Uncanny Encounters: Home and Belonging in Canadian Picture Books

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Résumé *: À la lumière de la notion freudienne d'étrangeté, le présent article propose l'examen d'albums pour la jeunesse traitant de l'immigration. L'analyse montre comment les personnages féminins font l'expérience de l'étrangeté au cours de leur intégration à une nouvelle réalité culturelle. En suggérant une lecture elle-même marquée du sceau de l'étrangeté, on convie les lecteurs à mieux percevoir la remise en question des notions d'identité et d'appartenance que mettent en œuvre ces albums.*

Summary*: This paper considers Freud's notion of the uncanny in relation to a selection of Canadian picture books that look at stories of immigration. The discussion considers how each of the female protagonists experiences the uncanny as she adjusts to life in Canada and comes to terms with her sense of difference and longing. By taking an uncanny reading of the texts, ideas of home, identity, and belonging are unsettled in ways that invite readers to reconsider how the texts under discussion engage with these concepts.*

> And they planted apple trees — strong hardy apple trees that could grow in the new land. Apple trees that would bloom every spring just like the trees they had left behind.
>
> — Marilynn Reynolds, *The New Land: A First Year on the Prairie*

The above epigraph is taken from a Canadian picture book for children written by Marilynn Reynolds and illustrated by Stephen McCallum. The excerpt comes at the end of the book but recalls its beginning, when a family — comprised of mother, father, son, and daughter — leaves its home to "set sail across the ocean" for the new land. The reason for their departure is not given, but it is presumably an exodus made by choice. In leaving, the family members bid farewell to the familiar, including the apple

trees of their homeland. It is the apple tree they plant in the new world that provides the link back to the originary point of home. While this story tells of an unproblematic migration to and settlement in a new place, it nevertheless inspires thinking about how this fictionalized experience of relocation relates to matters of home and cultural locality.

In romantic discourses of cultural locality and identity, "home" is constructed as a fixed point, a stable entity in which an authentic self resides. This romancing of the home resonates with a desire for belonging and attachment. When the security of the home is disrupted to the point of homelessness, this lack of belonging draws attention to feelings of alterity. These conceptual elements of belonging, identity, and difference are common to Western national discourses of identity politics, liberal pluralism, and multiculturalism. These same discourses invariably inform many narratives of immigration for children. One of the underlying and operating ideologies in such narrative accounts is the domestication of "the other." By making "the other" homely, difference and fear are erased with identities reduced to a singularity. The following discussion considers the idea of "the other" *becoming* "homely" by drawing on the paradoxical concept of "the uncanny." The process of becoming involves a negation and a resurgence of identity, a structuring pattern that is repeated throughout the picture books I have selected. Home is also a metaphor that stands for the nation. What does it mean to be "at home" or "not at home" when one speaks of nationhood? Why is national identity often assumed to be a stable entity in such a way that the naming of one's nationality implies a sameness? Furthermore, why do we fear those who are not like us? These questions guide my reading of the selected picture books where I consider various encounters with the uncanny through the mimetic account of the home as nation.

Before such a discussion begins, however, I want to make a brief detour into anecdote. After all, detours and anecdotes are not incommensurate with stories of arrivals and departures. An immediate question might be, "Why *Canadian* picture books?" My own location, my home, is Australia. It is a place where I was born and have lived all my life. It might then seem a little presumptuous to speak about notions of identity and nationhood about another country, one I have only visited three times for short periods. I live, have always lived, in a place whose architecture, climate, lifestyle, and history are very different from those represented in the picture books discussed herein. When I am in Canada, I notice that aspects of its geography and culture are different from my own, yet there are many aspects that are similar. Strangeness is not so strange but rather takes on a certain familiarity. Being on the outside provides a space for thinking about social and spatial relations that I encounter when I am "there" and not "here." Also, when I am "there" I am constantly reminded of or thinking about social and spatial relations "here." The different spaces I experience

are separate and separated; they also converge. It is this paradox of being and belonging that runs through the discussion that follows. I am drawn to Canada as much for its difference from as for its similarity to my own "home." Like many travelers, it is when I am abroad that I think about home and its connotations with identity, belonging, and difference. Undoubtedly, my ethnicity, class, and gender as a white, middle-class woman provide me with different access points from those who are different from me and who make journeys for reasons that are different from mine. And when I return, I see home with new eyes: its familiarity is at once apparent but also strange. This brings me back to the uncanny.

