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**The Mad Genie in the Attic: Performances of Identity in year 6 Boys’  
Creative Writing**

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# **The mad genie in the attic: performances of identity in year 6 boys’ creative writing**

Identity studies relating to writing in educational setting have tended to focus on the analysis of non-fiction texts. Aligning a Bakhtinian view of language with the concept of identity as participation in “figured worlds” (Holland et al 1998), this research paper puts forward a way of thinking about year 6 boys’ creative writing as identity performance. Undertaking participant observation in a co-educational inner city primary school, the researcher writes the opening of a play script which is completed by two groups of boys. Subsequent analysis of the boys’ play scripts indicates the ways in which creative writing can be used to disrupt hegemonic masculinity and potentially refigure localised worlds.

Key words: creative writing; boys’ identities; primary school

## **Introduction**

*Lucy: Well I’m sorry mum, but the other thing is I just don’t like Leeds. In fact I hate it. It’s cold, dark and it’s always raining. This house is a mess, the loft that was meant to be my bedroom is full of dead insects and whirring noises and (she chokes, catching her breath) and I don’t know anyone here! Why did you and dad have to ruin everything and bring us all here in the first place?*

Lucy is the protagonist of the opening of a play script, which I wrote for a year 6 class. She, like them, was about to start a new secondary school; a change further compounded by her family’s move from London to Leeds. Lucy’s outburst summarises the two narrative potentials I had deliberately left for the pupils to develop: firstly, the friendship narrative, with Lucy being the new girl at school; secondly, the who is in the attic mystery.

It was sometime after they had finished the play script that I became mindful of the parallels between the boys’ writing and Gilbert and Gubar’s reading of Jane

Eyre (Gilbert and Gubar 2000). In *Jane Eyre* (Bronte 1962, 111), the only threat to the eponymous protagonist breaking free from her humble beginnings to marry Rochester is the “the same peal, the same low, slow ha! ha!” noise coming from the attic. The noise comes, we eventually learn, from Rochester’s first wife, Bertha Mason, who is quickly labelled “mad” by Rochester and the other characters. Taking a feminist psychoanalytical approach to literature, Gilbert and Gubar view Bertha as Jane’s “truest and darkest double” (op. cit., 350) and go further still by linking the characters of Jane and Bertha to the author, Charlotte Bronte:

“female authors dramatise their own self division, their desire to both accept the strictures of a patriarchal society and to reject them. What this means, however, is that the madwoman ... is usually in some sense the author’s double, an image of anxiety and rage” (op. cit., 78).

Unlike Gilbert and Gubar, I take a post-structuralist approach to identity and textual analysis, but, I will argue, the boys’ decision to prioritise the mystery plot over the friendship plot as well as their decisions about who to put in the attic can both illuminate key aspects of their identity performances and also suggest ways in which their identities might undergo change as a result of engagement in creative writing.

### **The research study**

This paper is part of a research project which took place in between 2010 and 2012 in a one-form entry co-educational primary school in a predominantly working class inner city area of Leeds. The project was my PhD: a longitudinal study of boys at transition between school phases which, therefore, followed the boys through their first year of secondary school. For the purpose of anonymity, the boys assigned

themselves pseudonyms Countdukutroopvader, Spurs606, MR. JONES, Kay4559, Ryan gates, The Drawer and a can of coke. This paper focuses solely upon the play scripts written by these boys halfway through year 6.

Throughout my time in year 6, I undertook participant observation in order to teach creative writing to all of the 21 pupils in the class. Typically, this took place one morning a week, although the play scripts were the product of my second full week of literacy teaching with them. The pedagogical approach I took as Mr Dobson was one informed by research into the benefits of teachers presenting themselves to their class as writers (Ings 2009). Accordingly, Mr Dobson also took on the identity of Writer (as I explain later in this paper, all identities that are performed in the classroom are capitalised), writing stories both alongside and for the class. The play script written by the class and analysed for this paper, therefore, consisted of the final three scenes of the play script written by the Writer.

Mr Dobson's pedagogy was also informed by socio-cultural view of learning (Vygotsky 1986), and pupils were allowed to self-select groups to plan their stories and generate ideas (Andrews 2008). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this process of self-selection saw boys and girls choosing to work separately and recording their group discussions allowed me as Researcher to consider the interpersonal plane of identity construction (Rogoff, 1995, cited in Ivinson and Murphy, 2006) and the ways in which pupils in each group were influenced by each other. Ultimately, however, the play scripts were written individually, which gave Researcher an opportunity to consider the ways in which the boys negotiated their identities through creative writing, in terms of writing for each other, their teacher and themselves.

### **Tensions between my different identities in the Year Six Literacy Classroom**

Adopting a post-structuralist approach, I was keen to emphasise the perspectival nature of research and the idea that there is “no outside” (Burman and Maclure 2005) from which to objectively describe the identities performed (Butler 2000) in the classroom. I kept a research journal in which three of my roles in the classroom began to take on separate identities of Researcher, Mr Dobson and Writer who understood the classroom in quite different ways. That being said, the post-structuralist approach also made me conscious of how the delineation of these roles was an act of creating rather than naming and the separation between Researcher, Mr Dobson and Writer was in part a purposeful approximation which allowed me to articulate some of the tensions I felt within the classroom. The greatest tension was caused my methodological decision to use participant observation and the conflicting agendas of Mr Dobson (participant) and Researcher (observer) this precipitated. As Clandinin and Connelly illustrate (2000), this made me at feel at times as if I was quite literally torn down the middle.

