

**'Becoming Animal': Motifs of Hybridity and Liminality in Fairy Tales and Selected  
Contemporary Artworks**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

*'Becoming Animal': Motifs of Hybridity and Liminality in Fairy Tales and Selected Contemporary Artworks* serves as a theoretical examination of the concept of the hybrid. My research unpacks the liminal aspect of hybridity, locating the hybrid in the imaginative world of popular fairy tales, folk lore and mythology. In my accompanying MFA exhibition, *Becoming(s)*, I explore these motifs through an installation of mixed-media sculptures which are based on the hybrid creatures that populated the fantasy world of my childhood.

The written component of my MFA submission will relate directly to my professional art practise, developing it further and situating it within a relevant context. In my mini-thesis I will consider the liminal in relation to the 'animal turn' in contemporary art, with a particular focus on relevant artists working with the motifs of hybridity, such as Nandipha Mntambo, Jane Alexander and Kiki Smith. The 'animal turn' is a term used by Kari Weil (2010: 3) to describe a contemporary interest in issues of the nonhuman, and in the ways that the relationship between humans and nonhumans is marked by "difference, otherness and power".

Of key concern to my research will be Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of 'becoming animal'. Rather than describing a transition from one stable state to another, 'becoming animal' suggests a radical dissolution of boundaries – not just between species (such as 'human' and 'animal') but between any essentialising binaries. As such, 'becoming animal' suggests a conception of identity as being fluid and mutable, rather than stable and fixed.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

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## **Introduction:**

My mini-thesis research and professional art practise together aim to unpack the liminal aspects of the imaginative world of popular fairy tales, folk lore and mythology, concentrating on the notion of the hybrid. I intend to explore these motifs through an installation of mixed-media sculptures which are based on the hybrid creatures that populated the fantasy world of my childhood.

My interest in this field reaches as far back as my memories do, as I was born into a very creative Afrikaans family spurred on by my father's love of the extraordinary and his passion for the realm of fantasy. My most vivid childhood memories are filled with mythical creatures and fairy tales - most of them of my father's own creation. My two brothers and I were always encouraged to find the unexpected in everyday objects and situations. While this fantastical world soon faded and lost its hold on my brothers, I remained deeply embedded in the realm of make-believe, guided by my father's proclaimed knowledge of this realm.

It is this realm that I will be unpacking in my mini-thesis, taking my cue primarily from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming animal'. According to Friedrich Weltzien and Jessica Ullrich ([sa]):

Becoming animal offers a way out of the categorical binary imperative of man or woman, inside or outside, human or animal, integrated or disintegrated. Instead, it offers all sorts of half measures and approximations, uncertainties, mixtures and ruptures, hybrids and bastards.

I will be unpacking these concerns in relation to my own art practice as well as the works of contemporary artists who employ motifs of human/animal hybridity: Nandipha Mntambo, Jane Alexander and Kiki Smith.



In chapter one I will contextualise my own fascination with fairy tales by considering their intended purpose in childhood development, the attributes that characterise them, and various theoretical standpoints that reflect on their history, form and function.

I will investigate the ways that fairy tales present characters which conform to simplified binaries, being good or evil, heroes or villains and so forth. In this sense they enforce certain archetypes. I will briefly discuss some of the reasons why fairy tales may be regarded as important for the psychological development of children, drawing on the theories of well-known children's psychoanalyst, Bruno Bettelheim, and linking his theories to my own childhood as a reference. I will also be looking at contemporary theorists such as Tess Lewis and Maria Tatar and comparing their perspectives on fairy tales with those of the somewhat didactic Bettelheim.

There are a few amoral stories that present exceptions to the 'standard' framing of characters found in fairy tales i.e. *Puss in Boots*. I will briefly discuss why he may be viewed as an atypical 'hero' as his characterisation suggests amoral ambiguity that does not conform to a binarised world-view of right vs. wrong. My argument is that characters such as *Puss in Boots* appear closer in orientation to the characters in the original folk lore that fairy tales derive from, as they are complex and ambiguous.

Chapter two focuses on the animal's place in fairy tales, folk lore and mythology as anthropomorphic beings and as hybrids. I will initially be looking at the long history and origins of animals prevalent in fairy tales, folklore and mythology and how these animals are generally featured. Then I will be concentrating on the power-relations implied in this type of anthropomorphic characterisation in relation to the animal turn. The animal turn, as theorised by Ann-Marie Tully and Keri Weil, implicitly recognises and problematizes the power-dynamics at play in anthropomorphism and does not believe that animals are lesser beings.

Weil and Tully's interest in the animal turn links in with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'becoming animal', which also challenges the anthropocentric world-view. For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming animal does not involve mimesis, evolution or even the production of a new identity, but aspires to find a continuously shifting "zone of proximity" (Deleuze 1997: 1) between various states of identity. 'Becoming animal' thus signals an inherently transitional way of being as "there is no 'becoming animal', only 'becomings'" (Tully 2011: 76).

It is in this sense Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'becoming animal' links implicitly to ideas around hybridity, and is particularly relevant in terms of my research, as I envisage the hybrid as an embodiment of the inherently transitional non-mimetic being. Here I will be looking at a work done by Nandipha Mntambo entitled *Europa*, 2008, which may be seen to encapsulate this liminally transitional state between 'becomings'.

In chapter three I will be looking at this in more detail in relation to my own art practice. I will also be looking at the works of Kiki Smith, as Smith references fairy tales in a number of her works and also employs motifs of hybridity. I will also discuss how the process of doing my MFA degree has been about transformations and transitional stages, and how it has inspired my own 'becomings' as an artist, hence the title of my MFA exhibition.

Throughout my mini-thesis there is an underlying sub-narrative that reflects on my own identity and personal experiences. I write from a personalised view, as my MFA degree has shaped and altered my own sense of self through my studies into the realm of fairy tales and by revisiting the tales of my childhood. By looking and relooking at this subject matter, I have come to understand and appreciate my own messy and complex transitional processes of leaving behind the naivety of childhood and entering into adulthood. During this two year engagement, fairy tales have been my main focus, taking shape not only in my mini-thesis and art practice, but also in my personal transitional space, providing impetus for my research.

## **Chapter One:**

A German poet by the name of Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller once suggested that: “Deeper meaning resides more in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught in life” (quoted in Bettelheim 1976: 5). His assertion hints at the didactic function of fairy tales; the way that fairy tales work to instil good behaviour and to impart the ‘truths’ of life to those who engage in them.

My father taught me from a young age that fairy tales tell not only of larger than life heroes and heroines on fantastical adventures, but also of the smallest little mouse who changes the world by being a good ‘person’ and by going out of his/her way to be kind to fellow creatures, large or small. In retrospect, I can now understand how an idea such as this may influence the impressionable mind of a child on a subconscious level, in ways that are perhaps not fully understood or recognised until further deliberated on at a later phase in life. As repositories for hidden meanings, fairy tales contribute important messages to the child’s consciousness, pre-consciousness and unconscious mind. This, according to renowned child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, is why fairy tales are such an important part of childhood development.