The following discussion considers Freud's account of the uncanny in relation to four Canadian picture books: Robert Munsch and Saoussan Askar's *From Far Away* (1995), illustrated by Michael Martchenko; Madeleine Thien's *The Chinese Violin* (2001), illustrated by Joe Chang; Paul Yee's *The Jade Necklace* (2002), illustrated by Grace Lin; and Troon Harrison's *Courage to Fly* (2002), illustrated by Zhong-Yang Huang. However, my application is one of modification, perhaps even perversion at times, and highlights what I see as the interdiscursive character of children's literature criticism. Rather than inscribe myself totally in a specific psychoanalytic discourse, I want to enact the metaphor of migration that pervades throughout these selected picture books by migrating across disciplines to draw on a range of discourses that embody notions of subjectivity, texts, readers, as well as literary and artistic strategies. Such a migratory approach is entirely consistent with an uncanny that refuses to be located: it exists, but there is no univocal discourse that can be applied to exorcise it from a text. The uncanny has a protean quality and this paper explores "those other elements" that Freud admits determine the production of uncanny feelings (370) — other elements that lie beyond his original essay.

The image of the home as an extension of the nation surfaces in the ensuing discussion. In perpetuating the rhetoric that Canada is "a nation of immigrants" (which occludes Aboriginal presence), the focus texts offer seemingly easy solutions to complex matters of identity, belonging, and difference. Given that they are picture books targeted toward relatively young children, they are limited to some extent in the level of sophistication at which they can engage with these issues. Nevertheless, as texts that children may read, they play an important part in contributing to children's aesthetic sensibilities. Furthermore, both children and picture books do not exist in an ahistorical, apolitical realm. The experiences of relocation addressed in these texts cannot be captured accurately in words and pictures for any attempt to generalize or universalize the experience of immigration will always betray the individuality of experience. Yet the paradox continues, as experiences need to be communicated in ways that are accessible to the target audience: one way to achieve this is to reduce and simplify the range and complexity of experiences into some common elements.

Shapes of the Uncanny

Freud's 1919 essay "The 'Uncanny'" discusses the phenomenon of the uncanny from various perspectives — literary, linguistic, experiential, and psychoanalytic. From the outset, Freud considers the uncanny to be an *aesthetic* experience, not in the sense of something beautiful but as relating to the "qualities of our feelings" (339). This is significant in terms of the experience of immigration, since not everyone will be susceptible to the feeling of the uncanny, which in its relationship to aesthetics highlights the subjectivity of the experience. Freud defines *unheimlich* as the negation of *heimlich* in its most literal meaning of domestic, familiar, intimate: *unheimlich* is strange, unfamiliar, uncanny. The paradoxical meaning of the uncanny lies in the fact that it is something frightening, not because it is unfamiliar or new but because what used to be familiar has become strange. The idea of the familiar that has become strange relates to the psychoanalytic notion of repression. According to Freud, what is frightening is the "return of the repressed" (363).

In literary discourse, the possibilities for the uncanny rest with both the writer and the reader. When picture books are included as part of this discourse, then a third player — the illustrator — enters the textual game. Just as a writer or an illustrator can highlight or tone down the uncanny effect, so too can a reader recognize or miss the uncanny quality due to his or her own level of susceptibility. Thus, the elusive quality of the uncanny resists any attempt to pin it down. Furthermore, writers of fiction may manage to convey a sense of the uncanny, not so much by what they write but by what they do not write — the absent presence. It is this spectre of the uncanny that ensures that the repressed (a personal fear or desire) always returns. Consequently, when we encounter our most private fear or desire as something external to ourselves, there is "a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" (Freud 234): such an encounter is frightening, *unheimlich*, uncanny. These two aspects of the uncanny, repression and doubling, are addressed subsequently in relation to the picture books examined here.

