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# **Stories of value: The nature of money in three classic British picture books**

By Astrid Van den Bossche

Chapter 2 in *The Language of Money and Debt: A Multidisciplinary Approach*

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## **2.1 Introduction**

Much of the literature on children's economic socialisation focuses on exploring three questions: at what point do children acquire a "good grasp of economic reality," do they become "responsible economic agents," and do they need to be considered "economically literate" (Furnham, 2014, p. 118)? These concerns often imply a pragmatic understanding of money as a quantitative commodity that facilitates transaction, accounting, and the storing of value (Belk & Wallendorf, 1990). Yet they also imply an appreciation of what is considered to be 'literate' and 'responsible' behaviour, supposedly informed by a 'good grasp' of 'reality'. Finally, it assumes unproblematic knowledge of what is 'valuable.'

Any functional understanding of money is always embedded within a normative framework that entails judgement over not only the meaning of value, but also the correctness of certain kinds of behaviour. As Viviana Zelizer has famously argued, the socio-cultural contexts of financial behaviour can change the understood nature of pecuniary transactions, in ways that are entirely obvious to the social agents involved, but may not be captured by economic theory (2011). One would expect, then, that children's economic socialisation

contains at least traces of how these calculations are also social events. After all, children will encounter money as something caregivers exchange for goods at the grocery store, as playthings in board games, as a weekly allowance, or as a source of discussion between adults. All are examples of what Zelizer calls different types of ‘monies’ (2011), each possessing their own logic and coming with different specifications as to what money means in society. Yet research on economic enculturation remains surprisingly scarce, adding to a general oversight of children’s economic lives in consumer scholarship (D. T. Cook, 2013).

Most scholars in children’s literature would agree that children can learn a great deal about the world through books (e.g., Nikolajeva, 2014), and especially about topics that they may not have had a chance to experience in real life (yet). I therefore propose turning our attention to picture books, because these ubiquitous children’s stories, constructed through the interplay of text and image, act as introductions to the world. As such, because they are always shaped from specific adult perspectives—of the authors and illustrators of course, but also pressures from the publishing industry, the adults who purchase the books, and finally the caregivers who read the books together with the child—they are also vehicles for ideology even when they are read only for enjoyment (Hollindale, 1988; Stephens, 1992). As Kline summarises, “[n]arrative is a means of negotiating the broad patterns of a culture’s thought and feeling; through early exposure to the stories children gain their first intellectual framework within which they can integrate experience and perception” (Kline, 1993, p. 77). We, as adults, therefore stand to learn a great deal from these stories too, especially about which assumptions we hold dear. Picture books provide an early window to enculturation, where other data is notoriously difficult to obtain.

I turn, specifically, to three classics that many UK readers might recognise: Allan Ahlberg's *Master Money the Millionaire* (1981), Mick Inkpen's *The Great Pet Sale* (1998), and Shirley Hughes' *Dogger* (1977). Despite the titular hints, neither of these tales would be considered classic examples of pecuniary didacticism, but the narratives do revolve crucially around the value(s) money represents. *Dogger*'s iconicity barely needs commentary, and both *The Great Pet Sale* and *Master Money the Millionaire* were listed under 'Further Resources' in *Money Counts*, a guide to teaching money distributed to all schools in England, Scotland, and Wales in the early 2000s (Financial Services Authority, 2000a, 2000b). All three have seen reprints come out in respectively 2014, 2012, and 2015 (OCLC, n.d.), suggesting renewed interest, and all three books remain widely available in libraries and major bookstores to the present day.

Discussing each book in turn, I will highlight how it is that, following the pecuniary logic constructed in their fictional worlds, these books come to their narrative resolutions. For the sake of clarity, I will not often refer to literary terminology, but I will focus on highlighting the ideological tensions implicit in the representation of money, commensuration, and value.<sup>1</sup> Thinking about ideology is useful because it encourages the reader to question where the power of a narrative comes from. We can examine, for example, what sort of assumptions underwrite concepts that otherwise remain unquestioned (such as money), and which conventions are open to subversion (such as calculating value). Following Stephens, my focus will therefore be on exploring how *significance* can emerge from the *story* through narratological and visual discourse (1992). For this reason, I will begin each close reading by detailing the ending of the picture book—in this case often the very last

page—because it is usually in the resolution of the narrative that the implied moral is most apparent (Stephens, 1992). From there I trace back how the story is constructed through minute detail—linguistic and visual—to credibly deliver the final (punch) line.

As Cook has argued, taking childhood seriously in the study of consumption and economic behaviour helps us tackle the ghost of *homo economicus* in our thinking about the economic world as lived, embodied, and experienced by social agents (2008). I take this not only to mean that we uncover the adult vantage point that often hides behind the expressed vision of the world, but also the *economicus* portion of the equation, which is another side of the same coin. As each picture book will show, money is not only something to be rationally counted and invested,<sup>ii</sup> but should also be understood as a social and moral marker (*Master Money*), as a defective indicator of value (*The Great Pet Sale*), and as a divisor of spheres (*Dogger*).