They speak about [ the child’s] severe inner pressures in a way that the child unconsciously understands, and – without belittling the most serious inner struggles which growing up entails – offer examples of both temporary and permanent solutions to pressing difficulties (Bettelheim 1976: 6).

These stories act not only as fundamental tools for childhood development, but also offer different and unexplored dimensions that help shape and further a child’s imagination. Fairy tales create a world of wonder that the child can draw on and can structure his/her daydreams around, in this way giving direction to his/her subconscious self. In my personal experience, fairy tales always sparked my fascination with the world of art, offering me the opportunity and freedom to create my

very own world of fascinating beings, metaphorically brought to life through imaginative daydreaming.

As a child, I would spend most of my waking hours daydreaming and creating new and fascinating characters and little creatures for my father to base his bedtime stories on. I unconsciously projected my own personal fears and concerns onto these characters, and this helped me understand any issues I was dealing with at that time. One of my father's tales, the one that comes most readily to mind, is about a lonely little cat who goes off to her first day at school and gets rejected by all the other little cats, because she is different, and doesn't look like the others with her freckles and messy red hair. She wants to make friends with the other cats so badly, but they are simply not interested. So one day the lonely little cat meets an awkward little fox with exceptionally big ears, who has been cast aside by his siblings because they think he looks strange. The lonely little cat and little big-eared fox soon become fast friends, and end up going on grand adventures together. Eventually this dynamic little duo attract all the other little woodland creatures that have been pushed aside by their packs for being different or a little odd, and so their friend circle grows and grows, and all the other little cats, foxes and woodland critters who were mean to them from the start notice how much fun they are having together. They quickly put aside their previous judgements, and are welcomed, with open arms, into the friendship circle of the lonely little cat and the awkward fox.

There are obviously direct parallels between this story and my early school experiences; in terms of my feelings of being an outsider and my fear of not being fully accepted by my classmates and peers (which in truth was actually the case). My father must have noticed my distress, and fashioned his stories around my fears, using my own characters to help me relate and work through these problems by telling me bedtime stories. His stories also taught me not to be judgemental or unkind to people based purely on the way they looked, as others had judged me, and soon enough I was

part of a rag tag little team of friends from all different ethnicities, backgrounds and ages, and I could not have been happier.

This is merely one example of how fairy tales appear to be more than just escapist fantasy. In Bettelheim's view, they are actually a form of coping mechanism, used to unconsciously orient the child in his/her current situation. Instead of forcefully facing a problem head-on by applying rational comprehension to the situation, the child first perceives and familiarises him/herself with this new situation by role-playing and daydreaming about it. Through reflecting, rearranging and fantasising about it, and by applying various aspects and elements of similar situations learned and remembered from fairy tales, the child unconsciously learns to understand what is going on within his/her conscious self.

Essentially, for Bettelheim, "the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies which then enable him [sic] to deal with that content". Bettelheim continues:

It is here that fairy tales have unequal value, because they offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own. Even more important, the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams, and with them give better direction to his life (Bettelheim 1976: 7).

Arguably, fairy tales are able to "give better direction" to children's lives precisely because they expose children to the harsh realities of life, but in manageable doses, shorn of the greater tangle of complexities that so often surrounds such situations.

For Bettelheim, if children are not exposed to life's dangers and difficulties and do not practice decision-making for themselves, this lack of exposure could impact negatively on their later development. If children do not learn to deal with disappointment and loss from an early age, it may be more harmful when they later encounter the troubles that are found in so-called real life. This is

why most of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales begin with some or other tragedy befalling the hero, and the rest of the tale focuses on how the hero deals with this unfortunate event, and how his/her actions ultimately lead to successes. This also helps children to understand that actions have consequences, teaching them to process their fears or anxieties and to translate them into constructive and healthy conscious thought processes. At the same time, they are seemingly allowed the freedom to discover the solutions for themselves.

Bettelheim asserts:

This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, it is an intrinsic part of the human existence - but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious (Bettelheim 1976: 8).

According to this positive, somewhat utopian view (as presented by Bettelheim), fairy tales play an indispensable part in childhood development. They facilitate the burgeoning of agency through imaginative problem-solving; they 'give better direction' to young lives; and they equip children with the tools to 'master all obstacles' and 'emerge victorious'.

Not surprisingly, many contemporary theorists are sceptical of Bettelheim's idealism. For example, Tess Lewis, author of *Defending Children Against Fairy Tales*, argues that fairy tales may be doing "more harm than good to our children's psyches". She elaborates:

Because fairy tales do not merely encode social arrangements from the past, but also participate in their creation for the future, the misogyny, violence and anti-Semitism in many of the tales can, despite our best intentions, perpetuate itself in the subconscious of our younger generations (Lewis, T. 1993: 404).

Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber, too, see fairy tales as potentially damaging:

Many parents, educators and literary critics know that it remains impossible to read these charming tales and ignore their capacity for reinforcing limiting sex role stereotypes and conservative ways of thinking about family that act upon children when they are most impressionable (Fisher & Silber 2000: 121).

In many respects, the limiting stereotypes enforced by fairy tales are intrinsically linked to their didactic function. Most fairy tales focus on simplifying all situations in a clear and easily understandable manner. Even the characters in the tales are pared down to the bare essentials, and are, more often than not, typical rather than exceptional. The characters are exclusively good or bad, clever or stupid, beautiful or ugly, but seldom anything in between. In other words, these tales form strong predetermined stereotypes to which children will link associations. This juxtaposition creates a clear and definitive opposition in characters, making it easier for the child to ultimately relate to the 'hero' rather than the 'villain'.

Fairy tales, in other words, tend to reduce the world to simplified binaries of 'good' or 'bad', and allow very little space for moral ambiguity. 'Good' and 'bad' are ever-present forces, and are given body either by a character or by their actions. It is this contradiction which poses the moral problem faced by the child. As a result, the child usually finds him/herself attracted to the hero in the tales (not that the villains are without their quirks and attractions). The child usually gravitates toward the hero as it is the struggles and challenges that the hero must to endure (and eventually conquer after a notable exploit) that grab the child's attention, allowing the child to 'discover' that virtue always wins at the end. This venture, then, leaves a moral imprint on the child, and raises in the child the question: "Who do I want to be like?"

And yet these characters are such intrinsic stereotypes that, undetected, they may appear as normal in the subconscious mind of a child after repeated readings, until these delimiting stereotypes become so deeply embedded that they are naturalised.

