anthony Browne and a story he first authored in 1977 and rewrote again, twenty years later in 1998. Two other examples explore former best-selling texts by modern authors (Margaret Wise Brown and Laura Numeroff) and their representation by a current contemporary author (under the pseudonym, Ann Droyd).

As this engagement moves from modern story to tech-fictive mode, changes in interaction within readings emerge. Implementing a modified comparative content analysis based on investigation of characters, time/setting, culture and audience, I explore areas of change from the original telling of the story. I then probe this content using the heuristic for teacher learning of “*epistemological shudders*” (Charteris, 2014), which includes a process that intentionally critiques what is said in a text to consider what is omitted or not said.

Where the original authors saw children’s literature in the frame of a bedtime story where children were read **to**, it is now possible for children to view a story independently or online and essentially be read **at**. The human supports of a shared reading that involved questions and pause do not exist in cyberspace, and young children do not often question what is read to them without invited discussion. In encountering these changes, philosophical questions arise as to what it means to *engage* a narrative, what values the narrative may represent or omit, and what view of being human for the future may be acquired from the reading of the text.

Engaging Story

Since it would not be prudent to assume the chosen texts have been previously read by the audience of this paper, introducing the texts with short descriptions involving context and content for the reader is included to further meaning-making from this study. Books reflect the culture of the author who holds the pen, providing a social lens for the decade in which they were written.

Narrative #1: *A Walk in the Park (1977) by Anthony Browne*

Context. *A Walk in the Park (1977)* centers on two adults, two children and two dogs. The illustrations represent differences in appearance and voice, but not in personhood. Both families in the narrative are Caucasian. Adults and children are neatly attired. The children have similar haircuts, reflective of the rock-style celebrity haircuts in Britain in the early 1970’s. Language in the text is distinctly different between the adults, including a cockney accent and a more refined Victorian style of speech. The book represents a common, foundational event in life; the occurrence of parents, children and dogs enjoying a walk in the park.

Content. The text bridges aspects of the modern and postmodern story. It has a modern story map, but includes the social issue of poverty and affluence. Characters Mr. Smith, Smudge, (his daughter) and Alfred, their dog, encounter Mrs. Smythe, Charles (her son) and Victoria, their dog, in the park. Both Smith and Smythe recognize their “place” in society, avoiding eye

contact and sitting on opposite ends of a bench. The children, however, edge closer to each other and go off to play together. The dogs, running free, do the same. From my decades of use of the book as an educator across elementary and university education, I have noted that adults will relate to the social-political issues raised in the story clearly, but children will commonly first identify with meeting a child in the park, watching dogs play, and enjoying each other's company. Even as the adults avoid each other, the children become friends. Charles gives Smudge a yellow wildflower, which she keeps and takes home. A new kind of story is pollinating here – that of double audience. The child and the adult are both readers, and both view the story from their own positions of maturity and social intelligence.

Narrative #2: *Voices in the Park (1998) by Anthony Browne*

Context. Written in the late 1990s, *Voices in the Park* presents a post-modern critique on social interaction. The characters are the same, (two dogs, two adults, two children) but they are portrayed as *Voices* in the text. Society, in the 1990's, became more aware of social issues, and less aware of people or their interactions within that frame of issue. There was a “name it and claim it” approach to recognizing social ills. Illustratively, the characters are no longer children, but are represented anthropomorphically. This story continues to present social class issues, but in a much more disillusioned and divisive way.

Content. *First Voice*, (Mrs. Smythe), begins the story, not Mr. Smith, as in the original story. Her pedigree Labrador, Victoria, is mentioned before her son. Mrs. Smythe relates arrogantly to the people in the park. Mr. Smith is recognized as a “frightful type”. Charles talks to a “rough-looking child”. The tone of aggression is introduced. The dogs occupy the central place in illustrations of the walk, rather than the main characters.