## **2.2 Normative consumption and fungibility in *Master Money the Millionaire: A tale of two families***

In *Master Money the Millionaire* (henceforth *Master Money*),<sup>iii</sup> Allan Ahlberg and André Amstutz paint the jovial but structurally dichotomous world of Master Money and his happy, loving family. As a little boy of six, Master Money was exceedingly lucky: having dug up buried treasure three times in a row, he becomes a millionaire. Together with his family and friends, he enjoys the luxuries that wealth affords him; consequently, he achieves such respectability that he becomes worthy of newspaper attention. But one day, this attention exposes him to Mr Creep the Crook's criminal schemes, and he is kidnapped for ransom. Eager to have him back, the Money family sell all their belongings to raise the

money required. Master Money returns to his home, and his doting family quickly settles into a life of civilised normality. Mr Creep and his family, on the other hand, are arrested. Justice is served, but the money is lost: the Creeps have spent it all. Seemingly unaffected by this news, the Moneys throw Master Money a party for his seventh birthday. Amongst the birthday boy's gifts are a bucket and a spade, the tools that found him buried treasure in the first place.

On the final page, Master Money once more sets out to dig a hole in the garden, and the family gathers round: “‘Perhaps something interesting / is going to happen,’ they thought. / After all, Master Money was a lucky boy...’” (Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1981, p.24).<sup>iv</sup> Having risked losing their son, one might expect that the Money family would have forsworn the promise of riches for the sake of familial security. This would insinuate that the family was in need of moral development—to outgrow, as Fluck calls it, the adolescent desire to accumulate riches (2003). But that would be missing the point. I will argue that, on the contrary, the Money family is tongue-in-cheekily posited as the paragon of good behaviour, and that they have nothing to fear. Their counterparts in bad behaviour, of course, are the villainous Creeps, who end up in jail. This is a story about two very different families: the haves and have-nots, the virtuous and the corrupt, the capable versus the incapable. The families' use of money, which features prominently on the title page in the form of a bursting bag of bills and coins, is the social marker that distinguishes the two.

From the beginning, the Moneys are nothing but the embodiment of steady respectability. They live in a red-brick house with a landscaped garden, white lace curtains hanging in the bay windows and walls lined with wall-paper. They can afford a holiday to the

beach, Mr Money seems to have no problems finding a job in times of need, and they own a poodle. Even when the Moneys are forced to sell their luxuries, they remain well-groomed, friendly, and materially comfortable: they never lose the decorative items on the mantelpiece that mark their home as cosy and well appointed. Consequently, as their name suggests, their situation in life does not seem much altered by their pecuniary ordeals: they retain their social standing, their harmonious familial cohesion, and a certain level of material affluence.

The Moneys' position in society is signalled through a variety of consumption decisions, exemplifying Douglas and Isherwood's (1996) theory of the function of goods as an information system. Consumption shapes culture as much as culture shapes consumption, demarcating what can and cannot be sold, determining what consists of an appropriate exchange, and signalling—through, for example, the appearance of hearth and home—the various identities of social actors. Consumption is therefore inherently normative: “freely given and returned, moral judgment of the worth of people and things is exercised” within any consumption decision and any personal exchange (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, p. 38). For example, opprobrium and marginalisation might meet those who, contrary to societal expectations, would rather pay for cable TV than for their children's education. Marking morality as well as standing, consumption is a visible process of social classification.

The Moneys carefully construct and maintain their social relationships through the adequacy of their consumption decisions, which includes a set of rules that govern the use of money. Take, for example, the moment that Master Money offers his family an allowance, in what comes down to a humorous inversion of the usual parent-child relationship. Having first offered pocket-money to his sister, he proceeds to do the same with his mother and father.

The latter bows in gratitude and a speech bubble repeats the family's gracious response, anchoring the words in his mouth: "Thank you very much," he says (Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1981, p.6, see figure 1). Ahlberg and Amstutz use a text balloon to echo direct speech within the illustration; the device is then used repeatedly throughout. The effect reinforces the words by cementing them in the scene, but they also flatten the characters to that very utterance. In this case, it reinforces the impression Mr Money has no problems surrendering the role that is usually his. Indeed, cash gifts are the ultimate denotation of familial intimacy, because they would not be acceptable within any other type of relationship. The family's acceptance, however, not only marks their acknowledgment of the bond, but also their acknowledgement of the money's provenance.<sup>v</sup> Master Money found the buried treasure, so he is its owner even if this defies traditional notions of family hierarchy. Highlighting the locus of power, the scene suggests that even if it is in the hands of a child, polite society acknowledges ownership where it is due.

The Moneys are also adept at drawing their wider social circle into a web of exchange. Since cash is not appropriate, gifts will do. These fall into two categories: gifts based on perceived need, and which can therefore be put down to charitable generosity ("At school he bought / a new black-board for his teacher. 'Just what I need!' said his teacher." [p. 8]), and gifts that further social cohesion. Master Money invites his teachers and classmates to join him for a dinner of meat pie cooked by a French chef and served by singing waiters. "Yum yum!" approve the children as the waiters march in chanting "Tra la la!" speech bubbles once more anchoring the words in their jovial appearances (Ahlberg & Amstutz, p.8-



9). It is social capital in the making, and Master Money's uses of his wealth are met with widespread approval.