For example, it is immediately apparent that the 'virtues' being espoused, in terms of expectations around gender and gendered behaviour, are highly questionable. As Lewis suggests:

Today's most popular fairy tales subtly reinforce erroneous or limited views of women inherent in the Freudian outlook: Snow White and Cinderella win their princes through a combination of good looks, extraordinary housekeeping and modesty; the punishment for Bluebeard's wife's curiosity – a symbolic sexual transgression – is death. Until we challenge these prototypes we are at the worst offering harmful images to children in their formative years, or at best leaving young girls adrift, without strong role models (Lewis 1993: 404).

In summary, then, fairy tales may be seen to offer moral guidance by presenting a world of juxtapositions and clear choices – between heroes and villains; good and bad. This is a world of relatively tidy boundaries without moral ambiguity. And yet it is a morally questionable world precisely because of the stereotypes it enforces. It classes very particular attributes as 'good'; and enforces assumptions about race and gender that play out in how it frames its heroes.

What is then interesting, in the context of such clear binaries and stereotypes, are the few notable exceptions – where fairy tales present us with characters that are both 'good' and 'bad'. Some stories to consider in this category include *Puss in Boots* and *Jack and the Beanstalk*, where the main characters are not exactly displayed as traditional fairy tale heroes, given that they succeed through devious and nefarious means. These tales tell a different story, as they show no clear polarization or juxtaposition of good or bad. For example *Puss in Boots* is devoted and loyal to his master, but uses trickery and deceit to amass wealth and power.

The tale of *Puss in Boots*, (figure 1) in its various guises, is one of the most renowned accounts of 'animal as helper' in all folklore. The story involves the youngest son of a poor man who ends up inheriting nothing more than a cat. Upon seeing his new master cursing his miserable inheritance, the cat promises him good fortune and riches in exchange for a pair of boots. The cat then sets



about amassing wealth through numerous acts of tricky, theft and manipulation, eventually securing for his young master a marriage to the King's daughter with a lovely new estate to match.



Figure 1: Puss meets the King and his daughter in a nineteenth-century illustration by Gustave Doré

*Puss in Boots* is thus an atypical 'hero', as his characterisation suggests moral ambiguity rather than a binarised world-view of right and wrong. According to Iona and Peter Opie,

The morality of the story has in fact troubled many editors in the past, George Cruikshank amongst them, who took exception to 'a system of imposture being rewarded by the greatest worldly adventures'. Certainly the Master Cat can be acclaimed the prince of 'con' men, few swindlers having been so successful before or since (Opie 1974: 143).

In some respects, such morally ambiguous fairy tales seem much closer to the original pre-Victorian folklore that often informed them. Up until the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, fairy tales were intended for adult audiences as well as children, as a form of entertainment told around the fire place. There are numerous theories on the advancement of fairy tales throughout the ages. Max Luthi addresses one of these theories, in *Once Upon A Time, On the Nature of Fairy Tales*. He claims that:

The rich store of tales which were once handed down only by oral tradition can really be separated into a relatively small number of types which have coexisted for some time. The genres realistic story, fairy tale, saint's legend, and local legend have taken shape in the course of millennia... Each of these genres seems to serve an elementary human need (Luthi 1976: 35-36).

"Saint's legends" comes from the Latin word *legenda*, which means "that which is to be read", while fairy tales and local legends were passed on by word of mouth. For Luthi, it was initially the role of saint's legends to provide guidelines for proper moral behaviour.

However according to von Franz, the eighteenth century was marked by "Dissatisfaction with Christian teaching and the first longings for more vital, earthly and instinctual wisdom". In response, "It was this religious search for something which seems lacking in official Christian teaching that first induced the famous Brothers' Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm to collect fairy tales" (von Franz 1985:3). In other words, it became a function of fairy tales to impart secular morality. As seen in this woodcut from 1697.

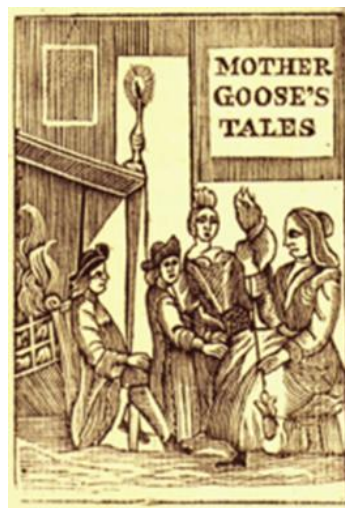


Figure 2: Woodcut frontispiece copied from the 1697 Paris edition of Perrault's tales and published to the English-speaking world

Jack Zipes concentrates on this subject in his book *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, (1983). Zipes writes that Charles Perrault was a major collector of fairy tales at the same time as the Brothers' Grimm, as he and numerous others were accountable for a "veritable deluge of literary fairy tales in the eighteenth century" (1983: 14). Although these tales were also still intended to be enjoyed by an adult audience there was definitely a strong tendency to "provide models of behaviour for the rearing and schooling of upper-class children" (1983: 14). At the same time, the original folklore and mythology was recast according to a patriarchal ideology:

... the matriarchal world view and motifs of the original folk lore underwent successive stages of 'patriarchalization'. That is, by the time the oral folk lore tales, originally stamped by matriarchal mythology, circulated in the Middle Ages, they were transformed in different ways: the goddess became a witch, evil fairy, or step-mother; the active, young princess was changed into an active hero; matrilineal marriages and family ties became patrilineal; the essence of the symbols, based on matriarchal rites, was depleted and made benign; the pattern of action which concerned maturation and integration was gradually recast to stress domination and wealth (Zipes 1983: 7).

When the written fairy tales originated, they were originally intended to promote proper moral grooming for children so that they might grow up into well-adjusted adults. These tales were designed to both amuse children while subtly introducing them to predetermined ideologies that were intended to shape and mould the inner nature of the children. In this sense, as Zipes asserts:

Perrault's own contribution to the development of the literary fairy tale for children is a contradictory one. He is responsible for shaping folklore into an exquisite literary form and endowing it with an earnest and moral purpose to influence the behaviour of children in a tasteful way. However, at the same time he is also 'guilty' of setting stringent standards of comportment which were intended to regulate and limit the nature of children's development (Zipes 1983: 16).

Zipes continues:

... the 'standard' fairy tale maintained an 'ideology of harmlessness', that is, discreet inquiry and censorship have always been employed to guarantee that fairy tales were more or less constructed to follow the classical pattern to reinforce the dominant social codes within the home and school (Zipes 1983: 19).

As such, it seems apparent that fairy tales - as we know and understand them - are reflections of eighteenth century values and ideologies. As Zipes points out, the oral folk lore tales were purposefully 'tidied up', censored and simplified for children, losing both the matriarchal aspect and moral ambiguity that may have characterised them previously. As Lewis notes:

Before Perrault turned "Little Red Riding Hood" into a moralizing tale about the dangers of talking to strangers ... a widespread version of the story recounted in great detail the heroine's seductive striptease for the wolf and her escape by asking permission to go relieve herself (Lewis 1993: 403).