As the above comments on the elusive nature of the uncanny imply, the aesthetic quality of the uncanny resists anchorage in language, given that words are not able to capture accurately the subjectivity of experience. In picture books, illustrations have the potential to go beyond words in capturing feelings of the uncanny, which may resonate with some readers. In light of Freud's description of the "uncanny" as "frightening" — as that which "arouses dread and horror . . . certain things that lie within the class of what is frightening" (339) — it may appear too extreme a term to apply to picture books for children. While picture books as a medium (or a genre) cannot be considered uncanny in the same way that one might apply uncanny to horror films, the subject of many picture books can be frighten-

ing, even uncanny, even if not all frightening instances can be termed uncanny. Picture books differ from horror films in a number of obvious ways, but perhaps the ability of the two media to create uncanny feelings lies in their nature as fictions. Both provide viewers/readers with an experience that is open to imaginative interpretation. However, audiences of horror films (generally not including children) are aware of the fictional status of the subject (for example, monsters) whereas child readers of picture books may not necessarily be able to distinguish fantasy from reality. This blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and reality by children does not necessarily have to be prompted by the appearance of something frightening, such as a monster, since a feeling of the uncanny can come about through seemingly benign instances. For example, when a text is constructed in such a way that it appears to be "real," about "real" people and actual "real-life" events (which is characteristic of contemporary realism generally), and specific to the picture books in this paper, which tell of the experiences of relocation, then there is the scope for readers to take the representation of reality in picture books as *becoming* that which it represents. This collapsing of reality and representation by the child can be even more significant when the accompanying illustrations are executed in a (photo)realistic style. In such instances, young readers can be so emotionally moved that they may believe that the object of their emotions actually exists. Thus, in these instances the snapshot effect of the still image works like a photograph in creating a sense of a reality in itself — a reality that exists within reality. This is further complicated when the text is written in past tense, even though the immediacy of the illustrations suggests the present: this distortion of time and space through a conflation of the past and the present can produce an uncanny effect. Such reader identification with the subject through words and pictures tends to efface the reader's own subjectivity (at least temporarily), at which point "the reader internalizes the perceptions and attitudes of the focalizer and is thus reconstituted as a subject within the text" (Stephens, *Language and Ideology* 68). In terms of experiencing the uncanny, this matter of reader-subject identification plays a significant role.

The point that the semiotics of picture books can create an uncanny effect is perceptively illustrated by Roderick McGillis in his discussion of Chris Van Allsburg's picture book *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (1984), in which pictures of home and nature capture a sense of the uncanny as the unfamiliar/the unreal erupts into the familiar/the real. McGillis explains the uncanny effect with respect to the nightmarish quality of some of the illustrations: "Here such common objects as books or wallpaper can come alive, creating a sinister or wonderful sense of the uncanny. Something from the deep well of unconscious desire and anxiety appears in each picture" (147). This paradoxical state of an animate/inanimate object is one which Freud considers in "The 'Uncanny'" and ultimately "doubts whether an

apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not in fact be animate" (347). His example is that of the automaton.

