

## Carnavalesque in Neil Gaiman and Gris Grimly's *The Dangerous Alphabet*

This paper will discuss how elements of fear and terror found in darker cautionary tales, intrinsically creates an obstacle for young readers. Once a prevalent genre in children's literature, cautionary tales function as admonition and satire on social issues, but sanitized folk and fairy tales now replace them in popularity. This essay will show how the carnivalesque in Neil Gaiman and Gris Grimly's *The Dangerous Alphabet* removes the hurdle between young reader and genre through language play and accessible grotesque illustrations.

*The Dangerous Alphabet* takes place in an underground sewer waterway where two young children engage with childhood anxieties caused by real and imaginary monsters. Gaiman's first rhyming couplet half immediately rejects the traditional verse in a classic ABC primer. "A" does not stand for the obligatory "apple," instead "A is for Always, that's where we embark." The metatextuality in "always" or "all ways" suggests how readers must ignore commonplace beliefs concerning conventional, "safe" fictions for young readers, because this story subverts those boundaries.

Grimly's illustration for the sewer waterways in the "A is for" scene operates as a type of funhouse ride, more carnival than carnivalesque in a sense, but the grotesque caricatures allow for an exploration into the grisly underbelly of society from which children are often shielded. The boy, wearing an apprehensive look, places the obligatory apple in a cup as payment for "embark[ing]" on this misadventure. This act serves as a visual cue and departure point for readers to liberate themselves from any notion of the "safe" story.

The transgressive nature of carnivalesque in *The Dangerous Alphabet* seeks to disrupt notions about the treatment of children's texts in dominant culture. This mode also serves as a form of escapism for young readers from their parents, allowing them to traverse upon the murky waters with the young girl and boy characters. By navigating through their own fears and anxieties in tandem with the children characters, the readers find they will still come out safely from the funhouse ride without the help of the authoritative parent figure.