Figure 3: *Wikipedia*, Little Red Riding Hood. [sa] [O]

## **Chapter Two:**

In chapter one, I examined how the simplified core binary ideas commonly found in fairy tales could be seen to facilitate emotional growth through early childhood, and yet how repeated readings of those binaries could also inform and naturalise unwanted or damaging gender stereotypes into adult life.

I concluded with the observation that some fairy tales share closer affinities with original folklore and mythology, particularly by presenting us with complex, morally ambiguous characters. *Puss in Boots*, for example, is interesting as an ambiguous character – as a human-like cat (or cat-like human) that is also morally hybrid, being both good and bad.

Using this as a starting point, Chapter two considers the prevalence of animals in fairy tales, folklore and mythology. I investigate the role and function of animals as anthropomorphic beings and as human/animal hybrids.

People have always lived in close contact with animals, and have naturally developed myths and legends about and around countless creatures, real or fictional. A myth can give special meaning or extraordinary qualities to common animals such as cats and frogs. Other creatures found in mythology include monsters and dragons, centaurs, mermaids, fauns, sphinx, Minotaurs, unicorns, werewolves and even the Japanese yōkai. In every culture, religion, country and community, animals have played a major role as ‘understudies’ for humans or human characteristics. Some are represented as tricksters (for example, *Puss in Boots*), some undergo heroic quests, or act as peacekeepers or guardians, while others are regarded as a source of wisdom and power. Animals often have a dualistic quality in mythology. They can be helpful to humans or harmful—sometimes both.

Countless mythologies, folk lore, fairy tales and even superstitions explore the various relationships between humans and animals. It is common in these tales for people to communicate

with animals, for people to transform into animals or vice versa, or even to marry them. Sometimes animals perform services for humans: some offer guidance, some are considered evil, while others are symbols for peace and love. Given the focus of my research, I am particularly interested in an especially large group of myths involving animal transformations or 'becomings' between the human and animal states.

Transformation myths have a strong history in mythology and in fairy tales: a princess kisses an enchanted frog, and he becomes a handsome prince, with whom, the fairy tale tells us, she will live 'happily ever after'. Transformation myths are about crossing the boundaries that set humans apart from the rest of the world. Such transformations - in which people turn into animals or animals turn into people - are common to almost every culture throughout history. For example, shape-shifting characters are common in Native American mythologies. A story from the Tsimshian people tells of "Asdiwal, a young man who follows a white bear up a mountain to the sky. He discovers that the beast is actually a beautiful woman dressed in a bear skin, and he marries her" (Myths Encyclopaedia, 2014: 1-3).

The ancient Greeks and Romans believed that the gods could blur the boundaries between different classes of beings. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a collection of Greek and Roman legends about mortals whom the gods turned into animals and plants. Both Chinese and Slavic mythologies include tales of people who, under some evil force, turn into werewolves.

The Scots have stories about silkies—imaginary sea creatures resembling seals that take on human form, marry men and women, and then return to the sea. In fact, the theme of animal wives or husbands comes up over and over again in mythology. Native Americans tell of girls marrying bears and men marrying deer. Eskimo and Chinese tales mention beautiful, seductive women who turn out to be foxes in disguise. In one Eskimo story a woman enters the home of a hunter while he is out. She cooks for him and stays for some time, but eventually she puts on her fox skin and disappears. The well-known fable of Beauty and the

Beast is a modern version of the myth of the animal husband whose beastly form cannot disguise his noble soul (Myths Encyclopaedia, 2014: 3).

In the writings of Plato we read that the elderly women of the community told the children symbolic stories called *mythoi*. Later on in antiquity Apuleius, a writer and philosopher in the second century A.D., wrote a fairy tale called 'Amor and Psyche' a type of *Beauty and the Beast* story in his famous novel *The Golden Ass*. According to Marie-Louise von Franz, author of *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1985: 30):

This fairy tale runs on the same pattern as those one can nowadays still collect in Norway, Sweden, Russia and many other countries. It has therefore been concluded that at least this type of fairy tale (that of a woman redeeming an animal lover) has existed for 2,000 years, practically unaltered (von Franz 1985: 3).

One can thus conclude that animals have played major roles in fairy tales and in the folklore and mythologies on which fairy tales are based. The brothers Grimm collected a vast number of fairy tales that contain animals or animal-like beings in them. Moreover, tales pairing humans with animal lovers – suggesting, at least hypothetically, the possibility of hybrid offspring – are exceedingly prevalent. However, the extent to which the animals in these tales can be properly regarded as *animals* is questionable. As von Franz suggests: "The word 'animal' is not very good in this connection because although the characters are animals, everyone knows that these animals are at the same time anthropomorphic beings" (von Franz 1985: 24).

This means that even though the animal may have the physical appearance of an animal in the tale, there is a resemblance of a human still in evidence, either in some of the characteristics, the ability to talk or the presumption of some form of consciousness. Some tales portray animals as a semblance - where a human is trapped in the physical form of an animal (or vice versa,) usually due to some form of spell or curse cast by the evil-doer in the particular narrative. When this occurs, it

usually forms the base of the story, and the rest of the tale revolves around breaking the spell and releasing the hero from his/her animal-form prison, as in the case of *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Frog Prince* and *The Twelve Brothers*.

For von Franz there is nothing problematic in the anthropomorphic portrayal of animals. She laments:

Anthropologists quarrel about whether they are animals disguised as human beings or humans disguised as animals. But this is idiotic, to my mind. They are just what they are! They are animals and human beings, no primitive would puzzle about it; there is no contradiction. From our standpoint they are symbolic animals, for we make another distinction: we say the animal is the carrier of the projection of human psychic factors...You see it beautifully in those animal stories which represent archetypal human tendencies. They are human because they really do not represent animal instincts but our animal instincts, and in that sense they are really anthropomorphic (von Franz 1985: 24).

The notion of 'symbolic animals' is pivotal, as it suggests the extent to which these 'animals' are actually projections and extensions of human concerns. In this sense they are not only anthropomorphic but also anthropocentric where – as suggested by Erica Fudge (1998: 8) – anthropocentrism entails 'placing the human and the human vision at the centre'.

According to Fudge, "humans define themselves as human in the face of the animal" (Fudge 1999: 1), meaning that when we are reading about 'animals', we are always reading through the thoughts of humans, as the 'animals' are incapable of speaking for themselves. Fudge states that Anthropocentrism creates anthropomorphism (Fudge 1999: 4). To my understanding, anthropocentrism is a way of inspecting entirety from a human experience. And anthropomorphism is to ascribe human qualities or attributes to non-human things or beings. David Clark concurs that



“the sentimental humanization of animals and the brutal animalization of humans are two sides of the same assimilating gesture” (quoted in Fudge 1999: 7).