An instance of an inanimate object appearing animate occurs in the picture book *From Far Away*. Seven-year-old Saoussan, a recent immigrant to Canada from the war-torn Middle East, encounters a Halloween skeleton hanging in the school washroom and is so frightened by what she sees that she screams and describes her feeling as being "scared to death." Traumatized by her encounter, she later wets her pants while being comforted on the lap of her teacher. Saoussan recalls her experience of seeing the skeleton in a letter to a reading buddy: "I thought the skeleton was evil. I thought that people were going to start shooting each other here. I screamed a very good scream: Aaaa ahh hhhh hhh hh!" The accompanying illustration shows the young girl recoiling in fright from the animated skeleton, which grins and appears to move its arms and legs, advancing toward her. In the background are images of soldiers in battle among the rubble of a destroyed and burning city. The rhetoric of the image of the Halloween skeleton as a frightening object serves a general effect of the uncanny. For Saoussan, the skeleton is an evil and frightening thing, like the soldiers who destroyed her home and forced her family to leave their country. Saoussan's paranoia as well as the uncanny signified and evoked by the skeleton can be traced back to Freud's "phenomenon of the 'double'" (234). Not only does the doubling occur in the illustration where past and present collide through the images of the skeleton and the soldiers, but the skeleton also functions as a doubling and dividing of Saoussan's self; it embodies the repressed and distorted aspects of her fears. The skeleton is Saoussan's opposite, in that it is what she is not: she is alive, full-bodied, a survivor of war. While the application of Freud's uncanny breaks down in that the skeleton is not something familiar to Saoussan, what it signifies is very familiar. The skeleton's appearance as the incarnation of the violent return of the repressed, of that which disturbs Saoussan's life, instills feelings of fear and terror in her. Rather than be perceived as a harmless Halloween decoration, the skeleton has a become "a thing of terror" (Freud 358) for the child.

From Far Away is not a complex or depressing story. The incident discussed here forms the climax to a series of incidents that describe fear and alienation in the mainstream Canadian classroom that the fictional Saoussan experiences (and that are based on the real Saoussan's recounted and edited version). Although the classroom is depicted as friendly and welcoming, it is the feelings inside Saoussan that speak of estrangement and unbelonging. With its multilayered imagery of war, homeland, loss, and dislocation, the skeleton illustration creates an excess of meaning that resides in the subliminal world of the unconscious and cannot be grasped easily at the conscious level. This returns us to McGillis's point about pic-

tures evoking "Something from the deep well of unconscious desire and anxiety." For child readers, the feeling of uncanniness that this picture suggests may be missed or apprehended depending on their own unconscious desires and anxieties.

Stranger Within/Without: Repression of Self and Other

In the focus texts in this study, the passage to acceptance (of the other and of the self) entails the immigrant subject recognizing her own strangeness. This recognition underscores Freud's analysis of the uncanny in which the familiar has become strange. Thus, the need to accept alterity within the self — in Kristeva's words, "the stranger within" (191) — is offered in these texts as the first and right step to take toward belonging and as a means of reconfiguring communities based on an identification and acceptance of difference.

Repression in its various forms drives all the narratives in my selection. In all examples, the relocation to Canada involves a pattern of negation and resurgence of identity, a point made at the beginning of this discussion. All the characters — Lin Lin in *The Chinese Violin*, May-jen and Yenyee in *The Jade Necklace*, Meg in *Courage to Fly*, and Saoussan in *From Far Away* — find themselves in the strange new world that is Canada, a world that is *unheimlich*. All the young female characters long for home (*heim*) and the familiar (*heimlich*). In Canada, they are surrounded by the unfamiliar (*unheimlich*) — language, customs, architecture, and the fear of the unknown (bullies, muggers, Halloween skeletons). Through their interactions across various cultural and spatial dis/placements, they experience a sense of longing for home and an intense feeling of unbelonging in their current locations. The longing for home and the need to belong are manifested physically as well as emotionally. The images through which the characters remember home are material, sensuous, and geographically specific:

> Every time Lin Lin missed her small village, she played the violin. The music drifted in the air along with the calling of the birds and the sound of the wind in the trees. (Thien, *The Chinese Violin*)

> In fact, both girls craved things beyond their reach. They wanted to hear the hearty shouts of peddlers in the market, smell salty treats being fired in the open air, and taste banana candies that were harder than rock. (Yee, *The Jade Necklace*)

> Meg's family were island people who crossed the sea and came to the city. (Harrison, *Courage to Fly*)

> I come from far away.
>
> The place where we used to live was very nice, but then a war started.