This turns out to be crucial when the Creeps, whom I will spend some time describing below, violate the rules of ownership and valuation. As they kidnap Master Money and demand a ransom, the Money family is faced with a false dilemma: their (child's) wealth or their child. Because this is children's literature, where families are usually sources of unconditional love, it comes as no surprise that Master Money's family shoots into action to get him back. But the impulse is also motivated by the same moral order that elevates Master Money to the status of a socially acceptable millionaire. As Mrs Money's speech bubble echoes when she holds onto her daughter, "[h]e is a *good* little lad" (emphasis added, Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1981, p.16), and should therefore be returned to the bosom of his family. Though it is unclear what 'good' means, perhaps it is his generosity that has earned him the right to be brought back home at considerable financial expense. Or, his generosity compels being responded to in kind and ends up bettering (if not saving) his life. The wise management of his riches has earned him as much, and the Moneys do not allow their intimate familial sphere, to echo Zelizer's thoughts, to be infected by pecuniary concerns (2011).

The only issue, of course, is that the funds need to be raised, which is a considerable effort that "took every pound / that Master Money had" (Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1981, p.16). As the Moneys head to the city—an industrial-looking place that is a far cry from their suburban home—their wealth turns out to be extremely fungible. Their consumption decisions have remained productive because they fall in one of three categories: genuine need, the creation of social capital, or investment. Besides the gift of an allowance, Master Money had

purchased each of his family members a gift that has retained its value: a horse for the sister, a car for the father, an airplane for the mother, and an entire sweetshop for himself. All these items turn out to be investments that could be exchanged again for cash. Even the dog's bag of bones is, contrary to any logic, resalable. When the hour of need strikes, the family is able to mobilise both investments and their social network first to look for Master Money (everyone participates in the search, however futile), and then to raise the pile of cash.

The Creeps, on the other hand, are distorted mirror images of the Moneys. They are poor, even when they are in possession of their ill-begotten million pounds. Wearing patched up clothes and toeless boots, they live in a "secret den" (Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1981, p.13) that simultaneously symbolises their status in society and foreshadows their fate: it is, in fact, a dungeon, complete with a bolted door, a barred window, and a wall shackle. The family engages in everyday rituals such as eating sandwiches and drinking tea, but these run-of-the-mill activities are overshadowed by the need for secrecy: They have kidnapped Master Money, and must remain hidden for their plan to come to fruition. Ironically, the children play a 'secret' game of I Spy<sup>vi</sup> as they keep an eye on the captive, suggesting that, for these children at least, being accessories to a kidnapping is nothing out of the ordinary. Although clearly not a very successful one, Mr Creep is after all a professional 'crook'. The symbolism that lurks behind his name suggests he steals away in circles where he neither belongs, nor would be acknowledged: he creeps into other people's homes to transgress societal norms and commit his crimes. Note that besides the kidnap, the Creeps and the Moneys are kept physically separate; they are never represented in the same frame.<sup>vii</sup> The Creeps are part of an

underworld that is not only antithetical to the Moneys, but is also so abject to respectable society that it must literally be hidden from view.

The crucial differentiator, then, is the place money has in their lives. When Mrs Creep and the children are finished counting their bounty from the ransom, the children exclaim in unison: “‘It’s *all* here, dad!’” (emphasis added, Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1981, p.17). The speech bubbles not only confirm the Money family’s end of the bargain has been met, but also draws attention to the prize as the Creeps toss a few bills in the air and Mr Creep holds one up in wonder. It is meaningful to them that the bounty amounts to precisely one million pounds. The possession of such a sum is a goal in itself; the Creeps are just plain greedy.

Eventually, the Creeps are arrested in toto (including their pet bulldog). Because all are guilty of the transgression, the entire family stands trial and is quizzed on the whereabouts of the money—but they “have not got it!”, and Mrs Creep sheds a tear (Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1981, p.20). It turns out that “[t]hey had spent it all” (Ahlberg & Amstutz, 1981, p.21), and contrary to the Moneys, this cannot be undone. In three flashback vignettes, we witness the Creeps squandering their dirty money: Mr and Mrs Creep dine with cigars and champagne, Miss Creep guzzles a giant ice-cream, and Master Creep looks like he is on a plane joyride. Their consumption decisions, it seems, amount to individualistic impulses of fleeting hedonistic pleasure—the very opposite of the Money’s respectable behaviour (see figure 3). Consequently, at the courthouse, the Creeps are as poor as they have always been.

Stories of lost treasure tend to come with warnings on finding said treasure in the form of a curse or immense trials (Belk & Wallendorf, 1990). In this case, the treasure comes at the cost of kidnapping for some, and imprisonment for others. What fate is due to whom is

determined by wherever they stand in society. The norm that morality is both nascent in pecuniary behaviour and should simultaneously trump pecuniary desire serves to split people in two categories: those who are moral (and therefore wealthy) and those who are immoral (and are therefore poor). In the end, the family gathers round because, echoing the beginning, Master Money is a lucky boy, and may yet chance upon new riches. This time, however, his luck does not only point to his propensity to find treasure, but also to the circumstances that enabled him to be saved from his kidnappers. The Money family is not afraid of what might happen should their wealth return to them, because they belong to the class of people who succeed in society. Unlike the unfortunate Creeps, money works for rather than against them.

