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# Racial Abstraction and Species Difference: Anthropomorphic Animals in "Multicultural" Children's Literature

**Abstract** This essay explores anthropomorphism in contemporary children's literature, books in which animals model racialized behaviors in order to promote racial resilience and "teach tolerance." Unveiling the unintended consequences of invoking species difference as a form of racial abstraction, the essay contextualizes "multicultural" picture books that enlist animal surrogates within the "here and now" innovations of Lucy Sprague Mitchell's Bank Street Writers Lab and the animal stories of Margaret Wise Brown. In keeping with studies in developmental psychology that explain how children acquire and unlearn biases, the work engages two arenas: books that imagine the adoptive family as cross-species alliance and those that depict biodiversity as a visual metaphor for multiculturalism. In looking at the adult's ventriloquism of imaginary figures for the imagined child, the essay explores the imperfect correspondence between pedagogic aims and fantastical form, the fissures that arise in turning to nonhuman figures to express adult anxieties over racial difference. Anthropomorphic animals reconcile the paradox of diversity at the millennium: envisioning democratic inclusion without invoking the divisiveness of US racial history.
**Keywords** picture books, Asian American literature, critical race studies, transracial adoption, biodiversity

> Deep puritanical distrust of fantasy . . . comes out often among people truly and seriously concerned about the ethical education of children.
> —Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1989)

> We expect a white child to find it easy to identify with an animal but not with a black character. Is the child further removed from a person of another race than another species? That's ludicrous.
> —Kathleen Horning, director, Cooperative Children's Book Center (2016)

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"I did not like when you drew the Indian like a bear," a New York public school student wrote to children's book author and illustrator Richard Scarry. "Indians do not look like a bear and Indians do not put feathers on their heads, only on special occasions." Scarry replied, "I am sorry that you don't like the Indian I drew in the *Best Word Book Ever*. I drew him as a bear because I LIKE bears and I LIKE Indians" (quoted in Hirschfelder 1982, 62).

Indeed, Scarry "liked" American Indians so much that he later depicted them as bison living in a tepee, a visual pun on the buffalo nickel: Chief Five Cents and his daughter, Penny (see fig. 1).[1] Drawing on the storied tradition of animal characters in children's literature, his 1965 *Busy, Busy World* went further, invoking species indigeneity to stand in for human geography: in this world, both the Bengal tiger and the Indian elephant wear turbans. If Scarry's depiction of animal dress-up avoids overtly racist caricature, the substitution is nevertheless cringe-worthy. As in the campus controversies over Halloween costumes in 2016, such depictions recall the tradition of blackface and its various iterations: bears in feathers and tigers in turbans as nonhuman ethnic drag.

Ironically, however, species difference in picture books for children has become a routine means of portraying differences among peoples, not in spite of but because of heightened political consciousness that followed 1960s social movements. That is, the practice of enlisting animals as racial proxies for child audiences has become one tool for celebrating human variation. For older children, such representations can be harnessed to specific narratives reflecting progressive pedagogy. In 1994, for example, the Berenstain Bears were enlisted to convey a lesson about overcoming prejudice when, shockingly, pandas move in next door ("Uh-oh. Some nearby neighbors moved away. *Now* who's coming here to stay?"; see fig. 2). Papa's bias against pandas and his subsequent comeuppance offer the child an accessible take on the affective fallout of residential desegregation. Gary Soto and Susan Guevara's (2005) award-winning books featuring Chato, "coolest cat in *el barrio*," model interspecies cooperation. In a 2005 story, Chato unwittingly finds himself vacationing among (Anglo?) dogs and must overcome his group preconceptions to come to their rescue ("We [cats] ain't prejudiced or nothing. But, *tú sabes*,

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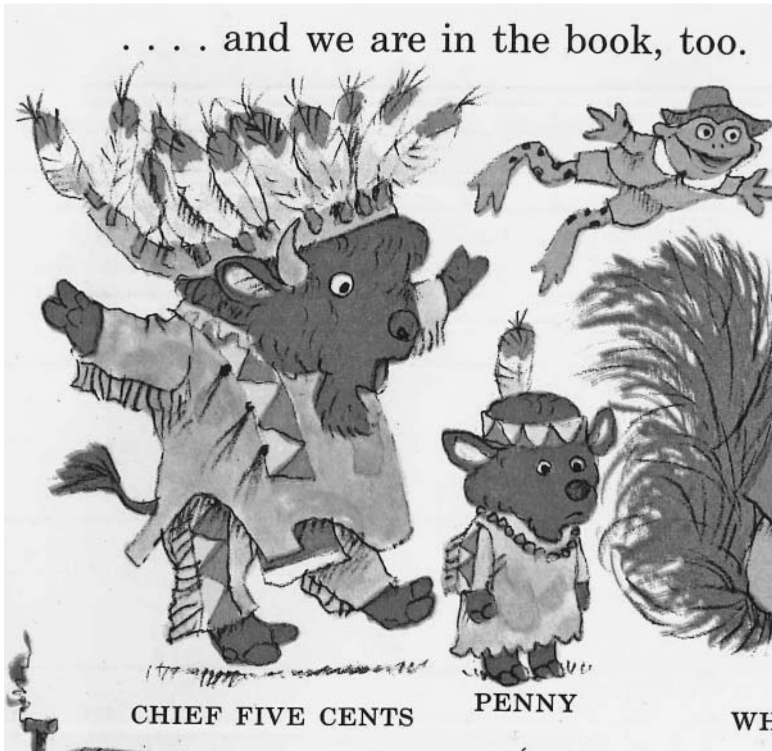


**Figure 1** Ethnic drag in Richard Scarry's *Storybook Dictionary* (1966)

we've had problems with your kind in the past"; Soto and Guevara 2005). Echoing Rodney King, by the end of the story, it is cats and dogs who all just get along. By 2016 the animal/race analogy went mainstream in the Disney animated film *Zootopia*, which engaged a predator/prey distinction in order to critique racial profiling. Such narratives offer thinly veiled social parables about overcoming species bias. Yet these visualizations are often at odds with their didactic intent, asking viewers to take pleasure in biological differences paradoxically in service to the message that such differences do not matter.

These overtly educational yet fanciful stories hearken back to a radical experiment in children's literature. In 1921 progressive educator Lucy Sprague Mitchell acknowledged the literary worth of classical children's tales featuring animals but nonetheless took on the