> Even where my sister and I slept there were holes in the wall. (Munsch and Askar, *From Far Away*)

The repressed desire that each of the young characters harbours is for the homeland — the smells, textures, tastes, and landscapes that are no longer present. These old sensations are recalled alongside the new sensations that the characters experience in their new world. Edward Said explains this phenomenon of "double consciousness" that can occur in expatriation: "The plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions. . . . [B]oth the new and the old environments are vivid, actually occurring together contrapuntally" (172). With the partial exception of *From Far Away*, where home has become unhomely because of conflict, the new discordant notes of unbelonging, strangeness, and fear add counterpoints to the remembered harmonious melodies of belonging, identity, and familiarity. "Home," therefore, becomes an unstable signifier that resides between memory and misery.

Another form of repression, repression of the self, is an implicit feature in the four texts. This thematic link across the texts may seem a departure from the traditional approach to children's literature, which Stephens sees as a quest of "autonomous selfhood" (Introduction 3). However, it is a temporary aberration, since a familiar humanist ethos pervades these picture books of immigration, which do not speak the unspeakable in terms of depicting extreme forms of racism, discrimination, and deprivation of human rights. While the texts gesture toward alterity, they ultimately take up a position of assimilation and absorption of alterity in order to achieve a coherence of identity, community, and linguistic totality. For example, given the passing of time after the skeleton incident, Saoussan immerses herself in Canadian culture by dressing up for the next year's Halloween and wanting to change her name to the Westernized equivalent of Susan; Lin Lin plays her violin to the rapturous applause of the audience at a school concert; Meg finds a friend; Yenyee is reunited with family members who come to live in Vancouver.

A feature that the texts share in terms of the characters' resurgence of repressed identity and developing autonomous selfhood is their transition from silence to speaking (in English). Saoussan expresses the shame and frustration that come with her inability to speak English — she resorts to crawling furtively on the floor to go to the washroom because she cannot ask permission (in English) to leave the classroom; Meg hides inside herself and in her room because she is too frightened to interact with other children; Lin Lin is unable to socialize with the other children because they speak English and play games she has never experienced; May-jen remains silent at school for fear of making mistakes in English. Except for May-jen, the characters' feelings of estrangement through silence are resolved by the conclusions of the stories: Saoussan becomes a confident speaker, reader,

and writer ("The teacher is now complaining that I never shut up"); Meg invites a friend to play ("'Can you come to the park with me?' she whispered shyly"); Lin Lin uses her violin playing as a way of initiating communication with her friends ("One by one, her friends came to listen. It didn't matter that she was shy when she spoke").

While the above has focused on the "silence of the subject," another kind of uncanny experience that occurs at the narrative level involves the *silencing* of the subject. This relates to the writer's use of "voice" as a narrative and, ultimately, a political device. Except for *From Far Away*, which is written in a first-person, epistolary style, the narrative strategies employed by the writers are a mix of third-person commentary and limited focalization through dialogue, utterance, or introspection. In *The Chinese Violin*, Lin Lin is denied a voice and her thoughts and emotions are conveyed through omniscient narration. A similar form of ventriloquism is adopted in *The Jade Necklace*, where there is only limited dialogue from the central characters, Yenyee and May-jen. Yet, despite the limited use of first person and main character focalization in the four picture books, the stories are implicitly from the perspective of the young female immigrants, as they tell of their transition from exclusion to inclusion, from unbelonging to belonging. This gives a ring of authenticity to the stories and encourages reader-character alignment.