Second Voice, (Mr. Smith), is out of work, and has become discouraged with scouring the employment ads in the newspaper. The dog is featured as being the first character addressed by the adult, when Mr. Smith says that he wishes he had his energy. He reads the paper looking for a job.

Third Voice, (Charles), is bored at home. Mrs. Smythe says it is time for their walk. He wishes he was enjoying himself as much as the dogs playing in the park. He is invited to play, even though he thinks at first that it is unfortunate that the invitation comes from a girl. Her skills amaze him. His Mommy catches them talking together and Charles must go home. Charles leaves wishing his new playmate would be there next time.

Fourth Voice, (Smudge), notices her Dad has been really “fed up” lately, and was pleased that they could take Albert to the park. She observes that Voice 1 was angry that the dogs were playing together, and refers to her as a “silly twit”. The children and the dogs play together. Smudge felt really, really, happy. Charles picked a flower, a poppy, and gave it to Smudge. When he had to go he looked sad. Smudge kept the flower and made her Dad tea. Smudge is the only character, besides the dogs, who is portrayed as happy.

Social issues are purposefully brought to the front of the illustrations, showing change in language and tone. In many scenarios, views and perspectives are framed in a politically correct way. For example, the position of opposing characters on a bench to show distain between the rich and poor, or the symbolism of the flower to engage friendship. Social norms are prominent. The story shows more animosity to “difference”. The distrust, disillusionment, and fear of others in the postmodern age is evident.

Narrative #3: *Goodnight Moon (1947/1975) by Margaret Wise Brown*

Context. *Goodnight Moon* is a modern story set in a child's bedroom, where a child tries to avoid going to sleep. The child and an old lady are portrayed as bunnies, reminiscent of the Beatrix Potter books. It is a comforting story and reflects a post-war era where family was treasured above all else. Common nursery rhymes are illustrated on the walls of the room, and a quiet old lady whispering "hush" is present, knitting in a rocking chair.

Content. The child says goodnight to all the objects in the room, and the old lady stays until the child is asleep. This is a very peaceful bedtime story, with a foundational family pattern and modern story mode. Illustrations are in soft pastels, and all concludes as it should, in a peaceful and logical manner.

Narrative #4: *Goodnight iPad: A Parody for the Next Generation (2011) by Ann Droyd*

Context. The *tech-fictive* narrative displays some postmodern trends with a meta-fictive story line. Technology is central. Foundational family norms are askew. Youth rule. The adult Dad behaves like one of the children. Adults diminish as characters and/or role models. The exception is the old lady, who represents the modern character, or wise "outsider". Everyone on the page is an individual, and the only one who interacts with them as a group is the old lady. Language used includes slang expressions and incorrect grammar. A sense of chaos envelopes the reader. On the last page, when the digital devices are removed, a bunny reads a book underneath the covers to a younger bunny with a flashlight. Ironically, it is *Goodnight Moon*.

Content. *Goodnight iPad: A Parody for the Next Generation*, begins with the license agreement, and a pictograph saying "Don't bother reading this. No one does. Just scroll to the bottom and click." The dedication is to "everyone who is as hopelessly plugged in as I am." The characters in this book are a multitude of rabbits. The setting is not a bedroom. It includes a bright, buzzing room with iPads, games (playing Doom and Angry Birds), screensavers – and shows babies with digital screens of rattles, and people texting. Robotic toys are also evident, along with headphones, digital phones, TVs and computer screens. Books are read on a digital device. Central to the room is a huge LCD, Wi-Fi, HDTV with Bose 5.1, six remotes and 3-D. Phones, music and FaceBook are noted, as well as YouTube. All technology is active at the same time. An old woman is trying to sleep. She proceeds to remove a child's iPad as he yells "nooooooooooooo." She announces, "Okay everyone, bedtime" – and the adult rabbit in the family (Dad; there is no mother present) says "do we have ta?" She then gathers all the technology and throws it out the window. She kisses the bunnies' goodnight and tucks them in to bed. This story is tech-fictive, in that it amusingly highlights the plugged-in world while providing an anxious yearning for engagement in it.

