

The Ambiguity of Fantasy: A Cultural Reading of P.L. Travers' *Mary Poppins*

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Professor of Renaissance literature and preeminent literary critic Stephen Greenblatt sees works of art, such as literature, as “fields of force, places of dissension and shifting interests, occasions for the jostling of orthodox and subversive impulses.”¹ His technique, popularly known as New Historicism, strives to recreate the socio-historical realities of a time period in order to better understand the “circulating social energies” of a time—the ways a text both draws influence from and impacts its cultural milieu.² Greenblatt believes that texts, as cultural artifacts, allow keen-eyed researchers a window into a time and place, full of all its contending values, contradictory desires and cacophonous voices.

In his anthologized essay, “Culture,” Greenblatt suggests that texts embody the contradictory cultural mechanisms of *constraint* and *mobility*—representing, respectively, the boundaries of social behavior within a culture and the attempts to batter against those limits.³ Greenblatt’s cultural method of inquiry, furthermore, appears particularly germane to P.L. Travers’ well-known children’s fantasy novel, *Mary Poppins* (1934). Within

Travers' text there appears a wealth of components reflective of and reinforcing the lived cultural realities of Britain in the 1930s; however, the surreal flights of fantasy within the novel appear to flee this quotidian set of values and communicate a more subversive message. In this essay, I'll magnify these textual ambiguities and, with the microscope of Greenblatt's "Culture," examine the ways in which *Mary Poppins* both reinforces and pushes against the values of its era.

In "Culture," Greenblatt argues that works of literature embody a type of "constraint" within a culture that helps define and reinforce for its audience the rules of the status quo.⁴ He defines constraint as "the ensemble of beliefs and practices that form a given culture [and] function as a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained, a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform."⁵ Greenblatt adds that these constraints are enforced rarely through the extreme methods of imprisonment or execution because "seemingly innocuous responses" like "a condescending smile, laughter poised between the genial and the sarcastic, a small dose of indulgent pity laced with contempt, [or] cool silence" provide effective means of enforcing the societal norms.⁶

This "seemingly innocuous" technology of control can be seen at work within Travers' *Mary Poppins*, especially in Mary's exchanges with the Banks children, Jane and Michael. Mary, for example, shoots a "terrible glance" at Michael in order to keep him from speaking until spoken to.⁷ She frowns in disapproval when Jane and Michael participate in Uncle Albert's anti-gravity hijinks.⁸ She "sniffs her usual sniff of displeasure" when Michael asks questions about Uncle Albert and once again when both children question her about fairyland.⁹ She also resorts to "an offended silence" when the children question her about her magical abilities.¹⁰ And when Michael misbehaves, she tames him with a forceful "Humph!"¹¹

Mary, however, is seldom so subtle in her enforcement of the rules. When the hour grows late, she snaps at the children, "spit-spot into bed."¹² If they talk after dark, she threatens to "call the police" on them.¹³ On the way around town, Mary threatens to "go back home" if they ask too many questions.¹⁴ Indeed, she constantly controls the boundaries of each outing by announcing "it's time to go home!" whenever the children become too involved or curious.¹⁵ Even when the children are immersed in the most

enjoyable fantasy adventures, Mary reminds the children not to forget their coats, gloves, or hats and to mind their appearances.¹⁶

At positively every turn, and in every imaginable situation, Mary upholds the status quo by reinforcing the middle class values of proper etiquette, presentability, and obedience.¹⁷ Indeed, the children learn “that it [is] better not to argue with Mary Poppins” and, presumably, the social norms she reinforces.¹⁸

Another way *Mary Poppins* reflects and reinforces social norms can be seen in Mary’s intense class-consciousness. Historian René Cutforth characterizes Britain in the 1930s as a decade in which “the universal game [within social spheres] was class assessment and judgment” where people “presented [their] ‘all present and correct’ act for inspection, and duly inspected the inspector” for laxities in appearance that could mark them as resting on an inferior rung of the social ladder.¹⁹ He adds that for many millions in Britain during the 1930s “to score well at this game was the chief reason for existence.”²⁰

