

# Journeys through the *Unheimlich* and the Unhomely

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Introducing a series of articles on the *unheimlich* in children's fiction for the 2001 winter edition of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Roberta Seelinger Trites identifies the *unheimlich* as "one of the most important principles that motivates international children's literature" (162). Literature, she observes, plays a crucial role in offering children a way of confronting and managing unspeakable fears about pain, death, separation, sexuality, and growing up. Focusing on two novels set against the backdrop of war, this paper will explore the *unheimlich* as a journey through "that unknowable and unreasonable fear [...] that lurks in the subconscious of everyone" (Trites 162).

With World War II looming, David, twelve-year-old hero of John Connolly's *The Book of Lost Things* (2006), is failing to come to terms with his mother's death,

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his father's swift remarriage, his new baby brother, and life in his stepmother's house. He is lured into the world of his whispering books and journeys deep into the *unheimlich*, as the beloved fairy tales he used to read with his mother turn macabre, revealing what has been hidden or repressed. In Robert Westall's *Gulf* (1993), the familiarity of home turns unhomely, as twelve-year-old Andy journeys telepathically into the consciousness of Latif, a boy caught in the midst of the Gulf War. Transmitting back the brutal realities of war, Andy's journeys disrupt his somewhat anodyne domestic life, as another world – Latif's world with all its pain and suffering – becomes visible. This paper aims to analyse David's psychological journey through the lens of Sigmund Freud's theory of the *unheimlich* and to examine Andy's journeys employing Homi Bhabha's concept of the unhomely. Neither David nor Andy travel much beyond the physical boundaries of home, yet both journey great distances through tumultuous and frightening landscapes, confronting what has been repressed or kept hidden.

Secrets play a central role in Freud's theory of the *unheimlich*. His study opens with an analysis of the semantics, etymology, and usage of the word *heimlich*; his dictionary perusal shows the word to mean "belonging to the house [...] dear and intimate, homely, etc" (*The Uncanny* 126). A further entry defines *heimlich* as "arousing a pleasant feeling of quiet contentment, [...] of comfortable repose and secure protection, like the enclosed, comfortable house" (127). Freud points out, however, that *heimlich* "belongs to two sets of ideas, the one relating to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden" (132). *Heimlich* in its second definition refers to that which is kept secret, "so that others do not get to know of it or about it and it is hidden from them" (129). Not only are these two sets of ideas *not* mutually contradictory, it is in their relationship to each other – in the tension and inversion between them – that Freud locates the *unheimlich*: with secrets concealed in the domain of the familiar, *heimlich* slips away from the cosy intimacy of the safe home, reverses its meaning, becomes strange, unreliable, or even deceitful, taking on an eerie or insidious element. For Freud, the deeply familiar (*heimlich* in its first definition) becomes *unheimlich* as that which is hidden or repressed (*heimlich* in its second definition) comes to light.

While attempting to identify a core meaning for the term, Freud notes that *unheimlich* is "not always used in a clearly definable sense" (123). The concept is slippery, not least because the *unheimlich* is, as Freud points out, an aesthetic and therefore subjective experience. In her genealogical study of Freud's concept of the *unheimlich*, Anneleen Masschelein charts how the term has become a

“‘passe-partout’ word to address virtually any topic” (2), its amorphous quality rendering it employable beyond Freud’s use of the term. Social and critical theorist Bhabha is among those to draw on and broaden the concept of the *unheimlich*, using it “more widely” than Freud has done (Huddart 83). Bhabha extends and adapts Freud’s *unheimlich* to shape his concept of the “unhomely”, requesting his readers’ permission to use “this awkward word” in the opening lines of his essay “The World and the Home” (141). Bhabha defines the condition of being unhomed or feeling unhomely not as a state of homelessness, but as the sense of dislocation that arises when the boundaries between the outside world and the domestic domain blur. For Bhabha, the *unheimlich* occurs when this border crumbles and “the private and the public become part of each other” (141), rendering strange the once familiar home.

Both Freud and Bhabha view the *unheimlich* in terms of aesthetics; both explore the concept within the realms of fiction. What Freud’s theory of the *unheimlich* and Bhabha’s concept of the unhomely share is the sense of fear and displacement that arises as the sanctum of home is breached by the emergence of that which has been hidden, repressed, or kept out. In disrupting the safety and intimacy of home, this other-world intrusion can act as a call to adventure: the familiar is rendered unfamiliar, home becomes unhomely, and in that moment, the hero’s journey begins. Not every journey requires a physical departure from home; a journey through the *unheimlich* entails, more than anything, an emotional departure from the deeply familiar.