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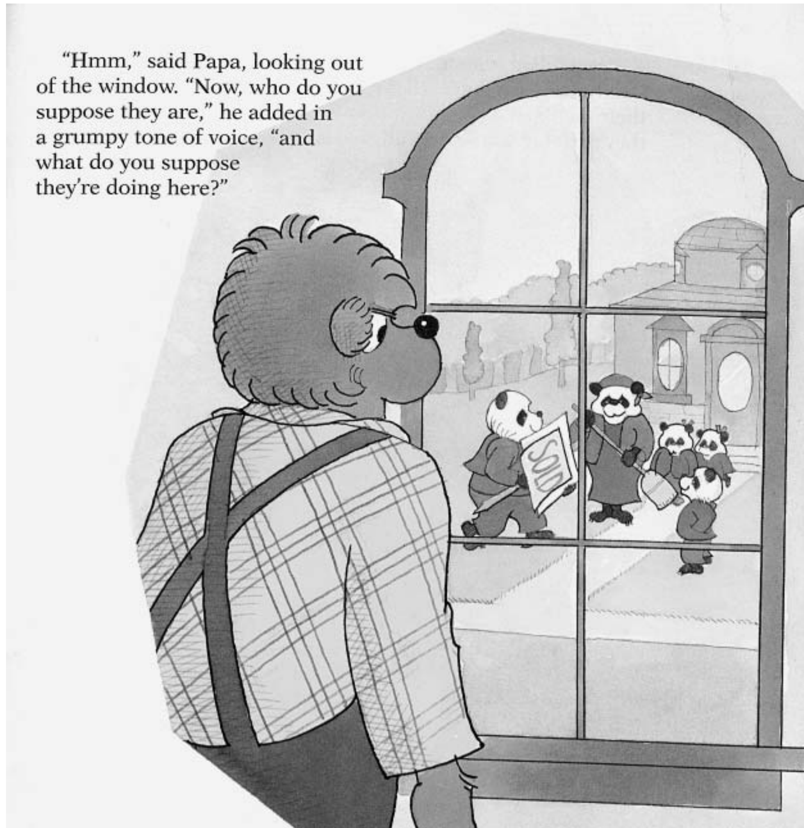


**Figure 2** Panda integration: Stan and Jan Berenstain's *The New Neighbors* (1994)

prevailing hegemony of children's literature by questioning their suitability for the young: "'The Elephant's Child,' the wild creatures of the 'Jungle Book,' 'Raggylug' and even the little mole in the 'Wind in the Willows,'—these are animals to trust any child with," she wrote. "Yet even in these exquisitely drawn tales, I doubt if children enjoy what we adults wish them to enjoy either in content or in form" (Mitchell 1921, 39–40). She dared to ask, "Now, how much of the classical literature follows the lead of the children's own inquiries?" (34). Fairy tales, myths, and other fantasy genres associated with children, she argued, reflected the thinking of adults; their content was developmentally unsuitable and thus "unsafe" for children under six. The founder of the experimental Bank Street College in New York in 1916, Mitchell dared to

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"commit the sacrilege" (19) of finding children's literature lacking; her Bank Street Writers Lab focused on producing developmentally appropriate books for young children.[2] When Ursula K. Le Guin (1989, 58) bemoaned the "puritanical distrust of fantasy . . . among people truly and seriously concerned about the ethical education of children" decades later, she may well have been referring to Mitchell's influence.

Mitchell's progressive vision inaugurated a new type of animal story most famously epitomized by her protégé, Margaret Wise Brown, stories that sought to reconcile the emotional, imaginative needs of children with their cognitive abilities. Contemporary animal characters like Chato and the Berenstain Bears are the inheritors of this genealogy and likewise bridge this division, but they are also self-consciously leveraged toward another goal: social intervention. As the romantic projection of a child unspoiled by civilization ceded to a post-1960s idealism that positioned early education as a site of social remedy, children's books could be situated in concert with the democratic project of preparing future citizens. More specifically, following research in developmental psychology on how the young acquire racial-ethnic awareness, books could be prophylactic to the child's developing racial biases. "Children's literature allows readers a means to reconceptualize their relationship to ethnic and national identities," Katharine Capshaw Smith (2002, 3) asserts. "Telling stories to a young audience becomes a conduit for social and political revolution."

Anthropomorphized creatures were thus charged with a new task in the post–civil rights era. And yet that metaphoric displacement seems to elude controversy even as the parallel between animal and human taxonomies has been scientifically discredited and, as in Scarry's conflation of American Indians and bears, rendered somewhat offensive. Recent scholarship exploring latent and overt racial biases in children's literature and culture powerfully dispels the notion of childhood as a site of racial innocence. Robin Bernstein's *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011) cogently analyzes the ways in which white supremacy was reinforced in narratives about children and childhood objects in the nineteenth century. Philip Nel's *Was the Cat in the Hat Black? The Hidden Racism of Children's Literature and the Need for Diverse Books*

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(2017) unveils the racial meanings underlying children's literature, including the African American origins of the Cat in the Hat.

Reflecting Nel's and Bernstein's work, I engage children's literature as a site that likewise encodes a degree of what I would call racial abstraction, here through animal displacement. But, in contrast, I focus on children's literature explicitly addressed to a liberal vision associated with multiculturalism, work self-consciously leveraged to teach tolerance and imagine equality. Promoting racial resilience and self-acceptance, the goal of multicultural children's literature is likewise to script racial behaviors toward salutary ends. In keeping with understanding how children learn social categories, books featuring animals as child proxies, I suggest, engage a specific sleight of hand in the service of these goals: bears do not violate a child's potential innocence about race even as they can be called on to model racialized behaviors. This essay thus engages the trope of the anthropomorphic animal in order to explore the conceptual limits of the use of species as an analogy to race, the limits of *latent* multiculturalism.

While animal characters have a storied history in children's literature, I first contextualize them within the "here and now" literary innovations of Mitchell's Bank Street Writers Lab and the work of its most celebrated alumna, Margaret Wise Brown. Addressing children's emotional and imaginative needs in the context of age-appropriate education, her enduring animal characters model processes of individuation and attachment, a template, I argue, for projecting children's affective ties into the social fabric. By the 1970s, contemporary picture books staging encounters across species differences likewise modeled separations and connections that assumed racial overtones. I examine two arenas within the genre: first, books aimed at five- to eight-year-olds that imagine the adoptive family as a cross-genus, cross-species alliance, and second, books that depict biodiversity as a visual metaphor for multiculturalism. The use of animals to portray physiological differences, I suggest, speaks to psychological studies of how children first classify and group peoples based on visual differentiation. I locate these animal stories as "multicultural" children's literature, if at a step removed, and highlight their interventionist politics, their admirable prophylactic address to the developing biases of children. And yet I unveil the unintended consequences of their race-as-species logic.

Enlisting animal surrogates to play out microdramas of racial-ethnic conflict and resilience, these fantastical yet overtly educational books

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at first seem to violate psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim's (1977, 63) view that stories "help the child work through unconscious pressures." Shifting that focus, this essay argues that animal proxies reveal "unconscious" adult pressures to promote both color blindness and diversity, to further the paradoxical belief that we are simultaneously all the same and all different. My intent is neither to valorize nor indict racial abstraction in children's literature but to unveil this genre of "multicultural" literature as a site of a specific racialized pleasure: the use of books to manage negative feelings surrounding difference for an audience presumed to be most vulnerable to those feelings. The adult's ventriloquism of imaginary figures for the imagined child reveals the imperfect correspondence between "real-world" aims and fantastical content, the fissures that arise in turning to nonhuman figures to express, I suggest, adult anxieties over racial difference. In what follows, I explore the very possibilities inherent within racial abstraction at the millennium and, as important, its limits.