The neurotic self-consciousness described by Cutforth perfectly pertains to the character of Mary Poppins. On her day off, for example, she “stop[s] beside an empty motor-car in order to put her hat straight with the help of a windscreen.”²¹ While having tea with Bert, her beau, she takes “a little mirror out of her bag and look[s] at herself in it.”²² While at her Uncle Albert’s apartment, she gazes into the tripartite window and “sigh[s] with pleasure. . .[as] she [sees] three of herself, each wearing a blue coat with silver buttons to match.”²³ While out Christmas shopping, she gives “a quick glance into the window beside her” to find “herself shining back at her, very smart, very interesting [with] her hat on straight.”²⁴ And in an earlier bout of window-mirror narcissism, Mary, quite pleased with her reflection, exclaims to herself “‘Just look at you!’”²⁵ Obviously, Mary Poppins needs to continually assure herself that she is nothing short of “all present and correct.”

Mary’s penchant for new clothing may also reflect the class concerns of Britain in the 1930s. According to historian T.H. Pear, the period in Britain after the 1920s marked a change in material production, which allowed “women of all classes. . .to resemble each other,” a peculiarity of fashion that had “never been known before.”²⁶ Coupling Pear’s assessment of the

availability of inexpensive and fashionable clothing with Cutforth's concept of class prudery, it seems clear that new clothing helped distinguish those of a higher class from those of a lower. And thus, when Mary Poppins feels "distinguished" in her "new hat,"²⁷ or when she delights in how "her new shoes [look] reflected in" a window,²⁸ or even how "nice her new gloves with the fur tops [look],"²⁹ she further participates in (and believes she is scoring in) the game of class assessment so characteristic of the decade.

The most convincing proof that Mary displays a heightened class-consciousness, however, appears in her treatment of those she regards as inferior. She "nod[s] haughtily to the policeman" patrolling the Banks' neighborhood.³⁰ She intimidates the butcher with a "haughty sniff" and makes an "awful" grimace when he compliments her appearance.³¹ She belittles the bad taste of the department store's Santa Claus impersonator.³² And she condescends to the fishmonger.³³ In light of Cutforth's remark that "small-minded snobbery" accompanied Britain's peculiar competitions of class in the 1930s, Mary once again emerges as a character immersed in and reflecting the class realities of her time period.³⁴ In Greenblatt's terms, then, Mary Poppins retransmits to readers a cultural "constraint" by reinforcing middle-class notions of obedience, vanity, and class-consciousness.

But if the more realistic elements of *Mary Poppins* seem to reinforce the 1930s British status quo, what of the fantasy elements with the story? One way to see them is as another reflection of the times. Cutforth, for example, describes the 1930s as a "long, uncaring flight from reality" after the societal shell-shock of WWI.³⁵ This evaluation echoes fantasy critic Colin Manlove's estimation of British children's fantasy during the period. He characterizes the 1930s as "the long idyll," in which fantasy became "less a place for learning or growing than sort of a prolonged secondary world where the imagination [could] feel at home."³⁶

In many ways, Manlove's argument finds an illustration within Travers' *Mary Poppins*. A quick recap of the novel's plot will help make this abundantly clear: Mary arrives at the Banks' by flying with her parrot-tipped umbrella;³⁷ she and Bert jump into a sidewalk-chalk drawing and have tea;³⁸ she chaperones the Banks children to Uncle Albert's, where a fit of laughing magically elevates them off the ground;³⁹ she speaks with a puppy to solve a dispute with its owner;⁴⁰ she uses a special compass to

quickly take the children around the world;⁴¹ she helps a relative glue gingerbread stars into the night sky;⁴² she chats with the Banks' infant twins;⁴³ she shows the children the zoo at night, where the roles of the animals and humans are reversed;⁴⁴ and she talks with Maia, one of the Pleiades, during a shopping trip before flying away again by parrot-umbrella propulsion.⁴⁵

For a public recovering from the horrors of the Great War, shackled with the irons of fiscal uncertainty, and anxious about the threat of fascism (which was then escalating the possibility of another world war),⁴⁶ *Mary Poppins* might have provided a light and carefree escape from its everyday anxieties. And, to use one of Greenblatt's examples as an analogy, "an audience watching a play. . . would not be hatching a rebellion."⁴⁷ A public reading a fantasy book would then be less inclined to question (let alone batter) the boundaries of its society, especially if that fantasy book compiles and retransmits the values of that society back to each reader. Thus, once again, in the realms of social conformity, class consciousness and escapism, *Mary Poppins* can be seen as a social document both reflecting and reinforcing the cultural work of Greenblatt's social "restraint."