Borrowing Joseph Campbell’s premise that every story relates a journey, this paper will map the stages of David and Andy’s progress against Campbell’s monomyth template of the hero’s journey. Campbell’s monomyth entails the crossing of a threshold into “a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces” (227), and provides an ideal scaffold on which to structure the analyses of David and Andy’s journeys. The hero’s journey according to Campbell begins in the ordinary world, from where the hero is called to adventure. The hero may at first refuse this call, and he may meet a mentor figure. Upon answering the call to adventure, the hero crosses the threshold from the familiar into the unfamiliar world. Here, the hero faces tests and meets allies or mentor figures, who accompany the hero to the point of apotheosis, which the hero then undergoes alone. The transformed hero then journeys back towards the threshold, re-entering or resurrecting in the ordinary world with an elixir, treasure, or boon to take home.

Teeming with wolf-men, dismembered limbs, plucked-out eyeballs and infantile fears, David's psychological journey in *The Book of Lost Things* prompts a Freudian reading. The text can also be seen to adhere closely to Campbell's monomyth template: David's story begins in the ordinary world, in a townhouse in London, just before World War II. His terminally ill mother dies despite the obsessive-compulsive rituals he performs; his animistic charms and counter-charms to ward off her death have no power in the ordinary world. Unable to come to terms with his mother's death, David begins to hear his books whispering. This blurring of reality and fantasy intensifies when, just "five months, three weeks and four days" after his mother's death (15), David realises that his father has already begun a relationship with another woman, the administrator of the hospital in which his mother died. David does not meet a wise mentor in his ordinary world; his father seems too busy and secretive, and he does not quite trust his psychiatrist, whose books mutter insults of "Charlatan!", "Poppycrack!" and "The man's an idiot" (23) during their psychiatry sessions. Instead, the Crooked Man appears, a shape-shifting trickster who ensnares children by promising to fulfil their wishes. Calling out, "We are waiting, [...] 'Welcome, Your Majesty. All hail the new king!'" (31), the Crooked Man calls David to adventure. At first, David resists this call, but when he hears his mother's voice crying out for him to rescue her, he crosses the first threshold, leaving his ordinary world behind to enter the liminal space Campbell describes as "a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms" (81), a place David names "Elsewhere" (84). Here, David is met by the Woodsman, his first ally and mentor figure, who sends him on a mission to find the king and accompanies him along the initial stage of his journey. Other allies come to his aid as David survives a number of trials and overcomes enemies, before reaching the apotheosis and facing the supreme ordeal: he enters the thorny and constantly shifting Sleeping-Beauty castle in which his mother lies trapped, guarded by an evil enchantress. This passage marks the transformation of David's psyche, as he confronts his deepest fears and at last accepts his mother's death. The treasure David seizes is the realisation that his stepmother cares for him deeply and that he loves his new half-brother. After a final battle in which he defeats the Crooked Man by not revealing his brother's name, David is rewarded by the reappearance of the Woodsman, who guides him on his journey home. David crosses the threshold back, 'resurrecting' in his ordinary world when he wakes from a coma in hospital. The boon he returns

with to restore his world is the love and acceptance he has found for his new family.

David journeys deep into the world of fairy tale, but his story begins in the ordinary world. For the development of the *unheimlich*, this is of key importance. Freud posits that the *unheimlich* is not present in literature that “abandons the basis of reality right from the start” (*The Uncanny* 155-156). In fairy tales, uncanny effects such as secret powers and omnipotence of thought are considered ‘normal’ events and are therefore not experienced as *unheimlich* by the reader, whose disbelief is suspended for the reading. Instead, the *unheimlich* is best achieved when a writer has “to all appearances taken up his stance on the ground of common reality” (156), only to then blur the boundary between reality and fantasy. In her study of the uncanny in death, art and femininity, Elisabeth Bronfen notes that “the *most important* boundary blurring inhabited by the uncanny is that between the real and fantasy” (113, emphasis added).