### **2.3 Promotion, pricing, and protest in *The Great Pet Sale*: Taking back the power**

While *Master Money the Millionaire* circles around the meaning of money in more circuitous ways, *The Great Pet Sale*<sup>viii</sup> confronts the question of currency and exchange head-on in a warming tale of economic decision-making. The nameless narrator, a bespectacled boy in a striped jumper, takes stock of a clearance sale at the pet store. As he discovers all sorts of improbable animals (including a penguin and a pelican), a very eager rat insists he is the best bargain of them all, and urges the boy to buy him instead. As the *Publisher's Weekly* review suggests, *The Great Pet Sale* is on the surface a prime example of “an unobtrusive lesson in counting and adding,” which we might expect from a book that teaches you something about money (Children's Book Review, 1999, par. 1). First meeting the rat—who only costs ‘1p’—the boy sees, in quick succession, a variety of animals of increasing price: “a tiny terrapin for 2 pence, / a turtle for 3 pence / and a tortoise, / a great big one, / for 4 pence” (Inkpen, 1998, p.4). Printed several times bigger than the rest of the text and echoed

by the pets' price tags, the numbers draw attention to themselves and seemingly become both an organising principle for the plot, and an invitation to the reader: Keep track of the pennies!

Yet in the resolution, after all this counting activity, the conclusion surprises. Having checked the coins in his possession, the little boy establishes he has “just enough / to buy the rat...,” but also “everything else in the shop!” (Inkpen, 1998, p.18). The final page folds out to reveal that the protagonist pair is merrily striding at the helm of a flying, hopping, and sauntering menagerie. Freedom at last—instead of purchasing one, the boy has chosen them all.

As the title suggests at first glance, *The Great Pet Sale* is about a store promotion, although a second reading might indeed suggest the alternative meaning of a ‘great transaction.’ Inkpen sets the stage for (discounted) pricing to be a major focus of the narrative, and this shapes the expectation, as the rat claims, that good bargains are to be had. Yet it is the very notion of the bargain—and the role that pricing plays in determining value—that will be challenged throughout the narrative. Pricing and commodification are, as Espeland and Stevens note, examples of commensuration *par excellence*—commensuration being the process of “[transforming...] different qualities into a common metric [... transforming] qualities into quantities, [and] difference into magnitude,” eventually providing a common measure of value (1998, pp.314–316). But while extremely useful, commensuration potentially comes at the expense of aspects that are flattened, obscured, or made irrelevant in the name of comparability. As a social construct, commensuration (as well as incommensurability) is thus shaped by politics, ideology, and other sociocultural beliefs that may, of course, not be shared by all. Money, in particular, facilitates comparisons

amongst different entities with potential “Procrustean” consequences (Carruthers & Espeland, 1998, p.1397). The practice of pricing may facilitate exchange, but it comes at the potential loss of information about the subject of commoditisation.

Such losses may be perceived as immoral and abject if the subject was considered incommensurable in the first place, or if the reasoning behind it looks flawed, biased, and potentially suppressive. In *The Great Pet Sale*, the commensuration of living beings poses not only a moral quandary, but also points to the lack of comprehensibility of the system. Here, valuation is arbitrary at best, and nonsensical at worst: “Things beginning with ‘p’: a pelican, / a puffin, / a penguin, / a parrot / and a platypus!” are grouped together as being worth “5 pence each” by sole virtue of their alliteration and the perch that they share (Inkpen, 1998, p.7, see figure 5). Each worth a silly amount of pennies, the creatures are made commensurable nonetheless. The protagonist, perhaps seeking some meaningful insight, stops to wonder about the difference between a salamander, a skink, and a gecko. In response, the rat unhelpfully exclaims that ““Nobody knows! / Nobody cares!”” (Inkpen, 1998, p.9), a tongue-in-cheek reference to an inexplicable arbitrariness in pricing. All that is worth knowing about the creatures is that they are 5 pence each.

Because they are a source of information in the market economy, the price tags thus become increasingly suggestive epithets. When a forlorn-looking koala and his anteater friend are priced at 9 pence the pair, the rat is quick to point out their shortcomings: ““Who wants a koala that / doesn’t like leaves?’ said the rat. / ‘Or an anteater that won’t / eat its ant?’”” (Inkpen, 1998, p.11). The lone ant becomes a source of suspicion: why does the 9 pence deal need to be sweetened with a freebie? Slowly but surely, the upwards count of the

prices reinforces the commoditisation and consequent devaluation of the creatures, while hinting at an alternative narrative of increasing cost. Finally, the count culminates in the most stringent devaluation of all: the box of ‘Assorted Little Brown Creatures’ for 10 pence, none of which, contrary to the rat’s claims, are particularly ‘boring.’