On the other hand, Travers' fantasy elements contain more complex elements that cannot be so easily attributed to mere escapism. Greenblatt's idea of cultural "mobility" here becomes a useful lens through which we can view *Mary Poppins*. He defines mobility as the "regulator and guarantor of movement" within a culture.⁴⁸ In the most interesting cases, he adds, a text's mobility propels it "to the very edges of what can be said at a particular place and time," where it "batter[s] against the boundaries of [its] own culture."⁴⁹

Evidence of such battering against social boundaries can be found within Travers' "Laughing Gas" chapter, wherein a curious kind of subversiveness is implied by Mary Poppins' actions. Although Mary continually reproaches the fantastic, gravity-defying tea party held by Uncle Albert, she eventually participates in the festivities, exclaiming "its all very silly and undignified, but, since you're all up there and don't seem able to get down, I suppose I'd better come up, too."⁵⁰ This capitulation to the surreal hijinks marks Mary's temporary surrender of her role as moral vanguard, which Travers has previously established (and yet continues to develop throughout the novel). But, even more significantly, as Mary Poppins momentarily

surrenders her authority, a new herald of the status quo emerges into the scene—Uncle Albert’s servant, Miss Persimmon. She ambles in, initially quite unaware of the bizarre mid-air tea time, but her surprise upon discovering the skylarking recalls the very language Mary Poppins used in her earlier attempt to censure it:⁵¹

“Well, I never! I simply never!” she said, as she caught sight of them all seated on the air round the table. “Such goings on I never did see. In all my born days I never saw such. I’m sure, Mr. Wigg, I always knew you were a bit odd. But I’ve closed my eyes to it—being as how you paid your rent regular. But such behaviour as this—having tea in the air with your guests—Mr. Wigg, sir, I’m astonished at you! It’s that undignified, and for a gentleman of your age—I never did— —”⁵²

Having thus transferred the role of apoplectic conformist to Miss Persimmon, Travers’ raises the stakes, as Mary subtly uses her magic to send Miss Persimmon “off the ground...stumbling through the air, rolling from side to side like a very thin barrel,” a spectacle that has the children “clutching their sides and gasping with laughter at the thought of how funny Miss Persimmon had looked.”⁵³ Here, Travers undoubtedly invites readers to laugh, as Michael and Jane do, at the suddenly discombobulated voice of Edwardian conformity. But what is perhaps most interesting is that Mary Poppins—the novel’s chief inculcator of obedience—here subtly encourages disobedience by helping to mock Miss Persimmon, Mary Poppins’ momentary proxy. Travers’ “Laughing Gas” fantasy thus illustrates Greenblatt’s concept of “mobility” by battering, with laughter, against the mores of obedience and conformity otherwise established throughout the text.⁵⁴

In the “Full Moon” chapter, Travers continues to suggest potentially subversive values with her fantasy. Although the chapter may seem on the surface to demonstrate a merely amusing role-reversal of humans and animals, Travers infuses the scene with a more complex message resembling class equality. Toward the end of the midnight zoo-romp, for instance, Mi-

chael and Jane witness a spectacle even more curious than the sight of animals feeding caged humans:

they saw leopards and lions, beavers, camels, bears, cranes, antelopes and many others all forming themselves into a ring round Mary Poppins. Then the animals began to move, wildly crying their Jungle songs, prancing in and out of the ring, and exchanging hand and wing as they went....⁵⁵

When Michael questions the Hamadryad about the meaning of this "Grand Chain," the creature replies that "we are all made of the same stuff" and that "we are all one, all moving toward the same end."⁵⁶ Cosmic overtones aside, this scene can be viewed as a subversive antithesis to the games of class stratification so characteristic of the 1930s in Britain. The Hamadryad's refrain of "we are all one" mocks the class-based inferiorities Mary Poppins strives to impose on others in her fastidious grooming and material pride. Thus, Travers' "Full Moon" fantasy displays another site of "mobility," colliding head-on with the values of class posturing otherwise permeating *Mary Poppins*.