Narrative #5: *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie (1985) by Laura Numeroff*

Context. In *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, the main characters are a boy and a mouse. With the natural environment and consumerism becoming of social interest in the Green Movement of the 1980s, this story takes place in nature, and then moves inside as the story continues. A young boy, outside, sees a mouse travelling by and offers it a cookie crumb. This initiates a modern story pattern, where the consequences of actions tend to repeat until they are predictive. For example, each new instance in the story is solved by using the same verbal pattern. The story is for amusement, and this puts it at the beginning of another aspect of postmodern writing – the lure to perplex or amuse.

Content. The boy and the mouse demonstrate a predictive, patterned sequence. The mouse requests a glass of milk to go with the cookie, then wants a straw for the milk, followed by a napkin for his its face, and a mirror to be sure he it does not have a milk moustache. The mouse then sees his hair needs a trim, asks for scissors to cut the hair, and requests a broom to sweep it up. He sweeps every room, cleans the floors, needs a nap, and asks to be read a bedtime story. He then solicits paper and crayons to draw a picture of the story, a pen to sign his name, and tape to hang the picture on the fridge. The fridge reminds him he is thirsty, so he asks for a glass of milk and a cookie to go with it. The cycle resumes.

Narrative #6: *If You Give a Mouse an iPhone: Another Plugged in Parody (2014) by Ann Droyd*

Context. This story begins on the inside book cover with the mouse requesting a cookie to repeat the sequence demonstrated in the original book. The boy says *“I’ll tell you what. If you leave me alone for ten minutes, I’ll let you play on my phone. But just for ten minutes.”* The boy then informs the reader that he knows once he does this the mouse will not be asking for anything at all. This is a meta-fictive, tech-fictive tale. It is both a warning and an invitation that makes disobedience more desirable. No foundational family connections are made. The mouse rules with his technological device. The child (who imitates the adult) follows, and an outcome based on resulting actions occurs.

Content. The boy tells the mouse it is time to put the iPhone away. He has planned an amazing adventure for them in an Amusement Park. The mouse is too engaged with the iPhone to pay attention to him. Adventures arise from the inability of the mouse to be in the present, such as not buckling a seat belt on a ride, and in falling out, opening all the cages in the park. He remains oblivious to what is happening and walks off a cliff into the sea where a dolphin sets him on an island asking *“Is that Minecraft? Can I try?”* The boy takes a boat to the island and says, *“You know that this much screen time can’t be good for you, right?”* Then the phone runs out of battery. The mouse totally freaks out and panics. He asks for a charger, and the boy points out that they are on an island with no outlets. Ironically, this reflects current culture, not between people, but between people and their portable technology, without the follow up of “removal of technological device by island”.

Change the Story, and You Change the World

“Stories create worlds. Tell the story differently and you change the world ... stories meant business ... stories were a way of getting to grips with reality.”
(Wright, 1996, p. 36)

In the above quote, Wright links stories to coming to grip with reality. In the current digital age, this is an area seldom discussed. Since 2000, portable technology has become more of a social concern across many disciplines (neuropsychology, crime, medicine, and so on) for a myriad of serious reasons. Harris (2011) and Turkle (2011, 2016) voice concern that technology is removing the ability for people to “attend” to others; Twenge (2017) focuses on daily life and the advent of delayed-adulthood and the burgeoning a mental health crisis. When Wright’s quote is combined with Naugle’s earlier reference to the *“kardiopic”* aspects of a worldview, the stage is set to allow consideration for stories being more than intellectual events. Stories, according to Wright and Naugle, provide mirrors of the world that illustrate to children what they could be, inviting dreams of what they could become. Children discover what they do and do not wish to be like in stories.