David’s story is anchored in the ordinary world of common reality, the world of terminal illnesses, hospitals, love affairs, and war. At the same time, however, the border between his world of common reality and the fantasy world of fairy tales is repeatedly effaced, as David’s mother teaches him to believe that stories “lay dormant” in books, “hoping for the chance to emerge” (3). David grows up believing that his world exists parallel to the equally real world of stories, so much so that “sometimes the wall separating the two became so thin and brittle that the two worlds started to blend into each other” (10). Throughout his mother’s illness, David reads her the stories they have always loved and read together: “myths and legends and fairy tales, stories of castles and quests and dangerous, talking animals” (2). These stories are part of David’s “home”; they are deeply familiar and bring him the comfort and safety of *heimlich* in its first definition.

David’s familiar world of fairy tales turns *unheimlich* when his ordinary life takes on a fairytale twist: his beautiful and beloved mother has died and been replaced by another woman. Richly dressed with “gold and diamonds glitter[ing] at her ears and throat” and “with long, dark hair and bright red lips” (15), Rose is at once reminiscent of a queenly stepmother and Snow White. Her name recalls the fairytale symbol of romance and pain. On catching his father and Rose kissing “[w]hen they thought he wasn’t looking” (16), David apprehends what his father has kept *heimlich* and begins to have fits and attacks in which the landscapes of his once-familiar fairytale world appear strange and threatening, “a twilight place of shadows and cold winds, heavy with the smell of wild animals”

(46). The perpetual and eerie twilight of Elsewhere signifies David's dawning knowledge, "the process of ceasing to be dark, the process of revelation or bringing to light", that is experienced as *unheimlich* (Royle 108). Moreover, soon after moving into Rose's house, David discovers that his room harbours a dark secret. It once belonged to Rose's uncle Jonathan, a boy who loved books and fairy tales, and who disappeared one day with his adopted little sister. Neither child was ever found or returned home.

Focusing on the blurring of reality and fantasy, Freud identifies the following as potentially *unheimlich*: uncertainty about whether a supposedly lifeless figure may perhaps be animate (135); epileptic fits, as these may hint at mechanical processes "hidden behind the familiar image of a living person" (135); the loss of sight and the removal of eyeballs (136-140); the *Doppelgänger*, along with mirror-images and the function of self-observation (141-143); the constant recurrence of things and the compulsion to repeat – the *Wiederholungszwang* (142-145); and animistic conceptions such as wish-fulfilment or telepathic dreams (145-147). Freud also lists death, dead bodies and ghosts (148), as well as severed limbs and being buried alive (150) as *unheimlich*.

All of these elements are interwoven in David's psychological journey, beginning with the attack of fits that precede his visions of Elsewhere. 'Resurrecting' in his ordinary world after crossing the threshold back, David finds himself in hospital, where he is told that "he had taken another of his fits, [...] and this one had caused him to lapse into a coma" (305). To all appearances, David's body lies lifeless in a hospital bed, the familiar image of his face giving away nothing of the challenges he is facing and the battles he is fighting in Elsewhere. While David's fits may not arouse fears of mechanical processes, they nevertheless serve as a reminder that behind a familiar face, a whole other world can be hidden away; *heimlich* in both its senses merge and turn *unheimlich*.

Watched over by Rose, David has been lying inanimate, much like the Sleeping-Beauty mother he had hoped to rescue. Doubling, repetition, and recurrence pervade, layer, and shape the entire text: the world of Elsewhere functions as a fairytale mirror of the trauma David has to negotiate in his ordinary world. In what could be interpreted as an act of *Wiederholungszwang*, David crosses the threshold into Elsewhere, where he repeats the events that have occurred in his ordinary world – an uncanny repetition comprising wish-fulfilment and grotesquely reassembled aspects of the myths, legends and fairy tales that were once deeply familiar to him. David describes Elsewhere as "a curious mix of the strange and the familiar" (194), the story of his journey being "itself made up of

other stories” (106). In the course of his final trial, David discovers that Rose’s uncle Jonathan has journeyed into Elsewhere before him – that it is here Jonathan disappeared to as a child, along with his adopted sister. David’s journey has been a recurrence of Jonathan’s, and in this sense, David uncannily doubles Jonathan: he occupies Jonathan’s room in Rose’s house, this room is filled with fairy tale books Jonathan used to read, Jonathan hated his adopted little sister, and Jonathan was lured into Elsewhere. Having been tricked by the Crooked Man into giving up the name of his sister, Jonathan remains forever a child, trapped as king of Elsewhere, waiting for David to release him by taking his place. Jonathan’s prized treasure is his Book of Lost Things, in which he has written down everything he has lost to the Crooked Man – the trope for wish-fulfilment. In the doubling between the two boys, Jonathan portrays a possible version of David in a process of mirroring through which David can recognise what he himself must not become. If he is to successfully complete his journey, he must recognise and leave behind the selfish desire for wish-fulfilment that has imprisoned Jonathan in Elsewhere.