The writing of the play script part way through year 6 was particularly significant in terms of my identities within the classroom as it was a moment when the role taken by Mr Dobson was to undergo a change not too dissimilar from gender “category maintenance work” (Davies 2006). For most of the first term in year 6 the class teacher had been on extended leave and this, allied to head teacher’s decision not enter the class for the year 6 Standard Aptitude Tests (SATs) in the summer, meant that Mr Dobson was near enough given free rein to use the pedagogies outlined above. At the beginning of the second term, however, Mr Dobson’s pedagogy became untenable and I captured this moment in my research dairy:

“I went into school today to meet with [teacher’s name] and to get a feel as to what my involvement might be with the class now that she had returned. She was quick to say that

the head teacher had changed his mind and that the class would be doing SATs after all. This was problematic because, she felt, the supply teachers hadn't covered the Primary National Strategy units of work that needed to have been covered. As a result, she would have to teach the class a different text type each week and my more 'creative' teaching would have to wait for the summer. I quickly said that I would be more than happy to teach a text type and we decided upon play scripts."

What is certainly palpable here is the reach of the neo-liberal government and the way that this translated itself in terms of literacy pedagogy was to resort to the teaching of 'text types'. Text types pedagogy can be traced by to the Australian Genre Theorists of 1980s (Martin et al, 1987) who identified that texts belong to different genres (persuasion, instruction, explanation...) which have different features at word, sentence and text level and which are social by nature and, therefore, subject to change. Genre theory became attractive to the government's National Strategies of the 1990s precisely because of the way in which texts could be commodified for assessment purposes and with writing reduced to an equation, the social aspect of textual genres was conveniently forgotten. Text type teaching, therefore, is an example of what Bernstein (2000) calls "strong framing", and Mr Dobson's subsequent teaching of the play script involved stronger framing than he was previously used to through the privileging of the formal features of play scripts (stage directions, direct speech...) in the use of objectives and success criteria. It should be noted, however, that this was both an approach with which the year 6 class were familiar and a form of writing they had experienced in year 5. The writing of the play script in this way did not, therefore, provide a challenge to the class and their writing was both extended and fluent.

Strong framing was particularly significant in affecting both my identities and the boys' identities in the classroom and the change in pedagogical approach highlighted the ways in which all of our identities were inevitably inextricable. In terms of my identities, a tension emerged between Mr Dobson and Researcher: the former actively positioning the boys as Pupils; the latter interested in learning about their identities as Boys. Researcher was worried, therefore, that the boys' writing would say more about their ability to meet learning objectives than it would about their identities. What ultimately happened, as I shall demonstrate, was quite the opposite. Indeed, the emphasis upon the participating identities of Mr Dobson and Pupils through the strong framing of genre theory in no way precluded the participation of the Boys and, in many ways, actually helped to illustrate how the boys negotiated their dual identities of Pupils and Boys in the Year Six Literacy Classroom. In this sense, Researcher was proved to be wrong in his thinking about how Mr Dobson should participate in the classroom in order to understand identity construction through creative writing.

Another tension between Mr Dobson and Researcher related to the role of gender in the boys' discussions about their writing. Whereas Researcher was interested in observing the ways in which the boys negotiated gender and how this shaped their creative writing, Mr Dobson was informed by critical literacy (Janks 2013) and was keen to challenge reductionist thinking and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. He therefore often found himself actively interrupting the boys' group discussions.

The Drawer: Yeah cos we don't like chick flick and stuff like Twilight.

MR. JONES: *(To a can of coke.)* You like chick flicks.

a can of coke: No, I don't.



MR. JONES: You told me you watched Bridget Jones.

The Drawer: I went to his house to sleep once and he put Mamma Mia on.

a can of coke: It was my mum who came in and wanted to watch something.

Mr Dobson: Can't boys watch Mamma Mia? I like Mamma Mia.

*(Silence)*

MR. Jones: *(To a can of coke.)* You like Mamma Mia.

Researcher had been reading Connell at the time and began to see such conversations as examples of “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 2005), with a can of coke becoming “complicit” in wanting to be part of The Drawer’s “we” by defending his participation through assigning the watching of “Mamma Mia” to his “mum”. Mr Dobson, on the other hand, was more aggrieved by the way his critical literacy pedagogy was failing to find a foothold in the boys’ discussions.

The play script, however, gave Mr Dobson a way of further challenging the boys’ perceptions of gender through asking them to write with a girl, Lucy, as the protagonist. Here, once again, Mr Dobson interrupts the group discussions to challenge Spurs606 about writing from the point of view of a girl:

Spurs 606: It’s easier to write when you’re a boy cos you can think.

Mr Dobson: Do you think girls think differently to boys?