The explicit discourse of belonging, unity, and authenticity is undercut, however, when one undertakes an uncanny reading of the texts and considers how the privileged theme depends on the marginalized element. The communities in which the young immigrants find themselves are largely non-violent. Nevertheless, a certain uncanniness operates through their overt benevolence and politics of inclusion that put the onus on the stranger to assimilate, thus ensuring coherence by keeping alterity at bay or in its place. These texts, therefore, offer an alternative to the historical reception of the stranger/foreigner as a disruption and a threat to the imaginary unity of the community. In these picture books, the centre is foreign and it is the margin that moves away from and toward its own strangeness in order to accommodate the centre. In other words, the uncanny identity of the immigrant (as an othered identity from the nation's perspective) is simultaneously denied and affirmed, and ultimately haunted by the impossibility of closing the question of her (non-)existence. This is further complicated by the female characters' enjoyment in negating their own identities in order to become like "the other" — that is, Canadian. Consequently, the uncanny return of the characters' repressed identities does not defy the national identity but legitimizes it. Thus, the logic of the uncanny involves a double move, and its inherent paradox persists.

The above discussion of the paradox of the stranger within/without demonstrated that a sense of the uncanny is part of the aesthetic experience of reading. I want to explore further the aesthetic experience that Freud attributes to the uncanny by considering what I term the aesthetic process — a negotiation between text and reader.

The aesthetic process implicates a certain reader to desire the uncanny. While desire can reside in "a reader," it is not necessarily something that is exclusive to the individual since it is also profoundly social: we desire what others desire. As the texts deal with the universal figure of the home, they are immediately located in discourses of family, security, and belonging. As such, they activate desire in the reader — a desire to have expectations fulfilled, thus satisfying a desire for significance. (Thus, the texts' form and content tend to confirm the reader within the social.) Furthermore, these discourses (and others) work *within* the texts to convey content and to inform the aesthetic process. For instance, all four picture books are aesthetically structured so that there is an emotional cumulative effect, which is broadly mapped as follows: departure; arrival; loneliness/sadness; critical incident; acceptance/joy. The reader is positioned to feel the pathos of the changes brought about by the characters' longing for home and their desire to belong. The figurative and syntactic features of the texts sensitize the reader to the plight of the characters, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> Meg huddled small inside herself like a frightened bird. (Harrison, *Courage to Fly*)

> In fact both girls craved things beyond their reach. . . . Yenyee wanted to see the glowing faces of her mother and brother. But all she could do was pray for their well-being. (Yee, *The Jade Necklace*)

> Lin Lin's heart leapt. The violin reminded Lin Lin of her dream. She remembered flying in the clouds, through the big sky. (Thien, *The Chinese Violin*)

> Children were trying to talk to me, but I wasn't able to answer them because I didn't speak English. (Munsch and Askar, *From Far Away*)

Thus, the aesthetic process through form and discourse instantiates aspects of the social discomfort and personal fear that the characters experience. It also instantiates affect that eventually takes a more positive turn. This appeal to readers' sentiments enables them to empathize with the characters' feelings of abjection and acceptance and to appreciate — albeit uncon-

sciously given the age of the readers — the uncanniness of the "home" (both Canada and the originary home) as a marker of identity and difference, of inclusion and exclusion, of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*.

Another form of uncanniness occurs at the reading level. Hélène Cixous takes Freud's uncanny and applies it to the act of reading, suggesting that as readers we sometimes become aware of ourselves *as readers reading*. According to Cixous, reading is like dreaming: we are "here" in the real world but also "there" in the story world. The ambivalent state continues, since we are in ourselves but also not in ourselves. A word, a phrase, an idea can give us a sensation of ourselves whereby we are suddenly aware of ourselves reading a story. The uncanny experience takes us away from the story momentarily and focuses us on ourselves as readers reacting to something in the text, something we have read. In a similar vein, Jack Zipes suggests that when a child reads a fairy tale "there is estrangement or separation from a familiar world inducing an uncanny feeling which is both *frightening and comforting*" (174). I would suggest that, given the subject matter of leaving home and adjusting to life in a new country and culture, these picture books induce similar uncanny feelings within certain readers. The distinction between these picture books and fairy tales is not so definite when one concedes that many fairy tales utilize the uncanny figure of the home (for example, *Hansel and Gretel*). In the picture books included in the present study, the characters' longing for home is both frightening and comforting. Through the aesthetic negotiation between text and reader, this same desire for the uncanny can also be part of the subjective experience of reading.