The "Full Moon" Chapter can also be seen as a subversive endorsement of the mystic religion, Theosophy.⁵⁷ The tenets of this religion call for a "universal brotherhood" in which "all human beings" and all "beings both high and low and intermediate" are inseparably "linked together, not merely by the bonds of emotional thought or feeling, but by the very fabric of the universe itself."⁵⁸ We can recall that the Hamadryad suggests to Michael that during the zoo celebration "Bird and beast and stone and star...are all one."⁵⁹ I would like to suggest that the animals' "Grand Chain" within the "Full Moon" chapter represents an illustration of the Theosophic belief in a "Universal Brotherhood."

With this in mind, Mary Poppins' Christmas shopping contact with Maia takes on an entirely different, and potentially subversive, meaning. In Theosophical parlance, *Māyā* names the "fabrication by man's mind of ideas [which] derives from interior and exterior impressions" contributing to the "illusory aspect of man's thoughts."⁶⁰ The veil of *Māyā*, then, repre-

sents all of the human misconceptions preventing the realization of the cosmic unity proposed by Theosophy. Therefore, in the “Christmas Shopping” chapter, as Maia descends from her place among the Pleiades, Travers alludes to the fabled Theosophic “falling of the veil” which would accomplish in the realm of humans the “Universal Brotherhood” achieved by the zoo animals in the “Full Moon” chapter.⁶¹

Travers, however, stops short of bringing a Theosophic version of Eden into her text. Instead, she opts to have Mary—like in the “Laughing Gas” chapter—subtly endorse a subversive value. As Maia returns to the stars, Jane and Michael detect “in Mary Poppins’s eyes something that, if she were anybody else but Mary Poppins, might have been described as tears.”⁶² Mary’s misty-eyed farewell to Maia is wholly significant, considering Greenblatt’s notion that cultural boundaries can be supported through an “apparently modest” act of positive reinforcement, such as “a gaze of admiration, a respectful nod, [or] a few words of gratitude.”⁶³ At no other point in the novel does the otherwise haughty, imperious, and emotionally distant Mary Poppins visibly express any positive feeling for any person or activity. Thus, her gesture of endorsement for the value system of Theosophy—a belief that would have been seen as heretical to Travers’ largely Christian British readership—further displays the concept of cultural “mobility,” with the previously established value system running into what Travers’ suggests within her fantasy.

One final way in which *Mary Poppins* exhibits Greenblatt’s “mobility” emerges from Travers’ layered and symbolically complex “Full Moon” chapter. More specifically, the zoo-reversal seems to embody a subversive meditation on animal rights. Travers, for example, places humans within the zoo cages, with sundry animal keepers to look after them and torment them.⁶⁴ She describes the caged humans as “imprisoned,” with animal guards “laugh[ing] loudly” at them.⁶⁵ Jane and Michael also see Admiral Boom, their next door neighbor, “prodded. . .with a stick” which “made [him] swear dreadfully.”⁶⁶ The scene greatly disturbs both children, and they are moved to pity over what they perceive as cruel treatment. Michael wants “to ask [the imprisoned humans] if they’d ever get out,” and he later exclaims “The poor humans!”⁶⁷ Using the children’s reaction to the reversal, Travers moves her audience to view the caging of animals as compara-

ble with the caging of humans—with both practices marked by mockery and cruelty.