## Fairy-Tale Wars

Early childhood educator and founder of the Bank Street College of Education, Lucy Sprague Mitchell (1921) initiated a "daring revolution" in children's literature in her *Here and Now Storybook* (quote from Mary Phelps and Margaret Wise Brown, "Lucy Sprague Mitchell," May–June 1937, Sprague Mitchell Papers). Explicitly questioning the place of classical literature in early childhood education, she argued that the fairy tale "gives the child material which he is incapable of handling" (Mitchell 1921, 43). Mitchell promoted a concept of educating the "whole child" inclusive of physical, emotional, and social needs. Her progressive pedagogical practices fostered not only intellect but creativity, self-esteem, and cooperation, shifting education's emphasis on rote learning to problem-solving. The Bank Street College functioned as experimental laboratory, nursery school, teacher education center, and later, an incubator for children's literature. Working from the premise that children learn from their own environments, she championed stories that reflected the "here and now" of two- to seven-year-olds with urban, realist settings featuring trains and trucks, "skyscrapers and airplanes, tugboats and trolleys" (Marcus 1992, 53). In the words of Bank Street alum Edith Thacher Hurd, children enjoy stories "about perfectly everyday Cindy, the cat,

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more than they do about that unfortunate misfit, Cinderella" (eulogy for Lucy Sprague Mitchell delivered at the New School for Social Research, New York City, December 1, 1967, Sprague Mitchell Papers). Drawing on contexts "familiar and immediate" (Mitchell 1921, 4–5) to children, such stories represented a direct challenge to the dark themes of fairy tales and nursery rhymes.

At the outset, Mitchell's views were contested by those who questioned the aesthetics of her so-called baby books; Bank Street was derided as the "beep beep crunch crunch" (Marcus 1992, 125 and 161) "Spinach School" (Edith Thacher Hurd, eulogy for Lucy Sprague Mitchell delivered at the New School for Social Research, New York City, December 1, 1967, Sprague Mitchell Papers). Chief among her detractors was the influential Anne Carroll Moore, a librarian at the New York Public Library, who raised formidable objections to the paradigm shift that Bank Street represented. Using her influence to separate "literature from chaff in the earliest stages of reading" (Moore 1920, 102), in 1920 she colorfully asserted, "The solemnity of the process of education has made too easy the way that leads to the vulgarization of art and the prostitution of fancy" (138). Highlighting literature as a site of competing versions of childhood, their rift was based on long-standing if insupportable oppositions between the imagination and development, aesthetics and cognition. In 1929 Walter Benjamin (1999, 252) decried the decline of children's literature "at the moment it fell into the hands of the specialists." Ten years later, J. R. R. Tolkien (1983, 136) noted the "dreadful undergrowth of stories written or adapted to what was or is conceived to be the measure of children's minds and needs." The so-called fairy-tale wars (Marcus 1992) inaugurated by Mitchell's experiment debated not only the content of children's literature but philosophies of childhood itself. "So the bombshell broke and the pieces are still flying," Hurd noted in 1967.

The fairy-tale wars thus set archetypal and realist content at odds, a boundary maintained through aesthetic valuation. If for Moore what was "authentic" in children's literature was synonymous with what was dull, by the 1970s, that association assumed racial consequence. The idea that literature could not only address the developmental needs of the young but contribute to social betterment was likewise represented as an unwelcome intrusion into the pleasures of reading. Those who promoted children's books dealing with racial issues

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faced considerable backlash. Since its founding in 1965, the Council on Interracial Books for Children, Donnarae MacCann (2001) notes, confronted charges that its race-sensitive literary reviews were communist, didactic, and reductionist, or otherwise represented calls for censorship and "apartheid." In an explicit defense of fantasy as a literary genre, Ursula K. Le Guin (1989, 58) lamented the lack of moral complexity in young people's literature engaging social issues, deriding "problem books" dealing with the "problem of drugs, of divorce, or race prejudice, or unmarried pregnancy, and so on." Decades later, others questioned how "identity politics" influenced contemporary "taste" in children's books.[3]

Those who pit the needs of imagination against the needs of education and, later, social intervention nevertheless found common ground, I suggest, in the trope of the talking animal. Bank Street's most enduring alumna, Margaret Wise Brown, for example, had no difficulties in integrating developmentally suitable content with an appeal to "fancy" through her anthropomorphic animal stories. Adhering to the "here and now" philosophy and applying experimentally tested literary techniques to more than one hundred published works, Brown often featured animals experiencing their environments as human children did. Books such as *The Runaway Bunny* (1942), *Little Chicken* (1943), *The Little Fur Family* (1946), *Goodnight Moon* (1947), and *Home for a Bunny* (1956) depict familiar rituals in whimsical if not also surreal ways. More fundamentally, Brown's work reflects psychoanalytic theories of development; by 1940 she was undergoing psychotherapy and affirming the importance of dreams to her colleagues at Bank Street (Marcus 1992). Predating Bettelheim's views about the importance of fairy tales, she engaged children's unconscious fears through animal surrogates. As in many of Brown's animal stories, works such as *Goodnight Moon* address separation anxiety; the potential disappearance of things in the room mirrors the absence of the (rabbit) mother. The ritual incantation of "good night" here functions as what D. W. Winnicott (1991, 64) calls the "transitional phenomenon" of play, the creative activity that represents a space between inner experience and shared reality. In *Goodnight Moon*, ritual is a form of control that acts as a balm to impending separation, emphasizing, in Winnicott's words, the "interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects" (64).[4] The mundane ritual of verbal repetition enacts a *fort/da* game

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that binds the child to people and things against the threat of loss and the leave-taking that sleep represents.

Brown's substitution of animals for children trades on the oscillation between the familiar and the surreal at the same time that it uses them to rehearse Freudian processes of individuation and attachment, which she saw as fundamental to children's development. *Little Chicken* (1943), her collaboration with illustrator Leonard Weisgard, utilizes animal proxies to reassure the child who is afraid to be alone. Here, a rabbit finds himself the unlikely caregiver of a chick: "The Rabbit found him one day just breaking out of the egg, so he belonged to the Rabbit." The pair is inseparable until the moment the rabbit must fulfill his needs as a rabbit, running "the way Rabbits run, on and on, for miles and miles." He casually dismisses his ward: "Hop along and find someone to play with." Setting aside for the moment the question of who belongs together and how, species difference here explains leave-taking as a biological imperative, as instinctual. In the chick's growing independence and the pair's eventual reunion, the story depicts the to-and-fro movement of a caregiver who affirms that his absence is merely temporary. Brown's developmentally "suitable" animal story reflects her mentor's "here and now" dictate while directly addressing children's emotional lives.

As in Winnicott's (1991, 64) notion of play as the space between "personal psychic reality" and "objective" shared reality, Brown's work situates children's stories as a placeholder for externalized affect. If animals externalize children's fears within the safe space of make-believe, how are they likewise a safe space for rehearsing racialized fears that also engage issues of separation and connection? In what follows, I explore a subgenre of children's books that self-consciously address separation and attachment as they take on a racial cast: animals enlisted to portray lessons about transracial adoption.