The figure of the Woodsman is another crucial doubling, presenting an alternative version of David’s father. In his ordinary world, David’s father is exhausted by the antagonism between Rose and David, so much so that “David could tell that his father’s patience with both of them was almost extinguished” (44). Worn out by stress at work – his job is to intercept and break coded messages from the Germans – David’s father shouts at them (44), buries his face in his hands (45), forbids David to leave his room and threatens to send him away to boarding school (55). The Woodsman is the first of Campbell’s “curiously fluid, ambiguous forms” to meet David after his crossing of the first threshold and represents the strong, reassuring father-figure David craves. On finding him cold and frightened in the woods of Elsewhere, the Woodsman “raised David up onto his back” (67). This seemingly small gesture of comfort is of vital importance to David; it is the support he has been longing for: “It had been a long time since someone had carried David upon his back. He was too heavy for his father now, but the woodsman did not appear troubled by the burden” (67-68). Metaphorically and physically, David is aware of himself as a burden to his father, often imagining that his father would prefer to be rid of him, so that “[he] and Rose could start a new family, untroubled by the remnant of the old” (83). On their first morning together, the Woodsman notices the obsessive-compulsive routines David adheres to. He calms David’s fears and counsels him in a manner David may have hoped for from his father: “Then find routines that allow you to feel

secure when they are done. You told me that you have a new brother: look to him each morning. [...] Seek others who are weaker than you are, and try to give them comfort where you can. Let these be your routines, and the rules that govern your life” (85).

The doubling between Rose and the disturbingly distorted Snow White of Elsewhere presents a grotesque mirroring of David’s intense dislike for his stepmother. On their first meeting in his ordinary world, David notes that Rose “claimed to eat very little, although she finished most of her chicken that afternoon and had plenty of room for pudding afterwards” (15). Because he has eavesdropped, David knows that “Rose had spoken about ‘people’ and how these ‘people’ were talking. She didn’t like what they were saying” (24). David believes Rose has talked his father into marrying her. The mixture of falseness and covetousness he perceives in her is extended and exaggerated in the obese, lazy, and greedy Snow White of Elsewhere, who sits out her days waiting for a prince to marry her while treating the dwarves as slaves. This comically distorted fairytale mirroring reflects David’s very nascent capabilities of self-observation: before he can overcome his blindness to Rose’s generosity and deep concern for him, he has first to recognise his own infantile fears and jealousies.

Interlaced with the multiple layers of doubling and mirroring are the recurring motifs of blindness, eyes, and the removal of eyeballs. Captured and tied up in the house of a huntress who dismembers her prey, David sees a bottle “filled almost to the top with eyeballs” (137). Uncannily, these plucked-out eyeballs “seemed alive to David, as though being wrenched from their sockets had not deprived them of the capacity to see” (137). Freud views the removal of eyeballs and the fear of blindness as “a substitute for the fear of castration” (139), and while David may not fear literal castration, his greatest fear is being ‘dismembered’ from his family. In the reflection of a pool, he sees his father, brother, and Rose: “They were all laughing, even Georgie, who was being tossed high in the air by his father just as David had once been” (158). David is not part of this picture. Like the eyeballs in the glass jar, he has been ‘plucked out’ from the family unit by what he sees and does not want to know: “Rose and his father were standing beside the bed, kissing each other. Then, as David watched, they lay down together. David looked away. His face was stinging, and he felt a great rage rising up inside” (159).