The rat’s saucy interjections are crucial to underlining the commodification of his fellow critters, and they seem to add the final nail to their coffin. Ironically, he is also the least interesting of the beastly lot, and given our cultural prejudices against rats, might even elicit reactions of revulsion. From the boy’s first peek through the window, the rat is found lacking as he is missing half his whiskers— but he is also the only one who even has a voice. Using it to paradoxically attempt to escape from the epithetic effect of his measly 1 pence price tag, he presses what a good deal *he* is in comparison to the others. Yet he fails to offer true points of differentiation, and his pleas once more emphasise the ludicrousness of the sorting system: he is better because his name starts with an ‘r’ (and not a ‘p’), he can stand on one leg, and he can eat anything (including, meta-fictively, the corner of the page). In short, his claimed advantages are vacuous, and all that is left is an impression of his desperate and obnoxious behaviour in what is otherwise a sea of silent acceptance. Promotional speech is rarely depicted as benign or useful in society at large (G. Cook, 1992), and in children’s literature, advertising is often loud at best, and corruptive at worst. It seems that the rat does not do himself any favours by being the very embodiment of promotional discourse.

Advertising needs to be silenced, and this happens just when also the pricing logic comes to a grinding halt. At the final revelation of the exotic Komodo dragon, the price jumps from 10p for the box of brown creatures to 25p for the extraordinary beast, disrupting

the steady linear increase that characterised the counting so far—that is how extraordinary this particular find is. Simultaneously, having tried to hide the dragon’s existence and then failed to convince the boy of the impossibility of its existence, the defeated rat surmises he cannot compete. He recognises he has been out-valued. Two market(ing) forces have come head to head, and puffery deflates while novelty triumphs.

It is worthwhile noting here that both pricing and promotion discourses assume a market, without which neither line of thought would make much sense. Indeed, the space is depicted in such a way that everything in it can easily be assessed, compared, and made commensurable: all the creatures are abstracted into whitespace, devoid of any contextual information. It foregrounds their existence for- and in-themselves, whilst flattening it to their price-tag (not unlike the pricing of *Dogger*). The same device is used in *Master Money* to summarise the goods he purchased for his family, except there the effect is reversed: the suggested market value is consolidated within the goods, making them solid investments (see figure 4). The same representational technique is used when, at the end of the narrative, Master Money receives birthday gifts from his numerous friends—including the fated bucket and spade that—as the final illustration hints—will allow him to recover his millions. Whereas in *The Great Pet Sale*, commodification is a dehumanising force, in *Master Money*, it works in favour of the investor. The key distinction lies in whether it is the alive or the inanimate that is being commodified, and this, of course, will be the crux of *Dogger*’s poignancy.

In order to function, markets also assume the presence of an economically rational buyer, and this is exactly the position in which the protagonist is cast. Accordingly, he hangs



back throughout the unfolding narrative, unobtrusively taking stock. Because the narration is in the first person, and the little boy is often outside of the frame, the reader is mostly invited to take the subject position of the all-seeing protagonist, which Stephens argues is particularly powerful in the expression of an ideological state of the world (1992). All of the rat's pleas, for example, are not only directed to him, but also to the reader. Whenever we see the little boy in a profile, it is because he and the rat are both looking at the scene, directing attention away from that dynamic and reinforcing the creation of the homogenising market. Throughout the narrative, however, the boy's thoughts remain inaccessible.

This play of perspectives continues until the little boy springs into action. As the pricing and the promoting have come to a halt, he silences the rat because he has done what buyers do and made up his mind about what the best bargain would be. Since market logic seems to have prevailed, one might expect the outcome to be a carefully thought through analysis, assessing the 'economic reality' and culminating in a 'responsible' decision. He undergoes a moment of mental calculation: echoing the multitude of examples in children's literature of pecuniary didacticism, we watch him head-on as he counts his coins (see figure 6). As Carruthers and Espeland observe, a consequence of monetisation is that arithmetic operations may be perceived to be applicable to commodified objects, furthering the logic of commensuration.

This is why it may come as a surprise that his conclusion is simply to buy everything. Instead of giving in to the impulse of the bargain, the protagonist chooses to do something about all the creatures that seem unable to liberate themselves from it—the continuous subversion ends up being heard. Revealing his preferences, he uses his identity as an

economic agent to realise an outcome that is better aligned with his values. Crucially, the story relies on the boy, and by proxy the reader, to develop a gaze that is critical—the rat’s clamours for attention encourage this every step of the way. Even the very materiality of the book encourages a journey of active looking as it invites the reader to turn over little fold-outs and discover more animals underneath. The ultimate recognition, then, comes in the form of willingness to purchase every living being. And while market logic dictates that the relationship between the boy and the animals has now been transformed into that of an owner and his pets, the final spread remains silent on this question; instead, by virtue of depicting the animals collectively moving forward, the imagery suggests that, at least in reference to the shop sale, they have been set free.