## Transracial Transitional Objects

Brown's *Little Chicken* reflects the tradition of animal foundling stories from Jean De Brunhoff's *The Story of Babar* (1931), to E. B. White's *Stuart Little* (1945), to Michael Bond's *A Bear Called Paddington* (1958). Books like H. A. Rey and Margaret Rey's *Curious George* (1941), Bernard Waber's *The House on East 88th Street* (1962), and Tomi Ungerer's *Crictor* (1978), for example, portray animals adopted

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into human households in order to trade on the absurdity of the animal acting out the role of a child or to witness animals being acclimated into the world of adults just as the child is acclimated. Yet Brown's work represents a precursor to what would later emerge as more pointed depictions of transspecies adoption. By the 1980s these books spoke directly to the experience of transracial adoptees in the context of increasing international adoptions at the end of the twentieth century. Among these are Rosamond Dauer's *Bullfrog and Gertrude Go Camping* (1980) (bullfrogs adopt a snake), Anne Braff Brodzinsky's *The Mulberry Bird: Story of an Adoption* (1986) (sandpipers adopt a goldfinch), Lori Rosove's *Rosie's Family: An Adoption Story* (2001) (schnauzers adopt a beagle), Diana Kimpton's *The Lamb-A-Roo* (2006) (a kangaroo adopts a lamb), Adele Sansone's *The Little Green Goose* (2010) (a goose adopts a dinosaur), and Renata Galindo's *My New Mom and Me* (2016) (a cat adopts a puppy). While by no means uniform, such books nevertheless gesture to racial issues by reassuring the reader of the adoptee's belonging within a loving family despite biological differences; yet, here, attachment and separation assume larger social consequence.

Echoing Bettelheim's analysis of the stepmother, animal orphans speak to both the fear of losing a mother and the desire to dispense with one; here, I would argue, their stories address latent racialized fears. Projecting distress over the loss of a parent—in particular, a mother—becomes more specific: not having a mother who looks like you. Keiko Kasza's *A Mother for Choco* (1992), for example, stages cross-species adoption in order to challenge physical similarity as a criterion for family. Interviewing a series of animals for their maternal potential based on shared physical traits, a yellow bird discovers a bear who, despite her lack of physical resemblance, willingly assumes the caretaker role:

> "Choco, maybe I could be your mother."
>
> "*You*?" Choco cried.
>
> "But you aren't yellow. And you don't have wings, or big, round cheeks, or striped feet like me!"

Substituting physical features for actions that mark maternality (hugging, kissing, dancing), the narrative undermines biology as a basis for kinship by rendering external appearance as ancillary to a mother's ability to manage a child's feelings. Accompanying the bear

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home, the bird is pleased to find a combined family: Mrs. Bear has also taken in a pig, hippo, and alligator. Similarly, in David Kirk's *Little Miss Spider* (1999), transspecies adoption is the happy resolution to the mother-quest narrative. A spider hatchling's journey to find her mother likewise displaces color in order to establish belonging based on affective ties ("For finding your mother, / There's one certain test. / You must look for the creature / Who loves you the best"). In these and other works portraying adoption, the criteria for parentage shifts from external appearance to desired behaviors, interrupting the "innocent" biases of children under age six who link family belonging to resemblance and addressing children's belief that racially "mismatched" children are stigmatized (see, e.g., Hirschfeld 1988 and Holmes 1995). *My New Mom and Me* (Galindo 2016), for example, depicts a puppy who, after painting himself with stripes in order to resemble his adopted mother, is gently corrected: "But Mom said I didn't need fixing. She likes that we are different" (see fig. 3).

Such books project and rehearse racial anxieties veiled through the affective structure of "liking" difference, testing the assertion that neither appearance nor genealogy matters in the reconfiguration of blended families. In animal/adoptee substitution, reassuring children that they are loved is likewise the occasion to allay their concerns regarding inherited resemblance with an eye to promoting racial resilience. Books such as *A Mother for Choco*, *Little Miss Spider*, and *My New Mom and Me* represent an implicit rebuke to the National Association of Black Social Workers' (NABSW) controversial 1972 position statement affirming the importance of family resemblance and opposing the adoption of black children into white families. The sentiment was echoed by the Child Welfare League of America, which gave preference to "monoracial" placement in 1973, and by the Indian Child Welfare Act, which gave tribes jurisdiction over child custody proceedings in 1978 (Jacobson 2008).

Imagining families who look "different" through species variety, anthropomorphic animal stories speak to the ways in which young children first access race. By the 1980s researchers in developmental psychology found that children categorize people according to differences in appearance or "naïve biology" (Hirschfeld 1995, 209) in concert with their "existing cognitive structures" (Ramsey 1987, 60).[5] Studies in the racial perceptions of children confirm that between the ages of three and four years, children are able to distinguish people

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**Figure 3** "Mom said I didn't need fixing. She likes that we are different": Renata Galindo's *My New Mom and Me* (2016)

"in terms consonant with race," a phenomenon evidenced across cultures (Hirschfeld 1988, 616). Children between the ages of three and five categorize individuals first on the basis of race, second of gender, and third of clothing but do not verbalize their associations as racial or gendered (Ramsey 1987). They make distinctions among people based on phenotype but also on "inferred nonobservable" traits (Quintana 1998, 35) such as language or foodways (Aboud 1987; Holmes 1995; Quintana 1998; Ramsey 1987). In 1988 Frances Aboud theorized that North American children around three to five years classify others by physical features and develop racial attitudes *before* they understand race as a form of social categorization used by adults. That is, they use descriptors such as black, brown, or Chinese without consistency or necessarily understanding the social meanings behind them.

Anthropomorphic animals thus visualize physiological differences without recourse to human bodies or their attending (adult) categorizations. In particular, bears are often invoked to show the fallacy of identifying nuclear family groups by color. In *All Bears Need Love* (Valentine and Taylor 2012), based on the author's own adoption story, zoo animals ventriloquize social disapproval of transracial adoption when a polar bear dares to take in a brown bear cub. Reflecting

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"here and now" patterning techniques, the narrative portrays various objections, each rebutted in turn:

> The giraffe scoffed. "But he doesn't look like you."
> "I think he's beautiful," said Mama Polar Bear. . . . (7)
> The anteater sniffed. "No one will believe he's yours."
> "He will know," said Mama Polar Bear. . . . (17)
> The lion roared. "Will he be raised as a brown bear or a polar bear?"
> "He will be the best of both," said Mama Polar Bear. (21)

As *All Bears Need Love* engages arguments made forty years earlier by the NABSW (1972), it does indeed address racial fears; they are not, however, those of the child.

The importance of fairy tales, according to Bettelheim, lies in their ability to speak to the child's inner life, likewise the intention of these adoptee narratives. Through these stories, the child gains reassurance of a mother's love, and the parent gains a tool to help manage the child's feelings toward racial resilience. But if these stories seem to violate Bettelheim's implicit contract, it is because they overdetermine that inner life, rendering the child's anxieties conscious and in adult terms. The adult emerges as the hero of such stories, assuring the viability of family against assumptions made about visible differences. One might say that they address the mother's separation anxiety as projected onto a racial template, the fear that the child does not (visibly) belong to her. Portraying a questioning of that bond, as they are read aloud, books tether the child to the caregiver through the mediation of talking bears. As transitional objects, teddy bears allow children to manipulate and control their attachment to and separation from others; books like *All Bears Need Love* represent the transitional objects of transracial parenting. They rehearse responses that comfort the adult against the abstraction of child loss imagined as racial distance. Such books oscillate between inner and outer worlds for more than one audience.