Spurs 606: Yeah.

Mr Dobson: Really?

Spurs 606: Sometimes.

Mr Dobson: Can you give an example?

Spurs 606: Like they always think about ballet and stuff and boys think about football.

Once again, gender essentialism is palpable in form of “category maintenance work” (Davies, op. cit.) and the expulsion of the feminine from the masculine. In line with research into boys (not) writing in the romance genre (Iverson and Murphy 2006), Researcher’s initial analysis of the play scripts written by the boys from the two working groups focussed on the way they actively censored emotions and promoted humour. Researcher felt that the boys had actively ignored the emotions of the Writer’s central character:

“The boys did not empathise with Lucy. They refused and in doing so they simplified their own experiences and denied their emotions. Repression and regression.”

However, in a similar way to how Researcher had erroneously presumed that strong framing would exclude the participation of Boys, Researchers’ analysis here was reductionistic in its view of the figured world of Friendship. In this sense, my identity of Researcher mediated my view of the boys and their writings and created an overly simplistic version of how they as Boys negotiated their friendships. And only by acknowledging my participating identities in the classroom was I able to perceive this and see things differently. Before I go to explain what I later perceived to be happening in their negotiating of the roles of Boys and Pupils in the Year Six Literacy Classroom, I need to explain why I was looking at creative writing and identity as well as how I was conceptualising identity within creative writing.

### **Creative Writing and Identity**

Whilst literary theory has a history of exploring the relationship between texts and authorial intent, creative writing in educational settings has to date eluded detailed analysis in terms of offering a space in which author identities can undergo change.

Taking a lead from discourse analysis, the texts which are for some reason deemed to be more appropriate for identity work are non-fiction texts, exemplified by Ivanic's in-depth analysis of academic writing by mature students in Higher Education (Ivanic 1998). In terms of creative writing, Kristeva's notion of "intertext" (Kristeva and Roudiez 1980) has been used to look at the effect of reading upon writing (Lancia 1997; Pantaleo 2007), but without conceptualising "intertext" in terms of identity forming discourse. Spence has taken Tobin's useful term "generous reading" (Tobin 2000) - a framework for considering media-based non-fiction writing in terms of pupil identity - to make some overarching comments about gender, story content and structure (Spence 2008). And Howell takes a structuralist approach to analysing Key Stage 3 pupils' writing in terms of the extent to which they are able to transcend their own (presumably fixed) identities in the construction of a narrative point of view (Howell 2008).

The lack of research into the ways in which creative writing can offer authorial agency is perhaps due to the problematic nature of the creative text. How do we view the literary text? As a product of the author's experience? The creative imagination? Society? The reader? This debate has engaged artists and literary critics for much of the last century, with the poet T.S. Eliot providing the greatest challenge to the dominance of authorial intent. For Eliot, the "personality" of the artist is of no significance in the creation of art; rather, the successful artist must aim for "depersonalisation" through engagement with tradition and everything that has been written before (Eliot 2011). Reader response theorists (Barthes 1992; Iser 1992; Jauss 1992) go further in denying the identity of the author through prioritising the role of the reader in the meaning making process.

In the face of such obstacles to thinking about creative writing in terms of the

author's identity, Bakhtin talks about the novel as stratified discourse - "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin 2000) - and in doing so offers a way of bridging literary theory and sociolinguistics. Crucially, he sees creative writing as belonging to "secondary genres" which, by nature, are more permeable to an author's "individual expression" (Bakhtin 1986, 62). From a post-structuralist position, I do not take "individual expression" to mean the expression of an essentialist self; rather I see creative writing as offering a space for writers to frame the ways in which their identities can perform in a range of social contexts which I shall call "figured worlds" (Holland et al 1998).

### **Figured Worlds and Hegemonic Masculinity**

In line with Bakhtin, I view pieces of creative writing as discourses which, from a post-structuralist perspective, function through "différance" (Derrida and Bass 2001). Discourse can be seen to serve three functions: saying (informing), doing (action) and being (identity) (Gee 2011). Participation in discourses (and we all have to participate to a certain extent; even non-participation is sending out messages of sorts which will impel response) is, therefore, an indicator of identity which contributes to both the nature of discourses and identities:

"the point is the performance, negotiation, and recognition work that goes into creating, sustaining, and transforming [discourses] and the role of language (always with other things) in this process" (Gee 2011, 37).

Gee also adopts Holland et al's term of "figured worlds" to illustrate how individuals develop identities through their cultural practice. In "figured worlds", experience in specific cultural practices and contexts is narrativised with lives

following particular trajectories and characters fitting into certain roles (Holland, Lachicotte et al. 1998). Participation, then, in figured worlds provides “the loci in which people fashion senses of self – that is develop identities” (ibid., 72).

Participation in figured worlds is never neutral as, “particular characters and actors are recognised, significance is assigned to particular acts and particular outcomes are valued over others” (ibid., 64). Some individual roles are excluded; all, to some extent, simplified; and other narrative possibilities are left unexplored. By nature, therefore, figured worlds operate through power; power, which, Holland et al argue, creates “positional identities” (identities which are defined by their relation to other identities) both within and (often) across figured worlds.