#### **2.4 Family intimacy and valuation in *Dogger*: the creation of separate spheres**

Unlike *Master Money*’s sketchier treatment, *Dogger*<sup>ix</sup> paints an elaborate picture of the protagonist’s everyday life, family, and the things that make him happy. Dave is a little boy in a bustling home with two siblings (an older sister and an infant brother) and two parents. Each child has different preferences: Bella sleeps with seven teddy bears, Joe likes hard toys because he is teething. But Dave “liked only Dogger” (Hughes, 1977, p.7), a soft and worn toy dog that is his companion in all things. One day, Dogger is nowhere to be found, and Dave misses him so much that even the carnivalesque school fair offers no consolation. As he ambles about, he suddenly recognises Dogger on a second-hand toy stall and runs to find someone who can buy it back for him. Alas, Bella and Dave are too late: a little girl has purchased Dogger and is unwilling to give him back. “Then Bella did something

very kind,” and exchanges her recently won giant Teddy bear for Dogger (Hughes, 1977, p.30).

On the final page, Dave and Bella are asleep in their shared bedroom, Bella enshrined with her seven teddies and Dave reunited with his beloved toy. It is a moment of comfort (Dave had missed Dogger dearly at bedtime before), but also of intimacy: the sibling’s shared space marks their difference as well as their unity—the familial tie that would be so crucial to the resolution. Before they fall asleep, Dave asks a somersaulting Bella, ““Shall you miss that big Teddy?”” (Hughes, 1977, p.31) No, she answers, because she didn’t really like it and there wasn’t any room in her bed anyway. Though Bella downplays her gesture, Dave’s question (several hours after the fact) puts it in the spotlight. It is, from his perspective, a moment of contemplation: perhaps acutely aware of his recent pain, he wonders what it must feel like to have let go of the toy. He asks his sister the question perhaps out of curiosity, perhaps in a sign of acknowledgment. Bella’s response might imply an unwillingness to take credit for a kind deed, a true judgment of value, or a rational assessment and balancing of needs. Whatever it is, it elicits no further prompting from Dave and both fall blissfully asleep: what is important is that Dogger’s value has been recognised, not only by Dave, but also by those who value him in turn (see figure 7).

Assigning value can be tricky. In *Master Money*, it seemed fairly straightforward: Master Money is a good person so he is worth one million dollars—though those who force this valuation are cast out from respectable society. In *The Great Pet Sale*, attributing pecuniary value is also experienced as abject, and the meaningfulness of putting a price tag on a living being is turned on its head. Yet in *Dogger*, value takes on a Simmelian dimension,

which Dodd paraphrases as “[being] a measure of the distance between a subject and the object he or she desires. That is to say, value is a measure of the extent to which we must overcome obstacles and difficulties to acquire that object” (2014, p.29). Dave must indeed overcome obstacles and difficulties when Dogger is lost. In a foreshadowing gesture, Bella offers Dave one of her own teddies so he can sleep, but the toy lies discarded at the edge of the bed: “it was not the same thing as Dogger” (Hughes, 1977, p.15). Dave’s attachment cannot be placated; he wakes throughout the night only to find that he misses Dogger, endowing the toy with more value than ever before.

As Douglas and Isherwood document, anthropologists have long noted the human tendency to create separate economic spheres, in which different types of currency prevail, and which cannot be mixed (1996). Often, the spheres denote domains that are valued differently, such as the domestic versus the political. Dogger is strongly positioned in Dave’s intimate world (another sphere identified by Zelizer (2011)), because he is part and parcel of Dave’s familial landscape. Note that again, the visual technique of abstraction and white space is used in counterpoint to elaborate illustrations of contextual background: the first details all the things Dave likes to do with Dogger, pulling the activities out from their context and thus contributing to Dogger’s valuation; while the second roots both within family life. Noticeably, Dave endows Dogger with almost human qualities (the need for a bath, the ability to feel cold, the curiosity to peek through railings) that elevate Dogger to the status of a living being. He is part of the family sphere, and cannot just be replaced by any other stuffed toy.

Dave may have lost it during a moment of distraction (the promise of ice cream), but he mentally holds onto the beloved toy's memory as the day at the fair passes. And then, he sees it, hidden behind a pile of other toys. The touching moment is illustrated from Dave's perspective, with a close-up on the table full of the other items. Each object is carefully tagged with a price: £1.50 for a doll, 80 pence for a car, 20 pence for a jingling furry ball, and, serenely sitting in the midst of the other junk with the ghost of a smile is Dogger for 5 pence (see figure 8). He is "wearing," as the narrator describes, his price tag (Hughes, 1977, p. 27). The anthropomorphisation again places the text's perspective squarely in line with Dave's experience of the scene, increasing the pathos of the situation. Dogger just doesn't belong there.

Although Dogger has never ceased to be Dave's from both Dave's and the reader's perspectives, there is now an invisible barrier between the boy and the toy: they have been organised in a market, where Dave is a potential buyer and Dogger a good. As in *The Great Pet Sale*, the marketplace is a re-contextualising mechanism that inscribes the value of goods through pricing (Dodd, 2014). By this standard, Dogger's transformation into a saleable good is legitimate, even though it jars with his almost-human status. When Dave tries to speak with the stand lady to explain the mistake, she just ignores him. Although not outrightly hostile, the lady is too interested in tending to her clients to pay Dave any heed. *Some* exchange must take place for Dogger to become Dave's again within this market logic. Possessing only 3 pence, commanding her attention by becoming a customer is not within Dave's power, so his next impulse is to find his parents.