## Panda Express

Animal substitution works in accord with how children group people based on visual cues, yet this seemingly innocent literary device produces some unforeseen ironies, particularly in light of genomic

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research rendering "species" a scientifically insupportable means of classifying human variation. These fissures become especially visible in the use of pandas as shorthand for Asian Americans; black and white in color, pandas might represent an easy occasion for depicting interracialism, but in the context of this literary subgenre, they are almost always stand-ins for Chinese adoptees. If Asians are overrepresented in the literature of US adoption, it is because they made up 59 percent of all foreign adoptions between 1971 and 2001 (see Choy 2013).[6] This rise of international adoption resulted in a flood of (largely realist) books published around 2000 specifically depicting transnational adoption from Asia.[7]

Imagining Asian adoptees as pandas unwittingly testifies to the limits of racial abstraction. In *Maya's Journey Home* (Lindsley and Christiansen 2008), for example, Maya the panda lives in China in a group home until she is adopted by a loving polar bear. In keeping with the genre, the text somewhat contradictorily intends to impart lessons about the immateriality of physical differences: it concludes, "It didn't matter that she was a panda bear and her mommy was a polar bear. She felt loved and protected" (22). If animal substitutes offer flexible metaphors for depicting human difference, they also present conundrums: the book's gesture to actual geography seems to require that, unlike Scarry's portrayal of indigenous species diversity, *all* inhabitants of China be portrayed as pandas. The species-race analogy reinforces antiquated notions of (human) type, replicating the troubling gestures of companies like 23andMe that purport to trace "racial" ancestry by correlating an individual's DNA with that of regionalized DNA groupings.

Can an animal character convey racial self-awareness? Penned by a psychologist and illustrated by his son, *My Adopted Child, There's No One like You* (Leman and Leman 2007) attempts to model the laden moment in which an adoptee's origins must be explained. The use of subspecies difference here introduces slightly absurd incommensurabilities:

> Panda pulled away. "But aren't we . . . different?" he stammered. "I mean, I don't even look like you and Papa. I mean, I . . . I'm a panda."
>
> "Yes, we do look different. Papa and I are brown bears, and you're a black and white panda. And do you know what? We think you're the handsomest guy in the forest." (14)

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This exchange delivers a reassuring message to transracial adoptees. Yet when animal substitution seeks to impute social meaning to physical difference, it begins to strain logic. The story continues:

> "Once upon a time," Mama began, "there was a young panda who lived in a different forest from ours." . . . (19)
>
> "Mama, where did she come from?"
>
> "I'll show you on a map," Mama said. "And I think it's time you read about pandas. I have a book about them for you." (23)

To the adoptive parent, the book anticipates another key moment, the request for origins. But metaphoric substitution may well initiate the child's confusion: why would learning about pandas represent an issue of proper timing? Foregrounding concerns about developmental time, the text speaks to what is known about how children comprehend racial categories. Yet it breaches the fourth wall of children's literature by making a direct appeal to the adult reader. Moreover, Panda's halting, reluctant expression of his genus and species specificity—here conveyed through stuttering and ellipsis ("I . . . I'm a panda")—signifies primarily in the context of presumed inferiority. In reality, who *doesn't* love a panda? If the moment of halting self-awareness lacks the momentousness of Franz Fanon's (1991, 109) depiction of social hailing, "Look, a Negro!," it is because the racial metaphor requires us to imagine a caste hierarchy among species in the family Ursidae where none exists.

Tales of animal adoption offer a valuable message in promoting a color-blind future in which external differences do not matter and love vanquishes the color line. Nevertheless, the human-animal metaphor veers offtrack particularly when it goes beyond remarking on color to hint that color might also assume social meaning. Uncomfortably situating the repression of biological difference as key to connecting with transracial adoptees, these animal stories allow for a second-level distancing of the parent's separation anxiety, oddly inverting the affective orientation of Brown's animal stories: with the overt goal of managing a child's feelings, these works likewise manage fears about child attachment potentially compromised by race.[8] From its peak in 2004, international adoption saw a steep decline by 2012 due to changes in the internal policies of China, Russia, and South Korea, as well as increased scrutiny of programs in Guatemala, Vietnam, and Cambodia by the US State Department.[9] Nevertheless, one of its legacies is a

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specific literary racial formation: the Asian immigrant as vulnerable child. Imagining Asian Americans as diminutive is perhaps one reason that their animal proxy is never called by its full name: *giant* panda.

### "Humanals": The Micropolitics of Racial Abstraction

Moving from the subgenre of transspecies adoption, I want to suggest that anthropomorphic animals serve a more subtle function in picture books for the young, where species is a seemingly neutral means of visualizing diversity. Scarry's use of animal indigeneity to depict human geography has ceded to this evolving, potentially less objectionable form at the millennium, specifically, biodiversity as an analogy to multiculturalism.

Picture books series such as Marc Brown's *Arthur*, Rosemary Wells's *Yoko*, or Joseph Slate and Ashley Wolff's *Miss Bindergarten* model age-appropriate diversity in fantastic form: animals go to school, play together, and live in same neighborhood in a delightful suspension of the food chain. Nickelodeon's animated television series for preschoolers, *The Backyardigans* (2004–10), highlights five differently colored animals to the same effect. In *Arthur*, a book and animated series featuring an eight-year-old aardvark, his significantly named sister D.W., and his community of friends, animals merely convey visual distinction. Presented as mono-species nuclear families, characters rarely act out species-specific behaviors in order to further plotlines. Animals living as human children is the taken-for-granted of stories featuring what illustrator Wolff calls "humanals" (Newman n.d.), which largely eschew fixing ethnic markers to biological types. Her *Miss Bindergarten* series depicts a classroom of twenty-six students whose species and names correspond to the alphabet, Adam Alligator to Zelda Zebra, in a panorama of biodiversity (see fig. 4). Across their somatic differences, anthropomorphic creatures perform social harmony for young readers and audiences, as well as a latent multiculturalism. In their vision of well-integrated suburban communities populated by aardvarks, monkeys, bulldogs, and penguins, color is just something that everybody has.

Works that more obviously link species to race or ethnicity promise to impart more explicit lessons about tolerance; yet, as in the case of transspecies adoption tales, this added resonance exposes the limits of racial abstraction. Author-illustrator Wells's portrayal of the species-

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**Figure 4** "Humanals": Joseph Slate and Ashley Wolff's *Miss Bindergarten* series (2001)

diverse kindergarten classroom in *Yoko* (1998), for example, reflects Mitchell's "here and now" dictate insofar as it depicts a normative sequence of a child's day—pack a lunch, get on the bus, go to school—as well as a familiar conflict: the casual cruelty of one's peers. Modeling kindness in light of bullying and trying new things in light of distrust of the unfamiliar, it also speaks directly to theories of children's awareness of racial-ethnic differences or, more specifically, to the cognitive limits of that awareness. *Yoko* tells the story of a kitten who brings an apparently objectionable lunch to school: sushi. The book is categorized under the subject heading, "Juvenile Fiction, Asian American," by the Library of Congress. In addition to being a cat, Yoko is apparently Japanese American.