In line with Foucault (Foucault 1998), Holland et al view power as a structuring force which is never absolute. Adopting Bakhtin’s notion of the authoring of self (Bakhtin 1986), they see the individual as being in a paradoxical position whereby they can use the discourse of figured worlds which perpetuates power to subvert and challenge the very nature of those discourses and, therefore, alter, albeit slightly, the individual’s identity in relation to others (positional identity). Figured worlds are structuring of an individual’s participation, but also structured by that very act of participation.

This emancipatory view of post-structuralist linguistics is one shared by Lather who talks about “postmodernism as resistance” (Lather 1991). However, gender research into cultural practices in school, whilst not using the term figured worlds, is not always able to realise this ideal. This is due to the hegemonic nature of masculinity: “a self regulatory system that needs to be understood as an evolving set of values and practices” (Ivinson and Murphy 2006, 164). In educational research, the power of masculinity can be seen in the hegemonic collusion between

male pupils and male secondary schools teachers (Mac an Ghail 1994) and gender “category maintenance work” in early years settings (Davies 2006). Hegemonic masculinity is also evident in the ways in which the boys in this project discussed the character of Lucy as outlined above.

The sociological stance taken in this paper is one of weakened cultural determinism: hegemonic masculinity is seen as a powerful discourse able to bound performances of identity through figuring localised worlds; but in line with the work of Beck (1992) and the notion of the self-reflexivity, due to its status as a secondary discourse more open to authorial expression, creative writing is seen as a means of disrupting this self-regulatory system and reconfiguring these worlds. The importance of creative writing as a means of refiguring worlds was even greater in this research project due to the fact that the boys in these groups were from a white working class background. As Reay (2006) suggests, the masculine discourse of working class boys can be seen as carrying less hegemonic power than that of their middle class peers.

Whilst Holland et al (1998) do preface their case studies with the acknowledgement of the difficulty of identifying and ring-fencing figured worlds, the examples they use to illustrate identity performance are particularly specific - Alcoholics Anonymous and Campus Romance – and serve to create the impression that figured worlds are discrete, measurable entities with their own self-governing logic. The classroom in which I was operating, I will argue, is actually a forum for a range of different, changing and often competing figured worlds.

Having said this, in order to say anything at all, I as Researcher am having to name (and, therefore, create) figured worlds I perceive to have been operating in that particular context. The names I adopt for the figured worlds are the Year Six

Literacy Classroom and Friendship and they have been deliberately capitalised to signify that they have been perceived as figured worlds. The former focuses upon participants taking on the characters of Mr Dobson and Pupils and enacting various ideological discourses; and the latter focuses upon the participants as Boys negotiating relationships and allegiances within a classroom environment. Similar to the capitalisation of figured worlds, where a character is perceived to be performing in a figured world a capital letter is used; accordingly, the absence of a capital letter (e.g. boys) indicates that figured worlds and their corresponding characters are not being discussed, rather the general meaning of the word (boys) is being used. It is, as I will demonstrate, precisely Researcher's creation of the boys' different identities as perceived by Researcher's different identities (Writer, Mr Dobson, Researcher) in the Year Six Literacy Classroom that can provide an analysis of the boys' creative writing which avoids simplification and which pertains to capture the complexity of the interpersonal plane of identity construction (Rogoff 1995, *op. cit.*).

To return to Researcher's adoption of the theoretical framework of figured worlds, the key relevance is that figured worlds view lived experience as narrative; a move which, therefore, blurs the boundaries between lived experience as participation and creative writing. Both creative writing and participation in figured worlds are, therefore, fictive and this opens up creative writing to potential identity work.

### **The Superaddressee**

In terms of identifying the relationship between the figured worlds in which we were operating and the boys' creative writing, Bakhtin's discussion of the nature of

“utterances” becomes useful (Bakhtin 1986). Although “utterances” imply dialogue, Bakhtin actually uses the term to encompass all language-based communication, including literary works. In a typically enigmatic manner, Bakhtin suggests that literary works are part of a mass of “secondary”, “complex” utterances which are shaped by and shaping of every day “primary”, “simple” speech genres (ibid., 62); a symbiotic relationship which, in a similar way to Holland et al’s narrativising of every day discourse, blurs the boundaries between primary and secondary, lived experience and fiction.

In terms of defining the utterance, Bakhtin is keen to emphasise the constituting nature of context. He sees, “each individual utterance [as] a link in the chain of speech communication” (op. cit., 93) which has addressivity in two ways: both as a past-facing response to previous utterances; and as future-facing in its anticipation of a response from an addressee. The words that make up the utterance, therefore, are “interindividual” (op. cit., 121), belonging to three planes: previous speakers, the present individual speaker and future respondents (addressees).

With regards previous speakers, I see creative writing utterances as temporal and therefore unrepeatable secondary utterances, which are both shaped by and potentially shaping of figured worlds. With regards the addressee, I partly concur with reader response theorists (Barthes 1992; Iser 1992; Jauss 1992), who would see the meaning of the secondary utterance as being determined by the addressee in a temporal and unrepeatable response (when we reread and reread a text, we will always give a different response). Such a view of the position of the addressee, however, constitutes only part of the meaning making process as it excludes the way in which the author performs to and therefore shapes the response of the addressee.