In other words, the anthropocentric view assimilates animals to a human world-view. It sees animals as mere extensions of ourselves (onto which we project human characteristics), or as ‘carriers’ for negative human traits. Essentially, we reduce animals when we humanise them (treating our pets, for example, as if they were humans), and we also reduce animals when we animalise humans (speaking of humans as being ‘snakes’, ‘dogs’ etc.). Animals sometimes appear in myths and legends as symbols of certain characteristics that they are commonly supposed to represent. Common phrases such as ‘sly as a fox’ or ‘brave as a lion’ are everyday examples of the practice of using animals to represent human qualities. Many cultures use stories in which animal characters represent human qualities so as to provide moral lessons.

It is evident that, inasmuch as these tales may seem to blur the line between human and animal, they also inadvertently invoke the binary of ‘human verses animal’, in a way that privileges the former. For example, in both *The Frog Prince* and *Beauty and the Beast* the afflicted characters must be released from their animal selves to become human, (in other words, a ‘better’ version of themselves). The presumption is that animals are lesser than humans, lower on the species hierarchy. So for the ‘heroes’ to reach their true potential they must leave behind their debased animal selves.

Yet there are other non-hierarchical ways of conceptualising the relationship between humans and animals. The ‘animal turn’ is a term used by Weil (2010: 3) to describe a contemporary interest in issues of the nonhuman, and in the ways that the relationship between humans and nonhumans is marked by “difference, otherness and power”. The ‘animal turn’ recognises and problematizes the power-dynamics at play. It does not believe that animals are lesser beings, and it certainly does not believe that “the animal and what you project on it are identical”, as stated by von Franz (1985: 24).

What is interesting in Weil's study is that she addresses anthropomorphism as problematic (because it reinforces the anthropocentric dominance of humans over animals), but also considers its potential as a 'productive critical tool' that could actually challenge anthropocentrism.

In *A Report on the Animal Turn*, Weil writes:

The turn to ethics in animal studies has brought a new focus on the notion of anthropomorphism, regarded not only as a problem but also as a potentially productive critical tool that has similarities to empathy within recent historical research (Weil 2010: 15).

For Weil, before we are able to empathise with the animal other, he/she must be "seen as capable of pain and pleasure, as having his or her own affects and capacities". Weil elaborates:

On the one hand, as a process of identification, the urge to anthropomorphize the experience of another, like the urge to empathize with that experience, risks becoming a form of narcissistic projection that erases boundaries of difference. On the other hand, as a feat of attention to another and of imagination regarding his or her perspective, it is what brings many of us to act on behalf of the perceived needs and desires of an other/animal (Weil 2010: 15).

In this sense, anthropomorphism potentially allows us to empathise with the animal/other, as we see the animal as being like ourselves. But the risk is that we may end up regarding animals as mere extensions of ourselves – as little more than carriers for our own narcissistic projections.

This is one of the concerns addressed by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychologist Felix Guattari in their book, *A Thousand Plateaus, capitalism & schizophrenia* (1987) where they consider how "the relationships between animals are bound up with the relations between man and animal, man and woman, man and child, man and the elements, man and the physical and microphysical universe" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 235).

In many respects Deleuze and Guattari's 'solution' to the anthropocentric framing of animals as lesser beings is to destabilise the categories of 'animal' and 'human' altogether. This is in keeping with their ambition to see hierarchical structures and interactions contrasted with "acentred systems... in which communication runs from any neighbor to any other" (Deleuze and Guattari 1997: 1). To characterise the latter, they use the figure of the rhizome, where

the stems or channels do not pre-exist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their *state* at a given moment...Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 17 & 21).

In this sense, becoming is inherently fluid and relational, resisting the stasis and fixity of binary imperatives. Elsewhere Deleuze and Guattari reference the warrior god *Indra*, who "bears witness, above all, to other relations with women, with animals, because he sees all things in relation to *becoming*, rather than implementing binaries distributions between 'states'" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 352).

For Deleuze and Guattari, "becoming is a rhizome" (1987: 239). Being non-hierarchical and acentred, the process of becoming is thus not governed by evolution (which necessarily implies a privileged state or term) but by alliance. They explain:

becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. If evolution includes any variable becomings, it is in the domain of *symbioses* that brings into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 238).

Moreover, being a 'rhizome', becoming is also "not a classificatory or genealogical tree". Indeed, because Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming resists classificatory discourse, it seems very difficult to define. Deleuze and Guattari revert in most instances to saying what it is not:

Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 239).

Essentially, 'becoming animal' thus suggests a conception of identity as being fluid and mutable, rather than stable and fixed. It is not a physical occurrence per se, but rather a perpetually destabilising process, which Ann-Marie Tully (2011: 66) describes as "an enacted and embodied cutting across of Cartesian species and imagined social boundaries". It does not involve mimesis, evolution or even the production of a new identity, but aspires to find a continuously shifting "zone of proximity" (Deleuze 1997: 1) between various shifting identity states. In Deleuze's words (1997:1): "To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, mimesis) but to find a zone of proximity, indiscernibility or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule". 'Becoming animal' thus signals an inherently transitional way of being as "there is no 'become animal', only 'becomings'" (Tully 2011: 76). As summarised by Weil:

Deleuze and Guattari want to free humans and animals from meaning altogether and thus undo the very identities that confirm a distinction between human and animal. ...Indeed, in a theoretical move familiar to students of deconstruction, differences between animals and humans are displaced onto differences within the human: to deterritorialise is to become aware of the animal-otherness within the human (Weil 2010: 12).

It is in this sense that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'becoming animal' links implicitly to ideas around hybridity, and is particularly relevant in terms of my research. I envisage the hybrid as an embodiment of an inherently transitional non-mimetic being, occupying the zone of the rhizome. As noted earlier, human/animal hybrids seem endemic to the world of fantasy: they appear repeatedly in fairy tales and various mythologies. They are often characterised as animals possessing human qualities, and are capable of speech, reason or acting with human-like intent. However, unlike the *Frog Prince* who magically transforms into a handsome prince, leaving his animal-nature behind-the hybrid that I am interested in is truly 'betwixt and between'; liminal. The hybrid is not dissimilar to an initiate undergoing a rite of passage, described by anthropologist Victor Turner (1974: 232) in his well-known description of liminality as follows:

a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation... an apt analogy would be water in the process of being heated to boiling point, or a pupa changing from grub to moth... during the intervening *liminal* period, the state of the ritual 'passenger' or [*liminar*] is ambiguous, neither here nor there, not described by the usual points of social classification, devoid of the status insignia of both the old state and the not yet-acquired new state.

James Sey (2011: 6) expands on this:

The concept of the liminal refers to the state of the threshold. That which is liminal exists in an in-between state, not fully realised, fully understood or fully accepted into the *socius*. Things and beings which exist in a liminal state are properly at the margins, often not accorded a full legal, epistemological or psychological identity... Liminal spaces are those in which the normal rules and mores of society are suspended, thus allowing for transformation and new confluences to happen.