Here, ethnic difference, not species antagonism, is the source of Yoko's targeting. Faced with the negative comments of dog, beaver, and skunk classmates disgusted by raw fish and seaweed ("It's green!" "Yuck-o-rama!"), a traumatized Yoko seeks reassurance from her teacher who promises, "They'll forget about it by snack time" (see fig. 5). When this fails, the teacher embarks on a more active diversity plan, an "International Food Day" requiring everyone to bring and try ethnic-themed foods. Here, the sincerity of the parent's or educator's mission in offering the book is modeled in the text itself by a caring but not overly interfering adult. The happy resolution is not that the

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**Figure 5** Ethnic trauma in Rosemary Wells's *Yoko* (1998)

class comes to appreciate sushi; rather, it is enough that one student (or one raccoon) recognizes and values Yoko's *temaki kani* and, by extension, Yoko herself.[10] That is, micro-assimilation does not require social change. The plotline echoes realist picture books in which ethnic markers (names, hairstyles, food, language, clothing, chopsticks) undergo positive (re)evaluation by an in-group child and serve as a basis for bonding, for friendship. If ethnic difference is a problem, cultural appreciation is a solution.

As in Margaret Wise Brown's work, *Yoko* stages animals working out processes of separation and attachment, but here these assume a deliberately racial-ethnic cast: who is or is not like us. Wells's animal

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characters thus "teach tolerance" without necessitating that their targeted audience access an adult understanding of social categories or the biases that attend them. In asking animals to perform diversity, such books manage a specific conundrum: how to instruct against racial prejudice for an audience quite possibly innocent of it. In this sense, animals do no harm. (This same delicacy is required when teaching children about sexual abuse without using either the word *sexual* or *abuse*.) Imparting multicultural values without explicit reference to the human body, anthropomorphism enacts a specific sleight of hand. As in the teacher's well-meaning plan, the demand for diversity recognition is met in *Yoko*; at the same time, in both visual execution and plot, the book is indeed color-blind. Anthropomorphic abstraction enables the fantasy of neoliberal futurity—it enables *adults* to pretend.

While I want to acknowledge the age-appropriate, positive lesson of books like *Yoko*, they nevertheless engage human diversity at several degrees of abstraction. First, cultural practice linked to nationality, not biology, serves as the objectionable mark of difference; that is, skin color, for example, is not the source of ostracism. The shift to cultural practice (here, eating raw fish) universalizes that difference: anyone can be lunch-shamed. At the same time, in ethnicizing the demeaned practice, the book gives bullying a politicized source readily recognized by adults. Second, to state the obvious, despite a kimono-wearing mother and a specific hailing by the Library of Congress, as a cat, Yoko is not actually "Asian American": she lacks "eyes that squint," the physiognomic marker that children most readily invoke to call forth East Asians (Ramsey 1987, 44).

More significantly, animal proxies may obviate the very reason that multicultural curricular materials are recommended for the young. In 1987 Aboud found that prior to age eight, children do not comprehend race and ethnicity in the manner of adults but nevertheless express negative views of out-groups (those not like themselves) and positive views of in-groups (see also Aboud 1993). She subsequently noted that biases held by young children *lessened* with greater exposure to individuals not like themselves: when children learned the names of out-group children presented in images and were acquainted with stories about them, their prejudices declined. Children who expressed negative views about pictures of children from other races favorably altered their viewpoints when working collaboratively with less-biased

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peers. If by the time children reach kindergarten they already express negative attitudes about racial-ethnic out-groups, offering them materials featuring children of color helps to individualize members of these groups in a way that lessens prejudices derived from group association (Katz 1976; Aboud 1993). Thus, in addition to advocating school desegregation, researchers in developmental psychology and anthropology pointed to multicultural curricular materials and cooperative learning methods as means of ameliorating negative racial biases (Aboud 1987; Holmes 1995). Yet if multicultural children's books help *humanize* children of color, it is not clear that animals perform this same function.

Child psychiatrist T. M. Rivinus and speech pathologist Lisa Audet (1992, 6) suggest that preschool and early elementary-age children reading Margaret Wise Brown's animal stories "do not need to exert great energy to process content and theme and can easily compare the events of Brown's stories with events in their own lives." Nevertheless, in 2017, researchers in cognitive development found that children ages four to six were *less* likely to engage in pro-social behaviors after being read a book featuring anthropomorphic animals than the same book Photoshopped with human characters. Children who were read a version of *Little Raccoon Learns to Share* (2013) by Mary Packard that was doctored to feature human children were more likely to share stickers with an anonymous peer than those who were read the original work. The increase in generosity, researchers surmise, is "perhaps due to the fact that young children may relate more to human characters than anthropomorphized animals and thus transfer what they have learned from the human characters to real-life situations. For stories with anthropomorphized animal characters, many children may find them not to be relatable and thus not act according to the moral of the story" (Larsen, Lee, and Ganea 2017, 6).

At first glance, the use of animal stories to teach resilience and tolerance requires that children understand a simple substitution—"different" animals for "different" children. However, for race or ethnicity to be understood as the reason for an animal character's out-group status assumes that children comprehend, in the words of anthropologist Lawrence Hirschfeld (1988, 619), an "inferential chain in the manner that adults, or older children, do." It is not apparent that young children understand the analogy to human diversity in the way that adults intend. Hirschfeld notes, "Racial classifications seem to

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develop in a manner which is significantly independent of most other classificatory skills" (622). Transspecies adoption narratives, for example, require a series of associations or inferential leaps in their attempt to expand ideas of kinship beyond biological inheritance: if they are to function as socially prophylactic of biased or inaccurate judgment about family units, they require children to see forms of visual distinction (e.g., fur color, stripes) as primary features of animals and translate these to human differences (e.g., phenotype, "eyes that squint"), only then to discount their importance. Rather than asserting that children do or do not understand animals in racial terms, I want to highlight this complex chain of associations that lies at the basis of seemingly simple, increasingly ubiquitous, perhaps overly convenient substitutions.

The very complication of animal racial proxies does not lie in how picture books visualize an "everyone is different" theme in accordance with children's cognitive capabilities. Rather, the popularity of anthropomorphic abstraction speaks not simply to adults' unwillingness to "see" race but their reluctance to assign it specific meaning. For example, in 2005 heated discussion threads on a website devoted to mothering erupted over the racial implications of the animated characters in Nickelodeon's *The Backyardigans*, which featured five colorful animals—Pablo, Tyrone, Tasha, Austin, and Uniqua—living in the suburbs (Mothering.com 2005). The discussion sent "mothers" scrambling to affix what turned out to be stereotypical racial associations to blue penguins (e.g., Pablo is Hispanic because he smells) and pink bugs (e.g., Uniqua is black because she is sassy). Some supported their interpretations with reference to character names, the racial identities of the voice actors, and the program's African American creator. The very flexibility of animal metaphors led adults to seek fixed meaning through racial typing—or to reject those associations altogether. Some defended the color blindness of the beloved series, variously expressing incredulity over the importance of affixing human attributes to animals ("What kind of person tries to figure out what race a bunch of bugs on a kids [*sic*] show are?"; fremontmama, November 4, 2:13 p.m., Mothering.com 2005). While color-blind rhetoric here attempts to defend childhood, it comes off as an aggressive unwillingness to see, perpetuating what sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) calls "color-blind racism," wherein proclaiming liberal values reinforces systemic inequalities. From the viewpoint of legal theorist

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Patricia J. Williams (1997), professing color blindness represents a hollow and misguided civic ritual, one that fails to account for a complex material reality. In effect, animal proxies both allow for this ritual and obviate it. Given the heated exchanges, perhaps the underlying issue is not how children apprehend racial analogies but how adults do.