As well as having an addressee, each utterance, according to Bakhtin, is



fundamentally constituted by the author, “with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposing a higher superaddressee ... whose absolutely just response understanding is presumed” (op. cit., 126). The “superaddressee” is Bakhtin’s God-figure: a being who is somehow able to completely understand the meaning of the author’s utterance. Bakhtin moves from post-structuralist to structuralism in claiming that the “superaddressee” actually exists, but within a post-structuralist framework whereby language operates through “différance” and where there is no outside, I would argue that the existence of an actual superaddressee is an impossibility.

The superaddressee as a theoretical construct, however, becomes useful as a device to think about the extent to which the author at that moment in time perceives that the addressee has responded to their creative writing piece as their superaddressee at that moment in time would have done. In line with reader response theory, all responses will be unique and historical, but all responses will also be open to being judged subjectively and temporally by the author in terms of how close they are to the perceived anticipated response. As indicated earlier, therefore, in writing the opening two scenes of the play script for the class, as Writer I had in mind a superaddressee who empathised with Lucy and who understood how traumatic it must be to move from London to Leeds and start a new school. As Writer reading the boys’ writing, I perceived a palpable rejection of this superaddressee; as Researcher (whose delineation as separate from Writer is, of course, a construct), this rejection of the superaddressee was further re-enforced and mediated by my simultaneous readings around hegemonic masculinity and the deriding of emotions. And this combination of readings led, I now see, to an analysis, which, as I have previously stated, was ultimately simplistic and based on my situated identities.

Having said this, whilst from a pedagogic perspective there may be a value judgment here about the pupils “yielding” to the meaning of a text (Chambers 1990; Hunt 2005), from a research perspective, an author’s perception of a response which is either proximate or distanced (as mine was) from what was perceived to be the anticipated response at that moment in time cannot be deemed a priori to be either of a definitively positive or negative value. Indeed, a response that is perceived to be proximate may be symptomatic of entrenched positional identities and may well only serve, from a particular and temporal perspective, as category maintenance work of positional identities in figured worlds; equally, a response that is perceived to be distanced may well, from a particular and temporal perspective, be seen to create a disjuncture which could lead to the local alteration of the categories and composition of figured worlds.

Just as the author of the secondary utterance is both shaped by and shaping of figured worlds, it is important to remember that so is the response of the addressee. Like the author, the addressee’s responses can only be (partially) understood with recourse to an understanding of their participation and positionality within their figured worlds. In terms of the nature of these figured worlds, operating through discourse which functions through *différance*, they are in a continual state of flux and subject to continual change. From a methodological perspective, the only way to pertain to capture identity as participation is to acknowledge this complexity and the multiple identities performed by all participants, including the Researcher.

### **The Figured World of the American High School Drama**

The first group consisted of four boys: Countdukutroopvader, Spurs606, MR.

JONES and Kay4559. As indicated earlier, the boys initially planned their stories

collaboratively and despite the strong framing of the genre theory pedagogy, this meant that their identities as Boys in the figured world of Friendship came through. Indeed, in groups they developed characters in response to the opening of my play script through a technique called ‘role on the wall’. This saw them drawing outlines of their characters on big pieces of sugar paper and writing down descriptions and traits. A key aspect which took hold in both their collaborative planning (interpersonal plane) and their ultimate individual writing was the figured world of what I will name (and, therefore, create) as American High School Drama. In Spurs 606’s script, therefore, we have the co-relations “kid” and “word” (as exclamations); in Kay4599’s we have “cool”, “kid” and “Yo!” (as greetings); and in Countdukutroopvader’s text we have “the guy”, and the question tag “Do you copy?” Co-relations aside, the figured world of the American High School Drama is even more palpable in the almost instantaneous labelling of characters in recognition work. Just as characters in American High School Dramas are known, one-dimensional and fated to lead one-dimensional lives following predetermined trajectories of success and failure – the Nerd and the Jock, for example – so too are many of the characters in the boys’ writing, most notably the characters of Mr Rap, Gilbert and Billy.

Within the first few lines of dialogue of all four scripts, Lucy – who is the protagonist in the first two scenes of my play script – is recast as “the new girl” in the classroom setting. Simultaneously labelled is the new character of Mr Rap who raps his way through most of the scene. Perhaps influenced by the School of Rock films, in Countdukutroopvader, Kay4599 and Spurs 606’s script, Mr Rap brings with him a black American dialect; in MR. JONES’s script his way of talking is Jamaican patois: “Ah tha new girl your late, pair up with Gilbert in tha corna.”

In all four scripts, Mr Rap is an object of humour, a Rapper who, because he is also a Teacher, is without credibility. In Spurs 606 and MR. JONES's scripts, he starts rapping: "1 Bubble Pop, " Bubble Pop"; in Countdukutroopvader's story he raps "Twinkle twinkle little star". Whilst planning in groups Researcher noted the constant laughter of the both as they developed the character of Mr Rap and the humour is two-fold; firstly, through dramatising the mismatch between the normally mutually exclusive figured worlds populated by Rappers and Teachers; and secondly by dramatising this further through the conflation of the figured worlds populated by Rapper and Early Years Teacher.