Considering how important Dogger is to Dave, this somewhat challenges the principles Belk and Wallendorf (1990) describe in their discussion on the sacred versus the profane. Inspired by Zelizer's observations and echoing the separate spheres thesis, the researchers argue that exchange of profane money for profane commodities is legitimate, but profane money for sacred objects is not because of the profane's 'contamination' of the sacred. Yet Dave does not acknowledge any sort of contamination; instead, Dogger has been repossessed. Someone else has power over him now.

Nikolajeva (2014) argues at length that children can never escape the power adults have over them, and this has a hand in shaping children's literature; Dave finds he needs to play along in a setting that is purely adult-made. Even when an effort is made to empower child protagonists, such as in the recognition of Dogger, our rendering of society remains inevitably biased because we cannot completely negate our adult point-of-view. Dave, as a child, has no option but to seek help from his parents, who would have the power to purchase Dogger back; a millionaire like Master Money is possibly even more vulnerable to thieves like Mr Creep because he is a child. This is not to say that children are always powerless in the adult world; the protagonist in *The Great Pet Sale*, for example, is arguably more powerful because he, as a child, can credibly break through the expectations of an adult *homo economicus*.

The plan to repurchase Dogger would have worked, if another child hadn't bought Dogger before Dave and Bella had a chance. Bella begins the negotiation with the girl by explaining how valuable Dogger was to Dave, but the girl refuses to hear the argument and relinquish the dog. The offer to buy it back also falls flat, because she too has endowed

Dogger with special value: she has bought him “with her / own money” (Hughes, 1977, p.28). The transfer of ownership is so strong that within moments, Dogger has indeed transcended his status as a marketable good and become coveted beyond its price tag. The children experience their own rules of exchange, in which assigning the right value to the right thing is of paramount importance, and ownership is a relationship that entails moral claims. In so doing, the children are contending with Zelizer’s separate spheres thesis, in which “two distinct arenas of social life” are created, “one oriented toward rational effectiveness, the other toward sentiment and solidarity” (Zelizer, 2011, p.5), which money may try, but ultimately fail, to bridge. Instead, love, sacrifice, and an equitable exchange are the answer. Being bigger and new, Bella’s offer of her recently won giant teddy bear is accepted by the girl as a suitable alternative to Dogger. Ultimately, it highlights the root differences between Dave’s attachment to Dogger (and Bella’s valuation of his happiness), versus that of the little girl who would not take the money, but acquiesces when offered the other toy.

## **2.5 More than just magical: Some final thoughts**

In his review of children’s pecuniary knowledge in *The New Psychology of Money*, Furnham makes a strong claim about the way children first conceptualise the power of money:

Children first learn that money is magical. It has the power to build and destroy and to do literally anything. Every need, every whim, every fantasy can be fulfilled by money. One can control and manipulate others with the power of money. It can be used to protect oneself totally like a potent amulet. Money can

also heal both the body and the soul. Money opens doors; it talks loudly; it can shout but also whisper. Most importantly its influence is omnipresent (Furnham, 2014, p. 118).

Yet there is, to my knowledge, no comprehensive study that would substantiate this view, and the three books presented here certainly challenge the notion that money is a straightforward thing of magical transformation. Instead, each of the three stories emphasise that the meaning of money can differ greatly depending on the setting, the context, and most importantly, the agent. Whereas money does buy Master Money enviable riches and saves him from captivity, it is also a clear social marker: The Moneys succeed in life because their consumption decisions amount to the construction of social capital, and the preservation of their wealth's fungibility. The Creeps' illicit activities go hand-in-hand with being such spendthrifts that even a million pounds quickly turns into 'nothing more' than memories. Money, in other words, can be as disempowering as it is empowering, and this tale suggests that morality and social class are the contextual factors that make all the difference.

Though money does empower the little boy in *The Great Pet Sale* and enables him to acquire a menagerie of fantastical pets, his purchase is made in protest against the marketplace's homogenising power. The processes of commensuration—in this case, the pricing of living creatures—are manifested with a subversive undertone emphasising the devaluation that commodification implies. Although the ending may be seen as the triumph of market logic, there is no escaping the tension that rises from the blatant inanity of it all: the bargain prices, the nonsensical categorisations, the promotional puffery, and the far-reaching purchasing power of the little boy all paint a picture of the market as an all-too-serious but



questionable construct. So, as we read that money perhaps *can* buy everything, it is far from a morally comfortable state of affairs.