## Counting the Nonhuman

How do anthropomorphic characters "count" in the project of liberal multiculturalism? In the fantasy of biodiverse kindergartens, people of color are absent; for activist publishers, librarians, authors, and booksellers, their substitution announces a fundamental incompatibility with the political aims of racial visibility bounded by the horizon of proportional representation, the valued metric of diversity. Ironically, current debates about whether to count texts like *Yoko* as multicultural literature echo the fairy-tale wars' opposition between imagination and education and, later, the view that racial representation is somehow incompatible with the pleasures of reading.

In 2013 multicultural children's book publisher Lee and Low blogged the question, "Why Hasn't the Number of Multicultural Books Increased in Eighteen Years?" (Low 2013). In 2012, for example, only 8 percent of all children's books published had multicultural content (Horning, Linden, and Schliesman 2013). In a series of commissioned responses to the question, librarians, editors, authors, and academics offered analyses surrounding the problem of the lack of representation, almost all of which focused on systemic issues surrounding the marketplace and publishers' gatekeeping function. Yet Roger Sutton (2013), editor of the venerable *Horn Book*, offered a "semi-facetious" explanation for the flatlining of the publication of multicultural children's books: "While the blog states the disparity between the nonwhite population in this country (37% of the whole) and the percentage of children's books with 'multicultural content' (hovering around 10% over the last eighteen years), I want to know what percentage of children's books are in the first place about people (as opposed to talking rabbits or outer space, for example). Things may look worse than they are." Sutton thus suggests that the absence of people of color is due to the absence of human beings more broadly. His final note resurrects debates about the aims of children's literature reflected in the fairy-tale wars: escapism and delight set against realism and

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pedagogy. The post ends emphatically, "*We need more rubbish!*" as if to echo Moore's much earlier defense of "fancy." Defending "rubbish" against social utility insists on a false division between "inner life" or emotional growth and the imperative to educate children with an eye to social change. Sutton's call elicited vociferous agreement that "talking animals should count" toward the multicultural tally. Author Margarita Engle reminded readers that, indeed, the rabbit protagonist of *Tiny Rabbit's Big Wish* is Latino (Sutton 2013).

In response to Sutton's post, Kathleen Horning, director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), set out to count "talking rabbits" in order to show that, given the paucity of racial representation in children's books, things are as bad as they look. She found that 23 percent of children's books (most of them picture books) published in 2013 featured animal characters (Horning 2014). That statistic must be placed in another context: of the 3,600 books received by the CCBC in 2012, books by and about people of color, as previously noted, accounted for less than 8 percent of the total.[11] In light of the small percentage of multicultural children's books, the turn to anthropomorphism does not really compromise those numbers.

Nevertheless, the CCBC has refined how it tallies multicultural children's literature; in addition to noting the racial identities of authors, illustrators, and speaking characters, it logs international content and representations of disability and sexuality, among others. While the project adheres to the horizon of minority visibility—the increased percentage of multicultural representation as a metric of change—it newly accounts for the contingencies of animal surrogacy. For example, Corey Rosen Schwartz, Rebecca Gomez, and Dan Santat's *Hensel and Gretel: Ninja Chicks* (2016) tallies as "Asian American" (Santat is Thai American) with an international setting ("Asia: Japan"; see fig. 6). Even as they run afoul of representational politics, like bears in feathers and cats in kimonos, chickens count toward diversity if they are dressed as ninjas. This pushes the boundaries of what Nel (2017, 26) notes as the erasure of (human) children of color in "places where we might expect to see them." In contrast, I suggest that the issue is not whitewashing per se but the inherent pleasures of racial abstraction, which in this case veers uncomfortably toward ethnic caricature. While acknowledging the positive work that animal characters perform in modeling human behaviors, Horning minces no words about the evasion they represent: "We expect a white child to find it easy

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**Figure 6** Chicken diversity: *Hensel and Gretel: Ninja Chicks* by Corey Rosen Schwartz, Rebecca Gomez, and Dan Santat (2016)

to identify with an animal but not with a black character. Is the child further removed from a person of another race than another species? That's ludicrous" (pers. comm., Madison, WI, September 8, 2016).

### Conclusion: Politicizing Abstraction

For Margaret Wise Brown, "Rabbit" was a queer endearment. Her fraught relationship with poet and actress Blanche Oelrichs (a.k.a. Michael Strange), the former wife of John Barrymore, was well known in her social circle.[12] Brown's pet name for Strange, twenty years her senior, was "My Only Rabbit," and in turn, Strange called her "the Bun" and "Golden Bunny No Good." Her letters testify to the toll that Strange's withholding nature exacted: "Your cruelty bewilders me utterly," Brown wrote in 1948. "I miss you too much. Feel ill from the division. . . . Old Rabbit, this seems all like a silly game" (cited in Pichey 2000, 177). Brown's sexuality was not exactly closeted during her career as a children's book author and editor, but even by 1992 her biographer refrained from identifying her as either lesbian or bisexual.[13] A gap in how the beloved children's book author is remembered, this biographical detail is significant in contextualizing

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a literary corpus engaged with animals acting out anxieties surrounding individuation and attachment, bunnies and chickens ventriloquizing the fear of not finding a home or companionship. In keeping with her own interest in psychoanalysis, Brown's plotlines are unsurprisingly understood as addressing a child's relationship with a primary caregiver.[14] Yet Brown's animal characters allow for alternative readings of the nature of intimacy, family, and connection.

In the posthumously published *Home for a Bunny* (Brown and Williams 1956), a rabbit's search among multiple species in the woods finds comforting resolution: he finds a home in a burrow with another rabbit.

He met a bunny.
"Where is your home?"
he asked the bunny.
"Here," said the bunny. . . .
"Can I come in?"
said the bunny.
"Yes," said the bunny.
And so he did.
And that was his home.

Whether the male bunny finds a mother, a friend, or a mate seems immaterial to the emotionally satisfying conclusion to a quest for shelter and companionship. Yet Brown's decision to abjure from using a gendered pronoun in reference to the bunny companion seems deliberate, particularly as that decision renders the exchange repetitive if not also confusing. In fact, the second bunny is also male; Brown's instructions in the book's mock-up read, "Other bunny demonstrating his / home" (Margaret Wise Brown Papers, box 4, folder 12).

As in Nel's (2017, 4) *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?*, which shows how "race is present especially when it seems to be absent," same-sex intimacy here assumes a similar valence: hiding in plain sight. I mark *Home for a Bunny* as a precursor to the portrayal of loving same-sex partnerships that would appear in children's books half a century later; Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell, and Henry Cole's *And Tango Makes Three* (2005) is a case in point. Yet the award-winning book depicting two male penguins who hatch an egg together is also one of the top ten most targeted for censorship in the twenty-first century.[15]

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Its censure recalls the response to *The Rabbits' Wedding* (1958), Garth Williams's children's book depicting the marriage between a black and a white rabbit. Pulled from the shelves of an Alabama library in 1959 due to pressure from the White Citizens' Council, the book was read as thinly disguised advocacy for interracial marriage at a time in which thirteen southern states still considered it illegal.[16] As Art Spiegelman (2011, 127) notes, animal masks enable authors to "approach otherwise unsayable things." Unveiling "unsayable things" was deemed "paranoid reading" by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1997), a hermeneutic practice uncovering evidence of same-sex desire and its repression. In the case of children's literature, what is at stake in the practice is not establishing intent but possibility. When asked whether his tomboy aardvark character, D.W., was gay, for example, author Marc Brown merely replied, "She doesn't know yet."[17] Throughout this essay, anthropomorphism in children's picture books suggests an analogous method, not so much a hermeneutics of suspicion as Sedgwick suggests but a practice of reading for racial latency that is likewise politically illuminating. Anthropomorphic displacement thus suggests the very possibilities inherent to abstraction: animals can serve as flexible metaphors that, like Brown's friendly bunny, invite other meanings to "come in."