Prophetic of the tech-fictive age, in 1995 cultural critic Neil Postman, made the following prediction:

At some point it becomes far from asinine to speak of the god of Technology – in the sense that people believe technology works, that they rely on it, that it makes promises, that they are bereft when denied access to it, that they are delighted when they are in its presence, that for most people it works in mysterious ways, that they condemn people who speak against it, that they stand in awe of it, and that, in the born-again mode, they will alter their lifestyles, their schedules, their habits, and their relationships to accommodate it. If this be not a form of religious belief, what is? (p. 38).

Postman worried that technology would become a “religious” venue of faith and worship to which someone ascribes extreme, life altering importance. When you change the story, you also change the “*kardioptics*”, or worldview, of the reader, which is the centre of a belief system. When your worldview changes, so do your daily life preferences and presumptions. The tech-fictive mode is mute regarding the spiritual, wise, ethical, caring, and humane side of stories, favoring amusement. Individual narcissism rules.

Discussion: Revisiting Epistemological Shudders

Current society has embraced a digital age, where image surpasses print, and picture books are decreasing in making explicit meaningful, obvious interactions. Social norms once commonly embraced by society (such as the need for manners) are now not specifically discussed in many children’s picture books, but may be socially noted by their absence, for example, by omission, or as an epistemological shudder, pertaining to areas of compassion, truth or morality. For example, the rise of wordless picture books allows an independent child/reader to make meaning of any illustrations to suit his/her level of interpretation. However, for most western picture books, a story in that mode is not commonly verbalized or interpreted as shared knowledge within formative educational literacy, unless it is discussed within the classroom. Picture books are increasingly focused on social/political issues; topics that used to be realistically dealt with by adults or in the home. If left undiscussed, each child can have a different interpretation of the same text. Meaning becomes relative to the individual reader, without a shared communal understanding. In North America, the exception to the rule is strand of visual art, where the Japanese tradition of manga work has very much influenced western drawing modes over the last 25 years.

Readers are in a “tech-fictive stage” of literature; a landscape where a new kind of reading is encountered, and a new kind of child may emerge. Adulthood is disappearing in picture books. Children are increasingly appearing as an additional type of independent authority.

The medium is the message, especially in viewing “the other” in our midst, omitting discussion around any discomfort that may exist because of difference or exceptionality. Maich and Belcher have found that technology affects how we today evaluate the misfortune of others, or see people as heroes. Media, via movies in which technology is evident, now shape a view of those “others” that text may find unrealistic. There are many texts today for children featuring autism. While this is to be encouraged, there are certain dangers in this kind of representation as well. Thanks to technology and movie media, those with autism can be virtually represented into a differently perceived and unrealistic tech-fictive persona that removes the truth of discomfort involved in dealing with autism on a daily basis. Movies, for example, can replace

this with a virtual reality of non-difficulty in daily life, even seeing a person with autism as a super-hero that makes such difference more desirable than normalcy (Maich & Belcher, 2012; Maich et al, 2015). Narrative is portrayed via stereotype. Currently, it appears that if a book is rendered to be claimed as “good” it is made into a movie and it is no longer necessary to read the original text. The realistic, daily human angst surrounding the situation or issue is veiled or avoided. Change the text form, yes. Change the world? I shall hold my view on that for a few more years.

Summary of Possible Social Implications:

That Was Then ...

Goodnight Moon (1947/1975), portrayed family life between the 1947 Western American post-war and the “baby boomer” era. With little modern technological intervention in the home at the time of the first writing, radio and bedtime stories were a time for families to share time with each other. Extended families lived together or were within proximity of each other, and grandparents were a part of daily life. Elders were portrayed as wise and patient. Books were often illustrated with oral literature that was familiar, for example, fairy tales or fables. Life was simple and sacred.

If You Give a Mouse a Cookie (1985) is a social spoof on raising children (mouse as child, child as parent). Whatever the mouse wants he receives, and the loop of the pattern is repetitive. The chaos in the house from granting the mouse all his requests appears to go unnoticed. The interesting epistemological shudder is that *no one ever says no*, you do not need that right now, despite the chaos this is causing for the host. Family life entered the child-centred, only-give-options zone where youth are catered to.