Disempowered by what he perceives as Rose’s sexual power over his father, David’s mission is to rescue his Sleeping-Beauty mother from the castle of the evil enchantress, believing he can thereby restore the family he once had. Having

passed the magic traps and thick thorns protecting the castle, David gains entry to the chamber in which his mother lies asleep on a stone altar. But his encounter with her is very brief: he kisses a cheek “so cold that the touch of her was painful to him” (234), and when she opens her eyes, “black, devoid of colour, like lumps of coal set in snow” (235), she is no longer David’s mother. “Now she was Rose, his father’s lover. Her hair was black, [...] and it pooled like liquid night. Her lips opened, and David saw that her teeth were very white and very sharp, the canines longer than the rest” (235). In his supreme and uncanny ordeal, David faces and battles a vampiric and terrifyingly sexual Rose – or rather “Rose, but Not-Rose” (236): “The shawl around her shoulders fell away, exposing an alabaster neck and the tops of her breasts. David saw drops of blood upon them, like a necklace of rubies frozen upon her skin. [...] One slim finger, its nail etched in blood, touched itself to her lips. ‘Here,’ she whispered. ‘Kissss me here’” (235-236). Using the claw of a beast he has slain in a prior challenge, David slashes Not-Rose’s eyes and blinds her – or, to borrow Freud’s terminology, “castrates” her –, nullifying the sexual power he fears (or rather, his fear of *her* sexual power) before she is impaled on her own thorns. For Not-Rose, death comes as a release: “‘Thank you,’ she whispered, and then her body sagged against the thorns and crumpled to dust before his eyes” (238). The overtly sexual enchantress David has extinguished is Not-Rose, because Rose is not the covetous and sexually devious woman David has perceived her to be.

In this apotheosis of the *unheimlich*, David becomes “more man than boy” (233-234), finally able to admit to himself that “he had always known his mother was gone” (240) and to allow Rose her place in the family. He leaves the castle knowing he had been selfishly chasing “false hopes, dreams without foundation, insubstantial as the voice he had followed to this place” (240). Like the ego holding in check the irrational, impulsive id,<sup>1</sup> he rides away on his horse, and “[a]ll was quiet as they passed through the trees, for the things that dwelt within them heard David coming and were afraid. Even the Crooked Man [...] now looked at the boy in a new way” (239). Having journeyed through and faced his fears, David too can look at things in a new way: awakening in hospital, he sees in Rose not a sexually vampiric Snow White, but a deeply concerned and caring stepmother, who has been watching and crying over him in crumpled clothes and unwashed

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1 In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud draws an analogy of the id being a horse and the ego “a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse” (15).

hair (303). Her dishevelled appearance affirms that she is not the vain and self-serving woman he had perceived her to be.

### 3 UNHOMELY JOURNEYS

The far shorter, novella-length story of Westall's *Gulf* does not adhere quite as closely to Campbell's monomyth template as David's journey, but it does begin in the ordinary world and lends itself well to an exploration of the unhomely. The story of Andy's journey is narrated in the first person by his older brother Tom and begins with the depiction of a fairly affluent family life. "Big in body and big in spirit" (7), Tom's father is nicknamed "Horsie", owns a construction company, plays rugby, and has a penchant for fast cars. Tom's mother is a county councillor, gentle, caring, always laughing and always helping people. They live in a "half-timbered house, full of pretty little antiques" (9-10), and Tom feels "very *safe* with them" (10, emphasis in original). Lonely before the arrival of his little brother, Tom invents an imaginary friend he names "Mr Figgis", who goes everywhere with him. Upon Andy's birth, Tom gives up this imaginary friend: "Andy took his place" (10), he narrates, transferring the name "Figgis" to his baby brother. It is through the telepathic journeys of Tom's younger brother Andy – henceforth referred to by his nickname "Figgis" – that the family's familiar and "safe" home is turned strange and unhomely.

In *Gulf*, the call to adventure happens incrementally and through the portal of Figgis's sensitivity and deep empathy. "He had Things about people, and Things about things" (12), Tom observes, both fascinated and frustrated by his brother's intense need to connect with people and objects, "as if searching out their very soul" (12). On holiday in Marbella, Figgis spends an entire weekend staring at a newspaper photograph of an Ethiopian mother and her starving baby. Figgis empathically knows, "His name is Bossa. [...] His insides hurt. He can't understand why his mother won't give him food" (27). These images come in stark contrast to the carefree holiday world of Spanish villas, blue skies, beaches, and ice-creams. Figgis's misery creates "a hole in the landscape, a black hole" (23) that worries his mother, infuriates his father, and drives all other holiday makers to seek another spot on the beach.