In all four scripts, the role of American High School Drama "geek" is played by the character of Gilbert: in Kay4599's story he is the self-professed "smartest kid in the school"; in MR. JONES' he sits "in da corna" and speaks "stupidly"; in Spurs 606's he is similarly positioned "in the corner" and he accepts Lucy's labelling of him as "dork" and "dorker"; and in Countdukutroopvader's he is "the guy with the big feet" who is once again marginalised, "in the corner". In each of the stories, it is Lucy's fate as "the new girl" to work with the "dork".

However - and crucially - this is a label which Gilbert, in each of the four stories, to some extent escapes. In two of the stories, this is initially thanks to the fact that Mr Rap is perceived as more of an object of ridicule than Gilbert. Compelled to listen to Mr Rap, Countdukutroopvader's Gilbert verbalises what Lucy is thinking ("I can't wait until home time"); and in Spurs 606's story, Lucy and Gilbert's thoughts are verbalised simultaneously: "That song is weird". To a large degree, Spurs 606's and Countdukutroopvader's Gilbert moves from Dork to Friend and Gilbert is invited back to Lucy's house to find out what is in the attic.

Spurs 606's story, however, is the only story where Gilbert is able to hold

onto the label of Friend, as indicated when Lucy introduces Gilbert to Billy (a manoeuvre which undermined Spurs 606's earlier professed adherence to an essentialist gendered figuring of worlds): "I'm Lucy and I'm here with my brother Max and my friend Gilbert". But in this instance, once labelled as a friend, Gilbert becomes almost superfluous to the story and is forgotten as Billy takes centre stage.

A similar fate awaits Gilbert in the other stories. For Kay4599 and Countdukutroopvader, the "dork" label re-asserts itself as Gilbert is "scared" by the attic and runs away. As with Spurs 606's story, Billy then takes centre stage, although the last line of Countdukutroopvader's script is devoted to re-asserting the "dork" nature of Gilbert with mum responding to Lucy, "So that was the guy with the big feet".

In MR. JONES's script, however, Gilbert's actions are slightly more unusual. Unlike the other three scripts, MR. JONES's first scene ends without Gilbert shaking off his "dork" label. In the following scene Gilbert enters Lucy's family home unbidden to reveal that he had been let in by Billy and that he'd been in the attic. Gilbert, therefore, serves the literary purpose of introducing Billy before he is seen by the audience. His appearance is slightly random, and, as in the other scripts, he does quickly depart, but not before gaining some textual authority through bravery more readily associated with the character of Jock and, therefore, partially ridding himself of the "dork" label.

In all instances - and contrary to my initial readings of their play scripts - Gilbert partially serves his purpose in the friendship narrative and goes some way to allowing their textual responses to tend ever closer to my temporal perception of Writer's superaddressee than I had first thought. More interestingly, however, in all instances, Gilbert's identity is fundamentally unstable, indicating the boys' only

partial participation in the figured world of the American High School Drama.

Why is their participation only partial? Maybe it has something to do with the Pupils' fundamental apprehension of Writer's superaddressee and - because of the co-existence of the figured world of the Year Six Literacy Classroom which gives them the positional identity of Pupils, me Mr Dobson - the perceived need to give Lucy a friend. That the friend is a Dork from the figured world of the American High School Drama certainly complicates things. And perhaps it is this taboo - the interpersonal difficulty of negotiating a relationship between girl and boy - that meant all boys had to leave Gilbert and have him eclipsed by the character of Billy.

Billy is the perfect solution to the difficulty of the boy girl friendship and the Gilbert problem. He takes two distinct forms and is labelled in two ways. In Countdukutroopvader and Kay4599's script, Billy is a character who belongs to the same world as the other characters, the boy who has been trapped in the attic. Although the children are scared as to what they might find in the attic, as soon as Billy appears he is given the adverb "nervously" before agreeing to go downstairs for some tea. There is an epistemological beginning in both of these stories with the mum in Countdukutroopvader's script deferring the knowing of Billy ("he can stay for tea then we'll take him to Jim the guy he'll know what to do") and in Kay4599's script with Billy himself offering a (stunted) history of his incarceration ("this was my house until it was for sale. I ended up in the attic because one of my friends locked me up there"). In both instances, Billy's escape from the attic provides a necessary distraction from the Gilbert problem.

In MR. JONES and Spurs 606's story, by contrast, Billy is the known other of the figured world of Humorous Hollywood Horror. Spurs 606 has him ordering the children to "Get out, now!" causing the children to admit their fear. In MR.

JONES's story, Billy speaks "creepily" and is primed with pantomime one-liners such as "When I getch you I'm gonna eat ya" and "Behind you". There is no need for the epistemological questions now; Billy is already known. So known, in fact, that the fear inspired by this caricature can only collapse in on itself to become humour as both Billys are invited for tea: MR. JONES's toasting "the first meal I've ever had"; and Spurs 606's claiming the food is worse than "eating flies or bugs" and "being sick".