In this sense the hybrid becomes a 'liminal body' – caught in a non-space that Sey (2011:8) describes as "a curious almost-becoming, a state of absence which is held in place, sometimes quite literally, as with the mythological centaur – a being which is both horse and man but simultaneously neither".

Liminality is thus an apposite lens to reflect on the work of South African artist Nandipha Mntambo (2011 Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner). Mntambo has produced numerous works on and about the human/animal, primarily by shaping animal furs to the contours of human bodies. Her photographic work titled *Europa*, 2008, (see figure 4) shows Mntambo in the process of transforming into a Minotaur, half human, half bull. The transformation appears to start at the top of her head, which has turned into a bull head, with horns and ears, while the bull fur transitions subtly down into her human face, and evens out to her human skin from her neck down. It is an immensely powerful work due to the strong gaze she projects through the camera, piercing the viewer. In an interview with Ruth Simboa, Mntambo suggests:

When I made *Europa* I was beginning to explore the whole idea of the animal-human and how people really do forget that we are animals as well. And I woke up one day and thought that I would try and make myself into a bull. I was reading a lot about the Minotaur and I was trying to understand how I would look as that kind of character, and I think that work is very direct, but strangely seductive in a way (Interview with Simbao 2011: 19).

At the same time, the work also addresses additional forms of othering, particularly regarding race and gender. Mntambo continues:

I think it's about the gaze, it's about the smile on the face, it's about how we understand the black body, it's about how we understand the female body, and it's about how we understand what's attractive and repulsive. For me, all those things are strangely problematized in that image and no one ever talks about it in that way, which I find

problematic. Everyone says ‘oh, great image... powerful’, but no one speaks about the female body, the animal-human; how we understand sexuality, how we understand the border between the male and female...and that, for me, is what the work is about (Interview with Simbao 2011: 19).



Figure 4: Nandipha Mntambo, *Europa*, 2008, archival ink on cotton rag paper, 100 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Stevenson, Cape Town

Mntambo's characterisation of the border (between animal/human as well as male/female) shares certain affinities with Deleuze and Guattari's "enacted and embodied cutting across of Cartesian species and imagined social boundaries" (Tully 1997: 1). *Europa* invites the viewer to understand the border as a complex space that is not finite and self-evident but constantly in flux, contested and open to renegotiation. The border is permeable.

In this sense, Mntambo's 'liminal body'/ hybrid upsets the binarised world view of 'right' and 'wrong'; it inhabits a space of moral (and other) ambiguity, refusing to be fixed/framed or stereotyped. And this, in turn, opens up a space for transformation, difference and "new confluences" (Sey 2011:6). It is a potentially liberating space, as it frees us from the restrictive labelling of binary imperatives.

### Chapter Three:

In chapter two I considered the prevalence of animals (particularly humanised animals) in fairy tales and folklore. I looked specifically at the hybrid as a liminal being, and investigated the hybrid as exemplary of Deleuze and Guattari's proposed dissolution of boundaries between human and animal. For me, the hybrid is inherently ambiguous, defying the binary imperatives of human/animal, male/female, good/evil, self/other and so forth. It is potentially destabilising in this regard, opening up new transformative ways of being. In chapter three I will continue my focus on the motifs of hybridity and ambiguity, as these are more evident in my own work and selected works by Jane Alexander and Kiki Smith.

Inspired by some of the hybrids I remember from my childhood, my exhibition, *Becoming(s)*, was a means for me to grapple with my own sense of being 'betwixt and between'. The 'aglurpie', for example, was one of my dad's own creations: an octopus-like creature that lives in one's drain pipes, sucking out the water and living off the water supply. The 'aglurpie' is also responsible for the gargling sounds that come out of water pipes. My memory of the 'aglurpie' was the stimulus for the two *Octo-glurpies* (figure 5) I created in my exhibition. I was always scared of these creatures as a child so I decided to create my own version partly to confront my childish fears. I combined the 'aglurpie' with tortoise shells which are meant to represent the tortoise from the tale of *The Tortoise and the Hare*. By combining all these various animals from a variety of different tales in a diversified and misassembled manner I speak of the hybrid, not only the physical amalgamation of the creatures but also of a 'hybrid' merging of past and present. These tales were once so clearly defined for me as a child, but as I grew up my memories started to merge and fluctuate. What was once a treasured and beloved bedtime story, which I knew off by heart as a child, started to blend with all the other stories I remembered from my youth.





Figure 5: *Octo-glurpie*

Using my shadowy and garbled memories as a starting point, I have created several other human/ animal or animal/animal hybrids, where I have combined various parts and qualities of the anthropomorphised animals in the Brothers Grimm fairy tales, with animals from tales remembered from my childhood, and the distorted creatures that have subsequently taken life in my imaginings. Some of my sculptures (like the 'aglurpie') reference creatures primarily of my father's invention. Others are based on more recognisable protagonists in children's stories, but with my father's inventive twist.

For example, another creature that I remember with some ambivalence is my father's version of the *Tooth Fairy*. As I come from an Afrikaans background, my brothers and I believed in the 'tandmuis', a mischievous field mouse who would come to collect the discarded teeth of children from their slippers in the dead of night. My father always took care to make us believe in the 'tandmuis': whenever one of us lost a tooth and put it in our slipper for collection, the next morning we would find a shiny coin neatly tied up with a string of grass and a little trail of dirt and debris leading to the closest open window. A vividly-recalled detail is that the 'tandmuis' was said to wear a

backpack full of harvested human teeth. From this memory I decided make my own version of the tandmuis, who (as I imagine) would live in abandoned birds' nests. I used marshmallow mice to reference my sweet-tooth as a child and the numerous warnings I recall about the hazards of eating too many sweets. In addition, the inclusion of real teeth (albeit animal teeth, rather than human teeth) strapped to their sides, hints at the particular detail that occupied my imagination as a child. My 'tandmuis' and their nests hang precariously, like a child's mobile, from the antler-branches of my two-headed reindeer (Figures 6 and 7).