For Bhabha, the uncanny arises when "the border between home and world becomes confused; and [...] the private and the public become part of each other" ("The World and the Home" 141). Figgis's telepathy and the "black hole" of

his misery efface the border between home and world, opening a space from which the repressed and ignored anguish of a starving child emerges. His father may try to obliterate the problem by tearing the newspaper photograph “slowly and terribly into tiny strips” (24), but in calling the Ethiopian baby by its name and describing the pain of starvation, Figgis plucks mother and child out of anonymity, rendering it impossible for their suffering to remain in the outside world. Their plight has entered and become part of Figgis’s home.

Through his telepathic journeys, Figgis experiences and shares with Tom uncanny “ways of living at home abroad or abroad at home” (Bhabha qtd. in Huddart 79). Dreaming of the South Sea Islands over a period of several weeks, Figgis wakes up to describe with detailed clarity “people singing and laughing and feasting round bonfires on the beach” (21), demonstrates his newfound skills in tying “the knots they used” (21) and provides precise information on South Sea fish (22). As Figgis’s dreams become “more real than real life” to Tom (22), they blur the boundaries between home and world, allowing him to live as though at home in other cultures and allowing those cultures into his home. In terms of the monomyth pattern, however, Figgis – and through him his brother Tom – refuse the call to adventure: however strange they may be or however much fun they might provide, the effects of Figgis’s journeys are short-lived, his interest quickly switching to “some other Thing” (15). Mere seconds after announcing the precise moment of Bossa’s death, Figgis asks for ice-cream, the entire episode with all its intensity seemingly forgotten (28). His empathic connections, however deep and real, only last for the duration of his telepathic journey, switching off instantly when the journey ends. In this sense, his telepathy emulates the family’s television set, switching on and off and jumping between channels, reflecting in a wider frame how short attention spans are and how fickle charity is in modern society.

The crossing of the first threshold comes when Figgis telepathically journeys into Latif’s world. This journey differs from his former ones in that Figgis is not just empathically connected to Latif, he actually *becomes* Latif. As with all of his other journeys, this one begins suddenly: Tom wakes up to Figgis shouting triumphantly in what Bhabha terms “the uncanny fluency of another’s language” (*The Location of Culture* 139) while brandishing a stick, his face “convulsed” and “fanatical” (Westall 31). For Tom, his brother has become *unheimlich*: “But where was this foreign language coming from? The hairs stood up on the back of my neck, and it wasn’t just the morning chill” (31).

Coinciding with the outbreak of the Persian Gulf War, Figgis's telepathic journeys to Tikrit, Latif's village just north of Baghdad, make immediate a world distanced and trivialised by repetitive news reports showing "the same old video recordings of orange tanks moving through pink dust clouds" (49), while anaesthetising the viewer from the horrors of war with anodyne talk of "Friendly fire" and "Tactical penetration" (79). Figgis loses the ability to relate the fine details of his telepathic dreams on awaking, and while dreaming, speaks only the "strange language" Tom later identifies as the Arabic of central Iraq. Tom discovers that he can communicate with Figgis in English during "an in-between stage" (46), when Figgis is just starting to come out of his dreams, and is neither fully himself nor the Other. In this uncanny twilight stage, Latif appears to Tom not as the enemy the news reports have portrayed, but as a boy his brother's age with a father who "repairs cars for a living" (46) and a best friend called Akbar who is a shepherd (51). Huddart posits that "the way new contexts change the meaning of a statement [...] can also be described as uncanny" (80). The visions revealed through Figgis's journeys provide a new context that render *unheimlich* all war talk of "bomb[ing] them to bits" (50), along with the "big military stuff" (51) Tom reads. He sees what is kept out of his home by the televised images of "apricot-coloured Tornados taking off" (50) and "Stormin' Norman [...] as big as a cliff, and as certain as God" (77). Figgis makes visible a child soldier "never getting letters from his mum" (52), "always trying to get rid of lice" (52), and playing football with his friends "till the old ball burst and they couldn't repair it" (51). For Tom, these experiences reflect what Bhabha describes as the unhomely "shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" ("The World and the Home" 141).