Or burrow underground. As I have suggested here, displacement by proxy can also represent an evasion of politics. *And Tango Makes Three* offers loving same-sex relationships without either gay men or homosexual acts. *Home for a Bunny* disturbingly implies that one belongs with one's own kind. Throughout this essay, I sound a cautionary note as to what it means to circulate racial meaning without racial bodies. In cross-species adoption, the pleasures of fantasy veil anxieties about parent-child attachment imagined as racial distance and reveal the at times absurd incommensurability between race and species. Likewise, literalizing color blindness while visualizing biological distinction, the biodiverse kindergarten allows adults to have International Food Day and eat it, too. Displacing ethnic markers onto animal figures here reconciles the paradox of diversity in the early twenty-first century: envisioning democratic inclusion without invoking the messy divisiveness of US racial history.

Children's picture books remain on the margins of literary study in part because they appear to wear their politics on their sleeves,

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sometimes quite literally. Less obvious is how they function as conduits of veiled yet positive racial feeling in their seemingly innocent use of animal characters. Yet "liking" bears and "liking" Indians are not commensurate: the latter veers into fetishistic reduction, liking a type. The circulation of racial proxies thus suggests an ethical dilemma in the education of the young no less complex than that articulated by author Michael Chabon (2011) who struggled over whether to utter the "N-word" when reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* aloud to his children. If the image of cats in kimonos is less racially charged, it is no less racially fraught. Its soft power lies precisely in the plausible denial of the pretend, in Jean Baudrillard's (1994) words, the imaginary as the alibi of the real. Yet once viewed as a site of innocence and escapism, childhood has been unmasked as a site of aggressive imaginary projection. The primary texts I address here highlight that what adults want *for* children is inseparable from what they need *from* them. If childhood is itself a projection of adult fantasy, it is likewise a site of profound racialized pleasure, the desire to situate books as preemptive of racial trauma or corrective of social ills, progressive goals bounded by a neoliberal horizon. As Bernstein (2011, 8) has shown, childhood in the nineteenth century was "raced white" even as child's play was itself "characterized by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness." In the genre of picture books discussed here, obliviousness gives way to sincerity. Resonating with the power of collective if now tenuously held ideals in the twenty-first century, such books maintain the fantasy that race does not matter, that we will be loved, appreciated, or accepted not in spite of but because of our differences.

At least, that's the story we tell children.

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## Notes

1 The characters appear in Scarry's (1966) *Storybook Dictionary*.

2 Julia L. Mickenberg and Lynne Vallone (2011) note other key moments in the emergence of children's literature as a discipline: the creation of a juvenile division at MacMillan in 1919, the establishment of the Newbery Medal in 1922, and the founding of the *Horn Book Magazine* in 1924.

3 For example, in his review of the 2013 New York Public Library exhibition, "The ABC of It: Why Children's Books Matter," Edward Rothstein (2013) disparagingly links the history of Puritan moral education—the idea that books have "an obligation to train the reader in proper moral and political attitudes"—to children's books focusing on "identity politics."

4 The sequel to *Goodnight Moon*, the lesser-known *My World* (1949), depicts the animal transitional object self-consciously: "Daddy's boy. / Mother's boy. / My boy is just a toy. / Bear" (Brown and Hurd 2001).

5 Studies focusing on children's biases as a reflection of cognitive development include Katz 1976; Aboud 1987, 1988, 1993; Ramsey 1987; Hirschfeld 1988, 1995; Holmes 1995; and Quintana 1998.

6 By 2000, 13 percent of adopted children in US households were foreign born; nearly half of foreign-born adoptees were born in Asia. According to the 2000 census, Asian adoptees hailed from South Korea (48 percent), China (21 percent), India (8 percent), the Philippines (6 percent), and Vietnam (4 percent), among other countries. South Korea and China accounted for the largest number of immigrant visas issued to adopted children from 1992 to 1996 and from 2000 to 2007 (Kreider 2003).

7 Sarah Park Dahlen (2009) identified fifty-one works of children's and young adult fiction published between 1955 and 2007 centering solely on adoption from South Korea.

8 As adult Asian adoptees testify, trauma lies not only in negative comments or ostracism from peers but in their adoptive parents' refusal to acknowledge their racial difference. Moreover, their racial consciousness, what Kristi Brian (2012, 81) calls "adoptees' departure from whiteness," does not begin and end with the childhood moment of recognizing a physical difference from the adoptive parents.

9 This increased scrutiny was due to fears of child trafficking. According to the State Department, in 2013, foreign adoptions dropped 62 percent to 8,668 from a high of 22,991 in 2004 (Swarns 2013). See also US Department of State 2015.

10 As in books featuring realist depictions of Asian American children, belonging is signaled through the recognition of a single figure. In this sense, the narrative reflects the hopes underlying what psychologists call the "friendship protection hypothesis," the speculation that having one high-quality friendship mitigates the effects of bullying. Its affirming resolution does not require the out-group child to change, nor does it

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require social change. In this, books like *Yoko* model a good-enough integration, marking children's books as a site of pragmatic, neoliberal racial micropolitics. See Hodges et al. 1999.

11 This excludes the 23 percent of books whose main characters are animals. See Horning, Lindren, and Schliesman 2013. Nel (2017, 2) references an earlier data set for establishing the flatlining of multicultural children's books, noting that they never exceed 15 percent of the total.

12 When asked whether Brown's relationship with Strange was sexual, Brown's friends gave conflicting answers; one simply affirmed, "Oh, of course" (cited in Pichey 2000, 176).

13 Leonard S. Marcus (1992) chronicles the long-term relationship between Brown and Strange and cites their love letters yet remains self-consciously opaque as to the sexual nature of their relationship.

14 Her relationship with Strange was characterized as "a mother-substitute relationship" (quoted from a letter from Bank Street volunteer "Rosie" Bliven to Lucy Sprague, February 21, 1951, Sprague Mitchell Papers).

15 Since its circulation in 2005, *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson, Parnell, and Cole 2005) appears consistently among the top ten books subject to formal written complaints filed with schools or libraries. According to the American Library Association (2014), objections centered on the book as it "promotes the homosexual agenda." See also Karolides 2006.

16 Williams denied any political meaning underlying the rabbits' intimacy ("it is only about a soft furry love") and claimed that the aesthetic representation of color contrast in Chinese painting, not racial difference, was his inspiration for drawing one rabbit black and the other white (cited in Sollers 1997, 22).

17 Brown's answer came in response to student questions during a visit to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2015 (pers. comm. with Horning, Madison, WI, September 8, 2016).

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