

## Frogs Are People Too: Crafting an Ethical Animal Fantasy

In her 2014 essay “The Rights and Wrongs of Anthropomorphism in Picture Books,” Lisa Rowe Fraustino raised ethical questions about the practice of assigning human attributes to animals “for our own ideological, cultural, didactic, and entertainment purposes” and concluded that “anthropomorphism uses conceptual metaphor in ways that often do obfuscate problematic attitudes toward ourselves and nonhuman Others,” such as stereotypical gender roles, racism, cruelty, and abuse of power (146). After applying the close reading approach pioneered by linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson to the conceptual metaphor HUMAN IS ANIMAL, Fraustino called for scholars “to examine what’s being inherited by young readers as they absorb cultural knowledge not only from specific canonical texts, but, perhaps even more importantly, from the predominant conventions and patterns repeated throughout children’s literature” (159). This paper answers Fraustino’s call by extending the discussion from picture books to creation of the animal fantasy novel, drawing examples from the presenter’s creative work-in-progress, *The Army of Cursed Frogs*.

For a reader to benefit from the human morals of a story while *not* being misled, the allegory of the conceptual metaphor in animal fantasy has to be transparent, and the analogies must ring true—that is, represent natural behavior in ways that serve *both* the humans *and* non-humans *ethically*. Instead—all too often—when the human analogy stops working, when it becomes too ridiculous or uncomfortable, Othering permits us to maintain our distance from what we don’t want to see about ourselves and the world we live in. Thus creative writers need to be aware of the human tendency to anthropomorphize our interpretations of animal thoughts, feelings, and motivations based on our own ideological biases. For instance, to translate amphibian body language and sounds into human words ethically, I had to complete ample scientific research on frogs and show them as accurately as possible within the conventions of writing for children. My implied reader has to be reasonably expected to recognize ways in which reality has been manipulated.