As an indicator of value, money is also found sorely wanting in *Dogger*. At no moment does Dave indicate that his beloved stuffed toy has lost any importance because he has been priced a miserly 5p; this sense of significance is strengthened through interactions with Dave's family, because they each in turn acknowledge Dogger's special place in their lives. In its inability to accurately capture and negotiate Dogger's true value, money is kept strictly outside the intimate sphere of familial love. Money and the market system, in other words, fail to play their facilitating role in a conflict of dispossession and attachment. They simply do not belong in a story about love (but certainly do help shape it).

Going back to Furnham's review, however, I will heartily agree that "economic understanding [...] forms the basis of the understanding of power in society and the concepts/ideology a child develops are therefore of concern to educationalists and politicians" (Furnham, 2014, p.116). What *Master Money*, *The Great Pet Sale*, and *Dogger* each show in turn is how money can both build and take down social barriers, generate and challenge social judgments, enable or disable agents in the marketplace. This is significant, because they begin to sketch the many contexts in which monies will have different meanings and purposes, which is not something that is learned after one knows how to handle money 'responsibly', but arguably before.

Yet it is worth mentioning that each story is also placed within a middle- to upper-class context. *Master Money* glorifies the morality of the bourgeoisie while suggesting the inevitability of moral corruption amongst the destitute. Though much more subtle, *Dogger*

also is set within a respectable, clearly recognisable family; and *The Great Pet Sale* assumes a protagonist with (limited, but effective) purchasing power. All are expressions of middle-class norms, which is not too surprising given that picture book audiences tend to be families who can afford them (Kline, 1993). Broadening this remark, each book has been published in market contexts that have not been documented here, and that might change the way they are received, read, and purchased over time. Finally, the very activity of reading itself (e.g., caregivers reading stories at bedtime, children reading for themselves, children reading in classroom settings) will bear crucially on the way the story will be understood, elaborated on, and remembered. There is, therefore, far more breadth and depth to be achieved in this line of inquiry.

Although parents seem hesitant to talk about money with their children (Lieber, 2015), the reality remains that children come into a world in which money does a lot of shaping, marking, and bounding. But more importantly, they will grow into the actors who will in turn enact these social processes. It is therefore unsurprising that in all three stories, the protagonist's actions and thoughts matter as much as money's seemingly omnipresent influence. Money might be an indicator of value, a tool of dispossession, or a builder of riches, but it certainly does not have the last word. The moral normativity that shines through each tale makes certain of that.

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<sup>i</sup> For the interested reader, I highly recommend consulting John Stephens' *Language and ideology in children's fiction* (1992) as a powerful guide to analysing these materials

<sup>ii</sup> Though many books purport to do just that, even the simple decision on whether to save or to spend is embedded in a web of normative considerations.

<sup>iii</sup> Written by one half of the most prolific author/illustrator duos in UK literary history, Allan Ahlberg's *Master Money the Millionaire* (and illustrated by André Amstutz, 1981) might be the least well-known of the three picture books in this chapter. Part of the 'Happy Family' series, readers might be familiar with the eponymous card game on which it is based, and indeed recognise the villainous 'Mr Creep the Crook.'

<sup>iv</sup> As the picture books do not have page numbers, the pages have been counted starting from the title page.

<sup>v</sup> When *Master Money* is no longer in possession of his millions, Mr Money takes over this role again. *Master Money*, the picture of politeness, seems happy to accept his father's gift.

<sup>vi</sup> There is irony here not only because *Master Money* is hidden from his own family, but also because the *I Spy* game is a recurrent theme Allan and Janet Ahlberg use in their other classic works. The reference might serve to humanise the Creep children in the eyes of readers who are familiar with the Ahlberg's other works.

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<sup>vii</sup> Except, that is, for the original cover, in which the Creep family lurked behind a shadowy corner as the wealthy Moneys stroll down a sunlit street. Subsequent covers depict Master Money with an overflowing bag of cash, or digging up his buried treasure.

<sup>viii</sup> Mick Inkpen's *The Great Pet Sale* was first published in 1998 (Hodder Children's Books, London), but has since seen at least eighteen editions and reprints across the UK, the U.S and Spain (including a translation in Catalan) (OCLC, n.d.). Inkpen is probably best known for his *Kipper* and *Wibbly Pig* series, as well as award winning *Threadbare* (1991), *Penguin Small* (1992), and *Lullabyhullabaloo* (1993). His work has been commended as an outstanding example of the complementary interplay between illustration and word, "each enriching, expanding, and enhancing the other" in a welcoming simplicity that does not sacrifice sophistication (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 93).

<sup>ix</sup> *Dogger* is truly iconic. First published in 1977, WorldCat lists at least 52 prints and editions combined from both sides of the pond, the most recent dating to 2012 (the first U.S. edition was titled *David and Dog*). After having won the prestigious Kate Greenaway medal upon publication, *Dogger* was also named the favourite winner of all time (or the 'Greenaway of Greenaways') in a vote from the British public on the award's 50th anniversary, coming in ahead of even Janet & Allan Ahlberg's *Each Peach Pear Plum* (1978) ("70 Years Celebration: The public's favourite winners of all time!," n.d.). Author Shirley Hughes has been awarded multiple honours throughout her career, including an OBE and the BookTrust lifetime achievement award (Book Trust, 2015).