Moreover, the placement of the human caging within the same time frame as the animals' "Universal Brotherhood" ceremony also heightens the injustice of the imprisonment of any living creature. Furthermore, according to animal rights chronicler Mark Gold, "the concept of rights for animals [within Britain] more or less disappeared from public debate for sixty years" after the first world war.⁶⁸ This means that Travers evoked animal rights values within *Mary Poppins* thirty years before the first major animal rights publication hit the underground in 1975.⁶⁹ *Mary Poppins*, then, shows itself as a cultural document displaying the most intense form of Greenblatt's "mobility," with the most apparent messages of the fantasy sections battering against the more quotidian values and "constraint" established elsewhere throughout the text.

What, then, are we to make of the ambiguities within Travers' text? What cultural work would the seemingly subversive fantasy elements within *Mary Poppins* have achieved in the 1930s? Children's literature critic Catherine Elick contends that the fantasy elements within *Mary Poppins*, especially the zoo reversal in the "Full Moon" chapter, can be better seen through the lens of cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "carnavalesque."⁷⁰ The fantastic role-reversal, Elick suggests, allows readers a kind of release valve. Their bottled-up emotions and repressed desires, accreting with the daily restrictions of societal norms, could be liberated through a temporary wish fulfillment. In this case, Travers' fantasy would allow readers to momentarily unfasten their psychic constraints inside the safe and socially acceptable arena of the imagination, only to later return to reality having productively slaked their unconscious yearnings.

Elick's analysis echoes psychoanalytic critic Bruno Bettelheim's idea that fairy tales provide readers, especially young children, with a way to manage the complex inner pressures through a process of textual "externalization."⁷¹ Fairy tales, he argues, "show the child how he can embody his destructive wishes in one figure, gain desired satisfactions from another, identify with a third, have ideal attachments with a fourth, and so on, as his needs of the moment require."⁷² This means that readers productively bal-

ance (and mitigate) contending emotions and desires when they project them onto characters or situations within a story.

More importantly, Bettelheim adds that “having taken the child on a trip into a wondrous world, at its end the tale returns the child to reality, in a most reassuring manner.”⁷³ Here, the literary device of fantasy allows an escape into a world of possibilities and release, the nature of which—like dreams—can not be permanent. Bettelheim suggests, rather, that fantasy helps readers more clearly internalize and manage the boundaries of reality. With this in mind, *Mary Poppins*’ continual denials of her fantastic adventures become more comprehensible; with each denial she more clearly draws the boundaries for her young charges—and for all readers—between what behavior is suitable only in the realm of fantasy and what behavior is tolerable in reality.⁷⁴

Both Elick’s and Bettelheim’s analyses fall in line with my previous characterization of 1930s-era Britain, a time and place for intellectual escapism in the face of the rapidly encroaching threat of a second world war. *Mary Poppins* both flows from and reinforces these “circulating social energies.” Travers enchants her readers with a quick spell of wish fulfillment, allowing them, once the escape is finished, to remain noncommittal to the ambiguously couched values of disobedience, class equality, Theosophy and animal rights. By virtue of their fantastic nature, the potentially incendiary scenes would have been easily dismissed by readers of the age as mere nonsense (or missed by readers too young to decode their complexities). Is this what Travers intended? Perhaps, although I feel hesitant even tentatively to classify *Mary Poppins* as a merely escapist narrative, given its complex layers and diverse messages.

Whether or not Travers deliberately tattooed *Mary Poppins* with subversive values and then concealed them within the innocuous garb of children’s fantasy is another matter. What remains certain is that *Mary Poppins* emerges under the microscope of New Historicism as a complex cultural document reflecting, to use Greenblatt’s words, a “dynamic interweaving of multiple strands from a culture that is itself an unstable field of contending forces.”⁷⁵

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ENDNOTES

¹ Stephen Greenblatt, "Introduction to *The Power of Forms*." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Eds. Vincent B. Leitch et al. (London: Norton, 2001), 2254.

² Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 19.

³ Stephen Greenblatt, "Culture." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 225.

⁴ Greenblatt, "Culture," 225.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷ P.L. Travers, *Mary Poppins* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 30, 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44, 177.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 37, 162.

¹⁷ See Paul Fussell, "An Anatomy of the Classes." *Everyday Theory: A Contemporary Reader*. Eds. Becky McLaughlin and Bob Coleman (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2005), 187-201. Fussell further taxonomizes the class systems apparent within the United States and Britain, and, according to his model, the Banks family embodies many of the core values of the self-conscious middle class. See, for example, 193-197.