In *A Walk in the Park (1977)*, the 70’s era of “rights” and liberation from modern restrictions began to emerge. The story moved from informing character, to reflecting the need for social change in society. Concerns regarding gender norms and roles, consumer interests and distrust within society arose. The worldview of Western American society questioned whether religious life was a good thing. The emphasis changed from the family being foundational to raising the young to peers or social movements informing them, filling the home front void with individual activity or involvement in issues outside of the home. The innocence of childhood was on the wane (Postman, 1994). Adults desired to return to their youth; children desired to become adults. Consumerism targeted the young, while adults had consumerist and class problems of their own. The story moved from the home setting looking out to the outside world looking in. This decade ushered in an end to the age of narrative being central to family structure, which nurtured a bonding of family and child, and understood certain character values and commitments. No one questioned the place of wisdom in the change. Both childhood and adulthood were on shaky ground.

This Is Now ...

From 1998 to 2014, stories were not only read; they were altered in order to be seen on electronic and digital media, vicariously listened to on headphones, watched on YouTube, and crafted or re-crafted through other digital technology. Society became inundated with information glut; most of it individually accessed. Families had no need to turn a dial to invite a radio or TV program into the living room. Digital media invited itself, day and night, through a variety of modes, beeping, dinging, ringing and vibrating its presence. Family life was altered.

The re-write of *A Walk in the Park* (1977) to *Voices in the Park* (1998) demonstrated change in how social values were portrayed, and how characters responded. Rise in the popularity of Darwinian creation theory was very much a topic of discussion in 1998, along with the creation/evolution discourses. The main character illustrations became anthropomorphic apes. The choice of image allows the reader to see humans as simply another kind of mammal. The “Voices”, are not the identifiable names of the originally illustrated people in the story, removing the humanness of the situation. Each Voice has a different typeset. Each Voice is individual.

Voice One begins with “*It was time to take Victoria, our pedigree Labrador, and Charles, our son, for a walk.*” The illustrations, language and subtle differences in staging favor pets over children. Voice One addresses her son the way we commonly address a pet in training: “*Sit*”, *I said to Charles. “Here*”. It is only the dog that is let off the lead to play.

The division in social status is more elevated, without compassionate human-ness, so that difference tends to rule more strongly than similarity. Voice One says “*You get some frightful types in the park these days!*” Voice One, in talking about, and not often to, her son, says: “*Then I saw him talking to a very rough-looking child.*” The malaise of distrust and despair provides a shudder that pets are valued more than children. “*Charles, come here. At once.*” *I said. “And come here please, Victoria”* .

The Second Voice, begins: “*I needed to get out of the house, so me and Smudge took the dog to the park.*” Outings to the park are escapes, not pleasures. The Second Voice is viewed illustratively, but not heard, thus becoming the helpless family member. The fourth Voice, the child, becomes the caregiver. This is an interesting representation of the end of adulthood, as children and dogs now are the caregivers to adults in human strife.

Third Voice begins “*I was at home on my own again. It’s so boring. Then mommy said it was time for our walk.*” Third Voice has become reduced to the position of a pet, alone at home, waiting for a walk. When Fourth Voice invites him to play, he responds: “*It was a girl, unfortunately, but I went anyway.*” The child in this version is aware of gender having social bias, which was not so in the first version. Third Voice is very lonely. The family has been reduced to individuals being seen together at the same place, but not being present to each other or communicating.

The Fourth Voice, is very positive and compassionate, and is pleased to be going to the park. Fourth Voice is very, very happy in the park when both children and dogs are at play, and recognizes that Third Voice looks sad when he must leave and Second Voice is frustrated in his job-hunting. Fourth Voice puts the flower given to her in water and makes her dad some tea. The symbol of the poppy as the flower of remembrance alerts the reader to loss, and to love, and to things to be remembered and not forgotten, but is easily overlooked.