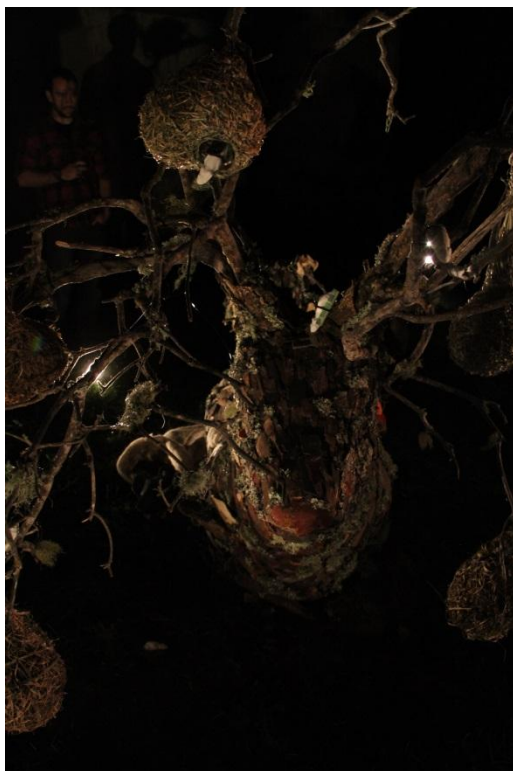


Figure 6: '*Tandmuis*' nest in antler-branches    Figure 7: Close up of '*tandmuis*' collecting teeth

Whereas the 'tandmuis' was quite a sinister creature, being associated with the pain of losing teeth and the dread of inviting tooth decay by eating sweets, my Christmas reindeer has its origin in more overtly fond and happy memories. It references Christmas, which was always a highlight in my childhood. But, here too, there are darker memories beneath the surface: as children we were warned that being 'good' would earn one a bag of shiny gifts but being 'bad' would result in Father Christmas delivering nothing but a bag of coal. My two reindeer are fused at the waist, with a head

on each side of the body, suggesting this duality – the binary of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. At the same time, one head is presented as female and the other as male (figures 8 and 9). To me this embodies the ambivalent nature of the various themes I am exploring in my art practise, where the notion of hybridity serves to problematise binary imperatives between male/female, good/bad, real/imaginary, self and other.



Figure 8: Close up of female deer head



Figure 9: Male side of reindeer

These same motifs reappear in my version of the Easter bunny. As a child my father used to stage fantastical Easter egg hunts for my brothers and I which took place in our garden. I had about thirty pet rabbits at the time, so every Easter my father would meticulously make outfits and dress all my rabbits in tiny waistcoats and bows, and let them loose in the garden. Then my brothers and I would receive treasure maps leading us to various treasures and Easter eggs hidden around the garden and in some of the rabbit holes that littered my own private rabbit yard, while we chased and played amongst all the little Easter bunnies. There was also a grand prize at the end of the hunt for whoever retrieved the most ‘Easter bunny helpers’, so as you can imagine it was immense fun. However, at some point in my childhood I began to ‘outgrow’ the gleeful Easter egg hunts, realising – as I inevitably would – that the Easter bunny was a ruse.

With this ambivalence in mind, I created my very own Easter bunny, with the exaggerated head and hind legs of a rabbit, the torso of a fully grown man and the arms of a young child (figure 10). This hybrid creation symbolises not only the notion of the human/animal, but it also suggests the

adult/child motif which represents my own liminal state of struggle with the notion of growing up while still hopelessly clinging to my childhood beliefs and love for make-believe. In addition, by combining certain stylised elements alluding to the fantasy realm (such as the exaggerated rabbit head and legs) with various parts more evocative of the 'real' (the fabricated man torso, combined with the arms moulded from a six year old child), I have attempted to express my own ambivalent positioning between reality and fantasy. I have also grafted together elements of the real and the unreal, with the use of artificial fur that covers the head and legs of the rabbit in contradiction to the tiny real 'lucky charm' rabbit foot that hangs around its neck.



Figure 10: *Bunny Man*

The tension between the 'real' and the 'unreal' is further evident in little bunny helpers that accompany *Bunny man* (much like the animal helpers I had as a child). Made out of white chocolate in the shape of traditional bunny Easter eggs, the Bunny Helpers seem initially quite benign, until

one notices the real rabbit skeletons embedded within the chocolate. Once again this evokes the notion of a hidden aspect or repressed idea beneath the surface of something seemingly innocent (figure 11).

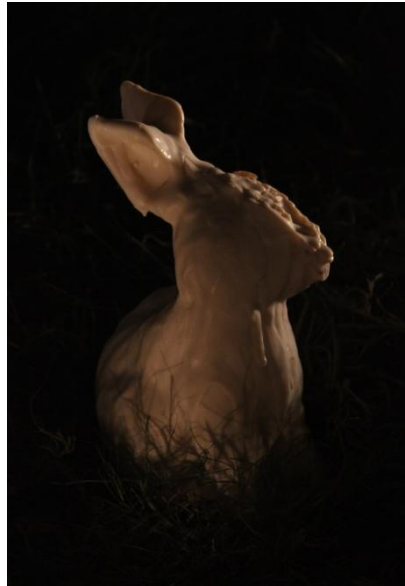


Figure 11: One of the *Bunny Helpers*

Similar concerns with ambivalence are evident in my three little bears, made up of three figures cast from a mould of a child dress mannequin, which I have manipulated and mutated with various parts of a variety of animal skeletons (figure 12). The first figure has the snout of a ram instead of a child's face, and numerous horns from a variety of different buck growing out from the back of its head, as if to reference hair. The rest of the sculpture maintains the shape of a little girl. The second figure I have used a warthog skull, with the bottom jaw of the warthog manipulated into the jaw line of the girl's face, and the top of the skull integrated into the chest of the girl figure as a breastplate. In the third and most extreme sculpture in this series, I replaced the girl's head with the skull of a donkey, growing out of what looks like a tumorous mass of boils. From the back one can see the skull and some spinal vertebra breaking out and growing through this malignant mass of tumours. After I added and manipulated all these various elements into the mannequin shapes, I completely

covered the figures in various teddy bear furs. To further reference the original story of the *Three Little Bears* I have also incorporated the use of porridge into these sculptures.



Figure 12: *Little Bears*

In many respects, the work shares visual and thematic affinities with some of the works of South African artist, Jane Alexander. Alexander has become widely recognised for her works concentrated in the dominion of the hybrid, where the human form seamlessly melts into the animal façade. A prime example of this is her award-winning sculptural work, *Bom Boys* (1999). In this work Alexander has made sculptures of eerily familiar figures, of vagrant street children, which she has masked in a variety of animal masks. By masking these little figures she has managed to create a sense of alienation and ambiguity about their presence and their intentions. Ann-Marie Tully believes that the masked figures evoke “a therianthropic theme of crime and innocence made manifest in the rhetorical relationship between animal signifiers and human subjects” (Tully [sa]: 72). These masked figures exist in a liminal world for they are simultaneously victims and attackers, and therefore evoke many different responses and emotions such as curiosity, distress, pity, humiliation, remorse, apprehension and compassion. I believe these mixed emotions arise from the use of child figures combined with the animal masks, as children, like animals, are often thought of as innocent and blameless, but by masking them a threat arises. This peculiar juxtaposition of child



meets animal aggravates a contemplation of threat and criminal intent: “The previous impression brought on by the juxtaposition of animal features and childish forms is simultaneously interrupted by a realisation of human threat contained within an animal façade” (Tully [sa]: 72).