¹⁸ Travers, *Mary Poppins*, 45.

¹⁹ René Cutforth, *Later Than We Thought: A Portrait of the Thirties* (Oxford: Alden, 1976), 34.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

²¹ Travers, *Mary Poppins*, 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁶ T.H. Pear, *English Social Differences* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), 171.

²⁷ Travers, *Mary Poppins*, 102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁹ Ibid., 175.

³⁰ Ibid., 17.

³¹ Ibid., 111, 110.

³² Ibid., 177.

³³ Ibid., 112.

³⁴ Cutforth, *Later Than We Thought*, 34.

³⁵ Ibid., 8. For more about the prevailing views of the period, including the loss of faith in royals, government, and spiritual ideals, and the economic future, Cutforth offers an excellent primer.

³⁶ Colin Manlove, *From Alice to Harry Potter: Children's Fantasy in England* (Christchurch: Cybereditions, 2003), 40.

³⁷ Travers, *Mary Poppins*, 6.

³⁸ Ibid., 24.

³⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁴¹ Ibid., 88.

⁴² Ibid., 128.

⁴³ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 155.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 187, 196.

⁴⁶ See Valentine Cunningham, "Neutral?: 1930s Writers and Taking Sides." *Class Culture and Social Change*. Ed. Frank Gloversmith (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), 45-69. According to Cunningham, Nazism, the Franco revolution in Spain, and the pressures of conformity to one party identity or the other plagued the intellectual life of citizens in the 1930s.

⁴⁷ Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 18.

⁴⁸ Greenblatt, "Culture," 228.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 231.

⁵⁰ Travers, *Mary Poppins*, 37.

⁵¹ Ibid., 34. Before joining in the zero-gravity teatime, Mary censures Uncle Albert with "Oh, Uncle Albert—not *again?*" (32). She also condemns the children's involvement, exclaiming "Really! Really, *such* behavior!"

⁵² Ibid., 41.

⁵³ Ibid., 42, 43.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 100. In Travers' "Bad Tuesday" chapter, Michael also embarks upon a non-fantastical protest against all rules, musing at the end of the day that he has "been so naughty, and [yet he] feel[s] so very good."

⁵⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁷ For more about Travers' exposure to and practice of Theosophy, see Caitlin Flanagan, "Becoming Mary Poppins: Life and Letters." *The New Yorker* 19 Dec. 2005: 40-46;

Also, for George William Russell's role in Travers' interest in the philosophy, consult Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man: A Biography of George William Russell "AE"* (Gerard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1975), 41.

⁵⁸ G. de Purucker, *Occult Glossary: A Compendium of Oriental and Theosophical Terms* (Pasadena: Theosophical UP, 1933), 176.

⁵⁹ Travers, *Mary Poppins*, 170.

⁶⁰ Purucker, *Occult Glossary*, 100.

⁶¹ Ibid., 100.

⁶² Travers, *Mary Poppins*, 189.

⁶³ Greenblatt, "Culture," 226.

⁶⁴ Travers, *Mary Poppins*, 156.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 156.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 159.

⁶⁸ Mark Gold, *Animal Century: A Celebration of Changing Attitudes to Animals* (Charlbury: Jon Carpenter Publishing, 1998), 161.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 131.

⁷⁰ Catherine L. Elick, "Animal Carnivals: A Bakhtinian Reading of C.S. Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew* and P.L. Travers's *Mary Poppins*." *Style* 35 (2001): 455; for more about all things carnivalesque, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

⁷¹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 65.

⁷² Ibid., 66.

⁷³ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁴ One of the peculiarities of Mary Poppins' character resides in her stubborn insistence that nothing fantastic ever occurs throughout the course of the novel; these denials both confuse and astonish the Banks children, forcing them to question their own perceptions and/or memories of each surreal event. See, for example, 45, 55, 172, 189.

⁷⁵ Greenblatt, "Introduction to *The Power of Forms*," 2250.