Seen from this perspective, the predictable and known performances of Billy remove the need for the boys to improvise roles and performances for Lucy and Gilbert as they threaten to break away from the figured world of the American High School Drama and disrupt the professed exclusion of girls from the figured world of Friendship. Billy allows the boys the comfort of participating as Boys in the figured worlds of Friendship.

### **Fairy Tales and Parody**

The second group consisted of three boys: Ryan gates, The Drawer and a can of coke. Interestingly, and perhaps symptomatic of the pervasiveness of the American popular cultural, whilst writing a very different play script, this group also drew upon the figured world of American High School Dramas in both their collaborative planning and their individual writing. In Ryan gates' script, the character Crackajack introduces himself with 'howdy'; a can of coke's script has children using the words "coolest", "yeah" and "dude"; The Drawer's school scene takes place at the "lockers" with the children saying "wow", "sure" and "cool". These co-relations aside, the scripts also use labelling to identify the nature of the characters and the figured worlds which they inhabit.

Most of this labelling centres on the character of Crackajack. Crackajack is an invented character who, whilst suffering from slight spelling changes (Ryan gates writers 'Cracker-a-Jack', MR. JONES and Billy use 'Crackajack') is common to all three scripts. Ryan gates' Cracker-a-Jack is similar to MR. JONES and Spurs 606's Billy and different from the other two in that his Cracker-a-Jack is identified by one-liners ("Well howdy"; "Can we get a KFC?") and superficial shape shifting (his voice changes from "posh" to "shouting" to "whisper" to "angry" within four lines of dialogue). As with the Billy stories and unlike a can of coke and The Drawer's Crackajack, Ryan gates' Cracker-a-jack takes over the story, shouts orders and denies the possibility of the friendship story. The story is Cracker-a-Jack's chance to perform.

Whilst Ryan gates' Cracker-a-Jack is paradoxically determined by his very indeterminacy, in both a can of coke and The Drawer's story the indeterminacy of Crackajack is unbearable and leads both casts of characters to threaten to "Call the Police!" The implication here is that the police, as a higher legal authority, would be able to apply the label that would put an end to indeterminacy. Accordingly, this is enough for Crackajack to reveal himself as a Genie/Fairy who will grant wishes. The figured world of Fairy Tales now enters the story, but the way the characters participate in this figured indicates that the boys are aware of the limitations of this world and this is expressed through parody.

In a can of coke's story the simplicity with which Crackajack labels himself ("I am Crackajack the fairy") aligned with the simplicity with which Lucy's wish comes true (the next day everyone at school immediately fights to sit next to her because she is "the coolest") indicates a mocking awareness that in other figured worlds friendships are not so easily won. This authorial awareness of the rules of



the Fairy Tale, compounded perhaps by an awareness of the positional identity of the Pupil apprehending the Teacher's superaddressee, is further highlighted when Lucy threatens to veer away from her prescribed role and the expected script by wishing for "millions of money" rather than a friend. In the next line Crackajack asks "Are you sure?" and in doing so steers Lucy back to the agreed script. "Not really", says Lucy, now correcting herself with: "I wish I was the most popular person in my school".

The self-consciously fictive nature of a can of coke's story is nowhere more apparent than at the end when, having become the "most popular person" at school, Crackajack "pops up" to announce "The end". Equally aware of the ending, the supporting cast face the audience and the last line reads: "everyone bows".

By contrast, The Drawer's parody is slightly more subtle and not immediately signalled. Once The Drawer's Crackajack has revealed himself as a Genie, Lucy plays her role, sincerely "wishing for a friend". Indeed, here The Drawer casts Lucy as the altruistic and self-effacing heroine who offers her wish to her mother first (her mother responds: "You can have the wish Lucy").

As with a can of coke's script, the resolution is immediate with Lucy meeting Maddie at the school gates the next day:

*(A girl appears.)*

Maddie: Hi, I'am maddie I like music, skipping and T.V

The stage direction is the first suggestion here of a parody, with Maddie being referred to as an "apparition". In terms of Maddie's first line, we have the same simple and immediate labelling of characters that occurs in the figured world of the

American High School Drama. It is perhaps not surprising that their next move is to discover that their “lockers are next to each other”.

The following two scenes see Maddie reveal her true colours. Firstly, the girls are playing the piano in the music class. “Your terrible,” Maddie tells Lucy. When Lucy meekly protests that she is “just starting”, Maddie reasserts, “so your still terrible”. The action moves to Lucy’s house where Maddie initiates some dancing. Once again Maddie says to Lucy, “You’re terrible,” at which point Lucy admits, “Your not what I wished for”.

Maddie heads for the loft and calls for Crackajack. As Maddie “appeared” earlier in the script, so too now does Crackajack. He listens to what Lucy has to say about Maddie and comes clean: “Well I’m not so good with magic”. Lucy asks for one more wish, to get rid of Maddie and she repeats Crackajack’s childish mantra: “pipidihoppadido”. This time his magic works and the parody is complete: a Genie who can only partially fulfil his role because he is “not so good with magic”; a best friend character who is really an enemy; and a resolution to a quest that leaves the main protagonist character back at square one, without a friend.