Figure 13: Jane Alexander, *Bom Boys*, 2002, sculptural installation view, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Tobu Museum

Although Alexander does not specifically invoke fairy tales, there are useful resonances between her work and mine. Her use of hybridity to destabilise expectations around childhood innocence is something I can relate to, as my own work similarly aims to unpack and critique the supposed innocence, naivety and moral purity of typical fairy tale heroes.

For example, the story of *The Three Bears* (otherwise known as *Goldilocks and The Three Bears*) with which most of us are familiar contains a set of fairly innocent and benign characters: Father Bear, Mother Bear, Baby Bear and Goldilocks herself. However, the initial story written by British author Robert Southey in 1837 – itself a retelling of an oral tale that had been in circulation for some time – contains a very different cast. In Southey’s tale, the three bears were actually ‘bachelor bears’ living together in a house in the woods; and the intrusive (but innocent) little girl Goldilocks was a malicious and sinister old woman. Though the bachelor bears were described as ‘good-natured’, Southey refers to the old woman at various points in his story as “impudent, bad, foul-mouthed, ugly, dirty and a vagrant deserving of a stint in the House of Correction” (The Story of the Three

Bears, *Wikipedia*). In Eleanor Muir's 1831 version, the old woman was even impaled on the steeple of the St Paul's cathedral when discovered by the bachelor bears. Only in later variations was the "fearsome oral tale" transformed into "a cozy family story with only a hint of menace" (The Story of the Three Bears, *Wikipedia*).

Given her interest in fairy tales, another artist who seems relevant here is Kiki Smith, who has worked extensively with the human form and has explored a broad range of subject matter.

More recently, Smith has explored storytelling as subject matter, often separating characters from their traditional narratives, as she weaves together elements from fairy tales, folklore and myths to create evocative pieces that invite multiple interpretations. This is often achieved through her use of materials, as in *Daughter* (1999), a curious and disturbing sculpture of Red Riding Hood crafted from Nepalese paper with blue glass eyes that stare from beneath a red cloak (Walkerart.org. 2006: 3).



Figure 14: Kiki Smith; *Daughter*; 1999; color photograph; 30 x 40 inches

In this work, Smith covered the figure's face in hair (as seen above in figure 9); as if to suggest that she is the daughter of Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf, and so addressing the notion of the hybrid. This is a similar technique I have used in my sculptures not only to blur the boundary



between human and animal but also to complicate a binary reading of gender as fixed and absolute. In *Bunny Man*, for example, the prevalence of the chest hair designates the figure as male, but he/she also has a girl-child's arms and ambiguous genitalia. In my version of the *Three Bears*, their excessive hairiness reads as masculine, linking them back to the original bachelor bears of Southey's tale, but at the same time their size and shape is evocative of little girls. In this way, they attempt to challenge the limiting stereotypes and the classificatory discourse of the fairy tales they reference, figuring identity as hybrid, fluid, ambivalent and liminal.

In the installation of my exhibition I will attempt to create a space of liminality by installing my sculptures on a rectangular patch of grass in the middle of a darkly lit industrial space. This will evoke a sense of the liminal in that it is a world within a world, a land of mystery and wonder filled with various hybrids to rule over it. It presents the whimsy and playfulness of my child-like curiosity into the land of far far away, offering the viewer a glimpse into an alternative world peeking through the veil. Stepping stones from the entrance to the patch of grass will invite the viewer to walk through/over the border of reality into my liminal world that floats on its own plain of consciousness.

The grass patch will be overrun with hundreds of frogs that are in a state of transition between their amphibian form and human form. They swarm around the *Octo-glurpies* as a horde, scrabbling to climb onto the turtles' backs, but struggling as they are partway between transformations, with only a single human arm to show their transitional progression. At the same time, the play of shadows on the blank concrete walls will introduce a sinister doubling, alluding to the dark side of fairy tales. In this sense, the space between the grass patch and the walls is really the liminal zone, designating a never ending realm of limbo, where liminal bodies are caught in a curious almost-becoming state that is neither here nor there, yet simultaneously both. These hybrid beings coexist in a state of exclusion and inclusion, suspended between the two social categories. In this dominion anything is possible, for it is the permeable and shifting boundary between inside and outside, real and

imaginary, it does not exist as a border or a line that separates one from the other, but rather a space where opposing contrasts can be negotiated, transformed or swapped in any way imaginable.

### **Conclusion:**

In the words of Friedrich Weltzien and Jessica Ullrich:

Art is not presented as a solid, unassailable achievement, as a celebration of being human.

Rather, it presents itself as a visualization of becoming, a constant shifting development that tends to obscure differences rather than inscribe them. It is interested not in canonization or conventionalization, not in laws concerning beauty and proportion, but rather in processes and transformations, metamorphoses and transitional stages (Weltzien & Ullrich. 2009: 3).

Over the course of my MFA degree I have undergone many of my own transformations. My research has not only opened my eyes to a new way of seeing and reading into fairy tales, but has also changed the way I produce and approach art. In this sense, this study has become more personal than I initially intended. I started off my art practise by looking at old photos of all the creatures my father and I made when I was young in the hope of finding some inspiration. At first this process triggered a blissful remembrance of happy days gone by (a happy childhood in my eyes) but the more I contemplated these creations and reread some of the tales my father used to tell me, the more I started to notice the flaws, ruptures and gaps in my memories and in these stories. I noticed that I didn't remember the tales as clearly as I used to, and some of the creatures we made appeared to have a distinctly sinister side to them.

It was this realisation that initially inspired me to delve deeper into this world and to research the function, form and origins of supposedly 'child friendly' fairy tales. The hidden binaries, delimiting stereotypes and moralising, didactic messages now appear so apparent. This realisation has re-shaped the way I approach my art practise, as I became interested in the sinister aspect of these seemingly innocent characters. My sculptures also began to speak of the metamorphoses I

was undergoing personally, being built up primarily in successive layers of materials both revealing and obscuring the forms. For each of my works have undergone numerous alterations to reach their current stage of 'becoming'. In this sense both my art and I have undergone our own 'becomings' with the help of all the research I have done throughout the last two years.

In my mini-thesis, I hope to have shaped a reasonable argument correlating my practical work, with my interests in the place of hybridity in fairy tales and folk lore, as well as in my own creations taken from my childhood memories. My art practice aims to present these creatures as destabilising in their strangeness but also uncannily familiar and somewhat recognisable nature. By employing motifs of hybridity and liminality in my art, I hope to have encapsulated Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'becoming animal' as a destabilising of binaries and of the delimiting stereotypes that result from a binarised view of the human/animal relationship.

In this respect, my research has also endeavoured to blur definitive boundaries between past and present, childhood and adulthood, then and now. In the words of Deleuze:

'becoming' is an event, a simultaneity "who's characteristic is to elude the present. Insofar as it eludes the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once" (Deleuze 1990: 1).

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