For both Tom and Figgis, the apotheosis comes in the final pages of the novella. Locked up in a psychiatric hospital, Figgis telepathically connects with Latif and 'becomes' him, recreating Latif's shelter in Kuwait out of old mattresses and war paraphernalia provided through donations to the hospital. Huddling in this reconstructed shelter with Figgis/Latif, Tom feels "almost as if I was sitting in a trench with him, out in Kuwait" (81). From Figgis/Latif's cries and actions – and from simultaneous news reports on television – it is clear that Kuwait is being shell-bombed. In a brief moment of respite, the telepathic connection between Figgis and Latif breaks, allowing Figgis to report that Latif's friends in Kuwait are all dead, lying scattered "all in pieces; arms, legs, heads still inside steel helmets" (87). Moments later, the connection re-established, Tom bears witness to the horrific and torturous death of Latif, hears his terrifying screams as he tries to

quench the flames engulfing his friend Akbar, watches Figgis “own body [...] writhing, being tossed into the far corner of the room [...] by the power of something that was tearing it to bits” (90).

When Tom’s brother wakes up in hospital, he has no memory at all of the ordeal they have just been through. He returns to his ordinary life, where he is “normal with knobs on” (93), achieves top grades in school, plays rugby, and grows “quite big and beefy” (94). Tom sadly notes how “the big change is in Figgis. Or should I say Andy, because we don’t see Figgis any more? No more funny little ways; no more talk of dreams or day-dreams, no more interesting revelations [...] No more crises” (93). The sensitive and empathic part of Andy embodied in “Figgis” has died along with Latif, leaving Andy “clean and free” (91) of the terrifying pain he has experienced. In this narrative, Tom is the hero who returns from the journey with an elixir or treasure. In their last brief moment of respite, “Figgis” pleads with Tom to “listen [...] and remember afterwards. Tell people what it was like. I *want* people to know what it was like. Latif and Akbar and Ali are people too [...]” (84, emphasis in original). This is the treasure Tom is given to return with, the elixir that could potentially change the world. But in the ordinary world he returns to, “[h]alf have forgotten about the Gulf War already; the rest are just hoping that Saddam will do something stupid, so we can bomb him to hell again; for good” (95). Ensnared within the protective confines of their domestic worlds, Tom’s parents, brother, and school friends remain safely distanced from larger world issues by the anodising filter of their television screens.

#### 4 UNHOMED HEROES

This paper has explored David’s passage to adulthood as a frightening journey of discovery through Freud’s *unheimlich* and examined how Figgis and Tom’s unhomely journeys illustrate the dislocation Bhabha refers to when the home “does not remain the domain of domestic life” (“The World and the Home” 141), but allows a world repressed, stereotyped, and trivialised by Western television culture to become visible. Set at a time of war, both novels are driven by death and destruction, their heroes confronting the terrifying forces of irreversible change. The journeys end with the heroes crossing the threshold back to the ordinary worlds from which they set out. But have they really returned *home*? David returns from the liminal world of Elsewhere and grows up in his ordinary world, befriending

Rose and his brother Georgie. The closing paragraphs sketch out how David's adult life is "filled with great grief as well as great happiness, with suffering and regret as well as triumphs and contentment" (306). David falls in love and gets married; and when his wife and baby die in childbirth, David is driven to repeat his journey through the *unheimlich*: living out his life in the house bequeathed to him by Rose, David writes *The Book of Lost Things* – and waits to return to Elsewhere. The unhomely journey portrayed in *Gulf* ends with Tom feeling isolated. "I miss Figgis more than I can say" (94), he narrates. "I'm lonely without him. Most lonely when I'm with Andy. Lonely and bored with Andy" (94). To be at home in the ordinary world – as Andy is after "Figgis" leaves him – requires the loss of sensitivity and empathy embodied in the death of "Figgis" and a blind immersion in the dominant culture.

The journeys of David and Andy carry a conflicted message: much as we may wish to remain in the safe familiarity of home, doing so is often not just an impossibility, but would also be detrimental to our development as caring and involved members of society. Tom is unable to share his elixir with his parents and brother, who retreat into the safety of their domestic life, leaving Tom scared, "because nobody seems to give a damn about anything outside our house any more" (94). As part of his maturation process, David recognises that not everything can or must be "restored to the way it was" (240). To grow, the hero must be unhomed, the comforting notion of home as a perfectly safe harbour relinquished. This process is often a painful and frightening one. For as long as this is so, the *unheimlich* will remain pertinent to children's literature.

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