What interests me most about a can of coke and The Drawer’s stories are the ways in which they appear to apprehend then disrupt the expectations of my superaddressee through parody. There is a sense of their positional identities as Pupils responding to Mr Dobson in the way they create a Crackajack character who will fulfil both narrative avenues left for them, but there is also a stronger sense of not accepting and then rejecting these positional identities by introducing and then ridiculing the figured world of Fairy Tales. Just like with the other group and the character of Billy, it is this ridiculing of the figured world of Fairy Tales as feminine

that allows their figured world of Friendship and their identities of Boys to regain textual control.

### **Hybridity and Agency**

This paper started with reference to Gilbert and Gubar's (op. cit.) reading of the character of Bertha Mason as the author's double; the expression of the socially unacceptable "anxiety and rage" of the female author at the role she was expected to perform in the figured world of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Patriarchy.

I see the boys' decisions about who to put in the attic as similar expressions of the roles they were expected to perform in figured worlds of Year Six Literacy Classroom and Friendship.

As Pupils, they all participated through adopting the format of the play script. As Pupils, they all, to some extent, also apprehended the superaddressee of Mr Dobson, acknowledging the friendship story. But as Boys, they all, in differing ways, made the decision not to provide a definitive resolution to the friendship quest.

This, I feel, is due to the way the figured world of Year Six Literacy Classroom was continually interrupted by the figured world of Friendship. Sat in groups, they collaboratively planned their characters and generated ideas; when undertaking individual writing, they would all pause to point to sections they had just written and laugh together at the ways in which their characters behaved. Their writing became a way of impressing one another and in doing so co-constructing the figured world of Friendship.

I later asked them about this, whether they felt that they were writing for me or for each other:

Mr Dobson: So with those pieces of writing, were they written for your Friends or the Teacher?

The Drawer: For yourself.

MR. JONES: Yourself and friends.

The Drawer: Yeah, cos what interests you you write about.

Countdukutroopvader: It depends what kind of story you are writing and which kinda people like that kinda thing.

MR. JONES: (*Looking at Countdukutroopvader.*) You always try to impress the teacher.

The Drawer: You always like to go with the crowd.

MR. JONES: No I don't.

The Drawer: You're shy.

There are different answers to my question here, but what prevails is the way in which the answering of the question becomes a chance for the Boys to participate in their figured world of Friendship where the adoption of the role of the deferential Pupil is ridiculed. This is also what happened with their creative writing as the boys drew upon figured worlds with which they were all familiar, notably American High School Drama, Fairy Tale and Humorous Hollywood Horror. All of these figured worlds are populated by characters with tightly defined roles, but as Pupils responding to their apprehension of their Mr Dobson's superaddressee, the introduction of these figured worlds created disjuncture.

In line with reader response theory, all responses will achieve some degree of disjuncture, but, as previously stated, the nature of that disjuncture cannot be

perceived a priori to be of a positive or negative value. In this instance, and from the vantage point of the figured world of my particular domain of Academia, some of the boys' responses, I believe, can be seen to be of potentially positive value and as potentially reconfiguring of local worlds.

Firstly, the collision of the friendship quest and the American High School Drama brought about the taboo topic of boy girl friendship; a hybrid discourse (Bakhtin 1981) that was, for all boys, untenable, and resulted in the character of Billy taking centre stage. Here Billy, therefore, is the opposite of Gilbert and Gubar's Bertha Mason: a character who, rather than expressing what the situated author cannot express (boy girl relationships, "anxiety and rage"), puts a halt to this uneasy improvisation. The reconfiguring of the world of Friendship as a world that might include rather than exclude the characters of Girls is opened up by Gilbert, then closed down by Billy.

Secondly, the collision of the friendship quest and the Fairy Tale allowed for the transgression of the positional identities of Pupil Teacher through parody. a can of coke and The Drawer's construction of the character of Crackajack both apprehended and rejected my perception of my superaddressee. Here Crackajack, therefore, is in a way similar to Gilbert and Gubar's Bertha Mason: a challenge to the positional identity ascribed to the Writer in the figured worlds of the Year Six Literacy Classroom and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Patriarchy.

It is Butler who identifies parody as one of the ways in which variation of stylised repetition can occur so that the discourse can be turned against itself to afford agency to actors (Butler 2000). The character of Crackajack demonstrates what this looks like in terms of challenging positional identities through creative writing in the Year Six Literacy Classroom. The character of Gilbert indicates,

however, that agency can also come in other guises. Indeed, the collision of the positional identity of the Year Six Literacy Classroom and the roles attributed to characters in the American High School Drama, opened up – albeit momentarily - the possibility for boys to disrupt hegemonic masculinity and reconfigure the localised world of Friendship they were co-constructing.

The key implications are that not only should creative writing be read as identity work, but that classroom engagement in creative writing can be empowering in providing the possibility of different participation within different figured worlds and with different identities to perform.

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