The analogy between reading, the uncanny, and dreaming made by Cixous is taken up by Anthony Vidler, who suggests that the uncanny is, "in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that eludes the real and the unreal to provoke . . . a slippage between waking and dreaming" (11). While the vision can be frightening for the character (and perhaps for the reader) as described in the skeleton picture in *From Far Away*, the effect of the uncanny continues as part of the negotiation between text and reader. Vidler's reference to "a slippage between waking and dreaming" accords with Lin Lin's repeated reference to "soaring high in the clouds" when she hears the violin music. This out-of-body experience is captured in one illustration where the young girl appears to fly among abstract cloud formations. For Lin Lin, the uncanny is the "mental state of projection" that Vidler describes, and for the reader, this state is visually represented. Thus, the reader's gaze is directed toward this dream-like uncanny moment. This moment of the flying Lin Lin also recalls the "phenomenon of doubling" in that the young girl experiences an imaginary projection of her natural self into another supernatural self, one who can leave the sadness of her new home and fly back toward the comfort of her lost home; however, she is neither "here" nor "there" as she remains in

a liminal state: "When she looked down, she could see her small village and this new city and the deep blue ocean between them."

A similar uncanny doubling occurs in *Courage to Fly* when Meg cares for a small injured bird, which can be seen as Meg's double. While Meg initially wants to contain the bird in a shoebox in much the same way that she wants to contain herself in her room ("The only place Meg felt safe was in her room"), she decides to let the bird fly free after a series of encounters with an old Chinese man who demonstrates several Taoist martial arts moves that mimic the unrestricted flight of birds in nature. The bird, along with the book's title, serves an obvious metaphoric function in terms of Meg's own need to break free of the fears that confine her (repression of the self). But the bird, unlike Meg, will return home after the winter. Thus, flight in the two books can be interpreted as a general metaphor for a return to home and as such is part of a metaphoric chain of flight, home, womb. The metaphoric link between home and womb is one which serves as a literary and an ontological convention in Western culture. From a Freudian perspective, the repressed infantile desire for the womb is a source of uncanny feelings and is central to his notion of *unheimlich* and *heimlich*.

Another example of the way in which metaphor conveys a sense of the uncanny as part of the aesthetic process lies in the motif of the found object. According to Freud, the found object is another instance of the uncanny in that it represents "the idea of something fateful" (144). In *Courage to Fly* and *The Jade Necklace*, the finding of the object is a critical incident that causes a turning point in the character's life. Meg finds the ailing bird in a half-frozen state on the snow-covered ground. Yenyee recovers (miraculously) her lost jade necklace during her dramatic rescue of May-jen, who fell into the waters of Vancouver's English Bay — Yenyee had previously thrown the necklace into the sea before leaving her homeland, China. Both instances are linked to a near-death experience. But the found object is also the lost object regained, in both a literal and a metaphoric sense. The fact that the bird Meg finds is a swallow carries further significances in that the swallow is greeted in the northern hemisphere as heralding the Spring, and in Western mythology Spring symbolizes rebirth and new beginnings. In Chinese mythology, the swallow is an emblem of success, happiness, and children. Further significance lies with the Chinese man who uses Lok Hup (a Taoist internal martial art of 36 individually-named moves) to help Meg come to her decision to release the bird and, by association, to release herself from her own fears. Yenyee literally finds the jade necklace that was lost to the sea, but its recovery also provides the solution to her unconscious desire to be reunited with her family. While the necklace is a familiar object, its talisman-like properties make it unfamiliar in that its retrieval (as being actively sought unconsciously by Yenyee) is the return of the repressed desire for home and family. The motif of a found object is common to many stories written for children, and its inclusion in these

picture books is a plot device employed by the writers as part of the aesthetic process. Nevertheless, the sense of repression that the objects (bird, necklace, skeleton) symbolically embody is likely to have an uncanny effect, when, as Freud suggests, "a symbol takes over the full function of the thing it symbolizes" (367).