In *Goodnight iPad: A Parody for the Next Generation* (2011), the reader is confronted with chaos that has become more comforting and familiar than alarming. The necessity of always *doing* is shown with bright colors, cluttered graphics, and leaves no time for readers (children or adult) to become human *beings*. The old lady is representative of the last generation to know what the world was like without invasive, portable technology. She acts as a harbinger of warning; use technology wisely and you do not have technology using you. The virtual world is more enticing, stimulating and easier to navigate relationally than the real one. Even the author is virtual, with the pseudonym (and pun), Ann Droyd (Android).

In *If You Give a Mouse an iPhone: Another Plugged in Parody* (2014), the language and chaos are more extreme, and the loss of a sense of family life, is more evident. The lack of traditional literary form is achieved through printed slang and a reduction in print to mere letters to represent words, (for example, DVD instead of digital video disc or device, which derives from mediated communication). The style is written more like a manual than a story, engaging copyright, and so on. Also presented is the addictive nature of technology, and how its removal from society appears to be the only way to escape it. It is now a child's world, regardless of age. Adults, in this case satirically noted by the virtual name of the author of the story, are anonymous, and, therefore, unaccountable for their actions or non-actions, at least from a child's perspective.

Conclusions. Change as Harbinger: A New Kind of Reading or a New Kind of Child?

Change the story and you change the world intellectually and kardiopically.

The nuclear human family as we once knew it is in decline in children's literature. This may be due to many things. Some of these may be cultural (the rise of the latch-key kid in the early 1980s); social (the politicization of issues in post-modernity); due to concerns regarding gender and consumerism in social life, (the dislike of authority, sexual orientation changes, a rising awareness of colonialism); technological (too much in too short a time), or due to the increase in social anxiety and preference for a virtual reality life choice over reality, resulting in a merge of both. There are also positives to many of these scenarios, such as increased accessibility to information, the ability to connect actions and consequences, and the scope of being able to converse with similar minded learners, both near and far away on larger topics of interest.

But the largest common epistemological shudder (I use the word shudder here to describe an undisclosed epistemology for the future that cannot be known as technology advances), will revolve around what will emerge from the move toward tech-fictive story mode if there continues to be a growing inability to “attend” (Harris, 2014); to pay attention to daily life in the present and to those around you as you do so.

Children's picture books, which were formerly written in bedtime story style to teach children about moral binary opposites of taking/giving, good/evil, or needs/wants in life, are no longer as prevalent. It is no longer necessary to write picture books as a compass for learning how to be a person in life, or how to value literacy. Tech-fictive texts mirror a form of entertainment for the individual. Stories for children have embraced areas of parody or amusement *about* family life. “Books” are used more in solitude, often as E-books. Hard-cover children's books are more graphic, and are viewed quickly and independently; read once rather than read *with* someone twice. Adults are often portrayed as simpletons with childish behaviours. The elder characters in contemporary narrative may remind others of reality. It would seem that in many of these texts, parents are dispensable.

Society does have a new kind of story, *representing* a new kind of child. But this is a *virtual* reality, not the reality of daily life in many homes where parenting still occurs. Current forms of tech-fictive story increase a love for all that is technological by making an appeal to amusement. Even the most serious matters (i.e., over indulgence in technology to the harm of relational life), are clothed in humor in order to make what is problematic desirable. At the same time, narratives are negating parts of life that generate moral commitment and deep thinking to harness individual wisdom. Consequences are mute.

The family and its consistent role in shaping what children become, has changed in its representation of what it means to be human – at least in our habitual interactive habits within the covers of a picture book.

The insight that the reader can take from this study is not to read only stories in modern mode. Read and *discuss* stories in a parent/child relationship so that the child can tell the difference between virtual reality and the real grit needed in living a life. And real grit is what we are losing. That is what will change us “*kardiologically*”. Sharing a book to explore this omission has become more essential than ever.

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