Parting Comments

This paper opened with a story fragment that told of a family's arrival in a new land and desire of its members to belong. It also told of their need to remember. The picture books that form the focus of this discussion encode a similar kind of desire and nostalgia. The stories' privileging of the outsider, the stranger, enables a vision of harmony whereby there is an interconnection between the personal, the social, the cultural, and the national — entities that are often treated as discrete. On the surface, the texts' shared vision delineates an imagined community whereby the members desire belonging together. This imaginary logic of identification, which equates with political, social, ethical, and religious harmony, characterizes the political rhetoric of the modern nation-state and, in terms of the focus on nation in these picture books, is commensurate with Canada's political ideology of multiculturalism — "a nation of immigrants."

I mentioned in the beginning of the paper that my nationality, my identity, my history as an Australian privilege me an outsider viewpoint. This outsider status also carries some necessary translations of culture and politics, which shape my interpretation of these texts. Throughout the discussion I have tried to critically engage with the desirous vision of being-in-the-world expressed in the texts by taking the negative affect of the uncanny as a way of disturbing the stories' calm surfaces of communal harmony. By viewing the aesthetic properties of the text through an uncanny lens, I have approached with some wariness the liberal notions of inclusivity, belonging, and assimilation. The familiar pattern that structures the plots of these stories threatens to collapse the diversity of immigrant experiences (Chinese, Caribbean, Lebanese) into a master narrative of *the* migrant experience, and the characters become "ideal-type" immigrants: they fit in with little fuss. "To fit in" is part of a larger project — "to belong" — a recurrent theme in these picture books. Yet, for those who are on the margins of society, it is a vexed concept that gives rise to possible loss, ambivalence, and resistance as well as a promise of survival, companionship, and visibility. This paradoxical state is uncanny.

The picture books discussed in this essay offer a similarly paradoxical view of diaspora and identity. Each of the characters is caught in-between: between "there" (originating home) and Canada (new home), between past and present, between cultural spaces. Their liminality points to the indeterminacy of identity, which ultimately proves to be a productive state,

rather than a disempowering one. The characters' interstitial passage from the familiar to the strange is more than a journey across territorial boundaries. Rather, it is a psychological journey in that they see themselves as "other" and become other than what they once were — the familiar becomes strange. This process of *becoming* is what is both frightening and comforting; it is an uncanny experience. As Kristeva suggests, "the uncanny strangeness . . . sets the difference within us . . . and presents it as the ultimate condition of our being 'with' others" (192).

As the world continues to be characterized by the voluntary and forcible movements of peoples from their homelands to new places, the developing diasporic cultures that many Western nations are witnessing call into question previously essentialist notions of unified and "natural" cultural and national identities that underpinned the centre/margin paradigm of colonialist discourse. Children's literature has always responded to the changes that impact on the lives of real children, and there is no doubt that many of these stories offer comfort, create awareness, and challenge existing beliefs for the children who read them. Writing for children is not a licence to indulge in untruths or romantic fantasies that offer distorted views of the world. This is not to say that all children's stories should convey the harsh realities of life without considering the age and sensibilities of its implied readers. But children need stories that disturb and unsettle as much as they need stories that offer humour, wonder, and a sense of the absurd. Stories of immigration, such as those discussed in this paper, can work in much the same way as liberating fairy tales, in that both can create what Zipes sees as an "awareness of social conditions" (191). Thus, children's literature can provide a discursive space for children to revise their understandings of the world and to question themselves; and for critics, it can offer a similar space to study the uncanny effects of its stories in order to recognize their unsettling and emancipatory potential.

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