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Time and Timelessness in Judith Kerr's Child-Pet Relationship❖

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the interplay between linear and cyclical narratives that construct a distinctive portrayal of childhood in Judith Kerr's Mog picturebook series. It examines how the domestic cat, Mog, functions as an emotional catalyst shaping the social and emotional development of Nicky, the child protagonist, while preserving memories of childhood innocence and domestic harmony. Based on the Kerr family cat, Mog debuted in 1970, and her enduring bond with the Thomas family has resonated with generations of young readers. Drawing on Romantic conceptions of childhood, narratology, and historical contexts, the discussion addresses temporal duality in the series. It applies Maria Nikolajeva's framework of mythic and linear time (2000) to analyze how Mog influences both Nicky's progressive development and his recurring childhood experiences in the verbal and visual texts. The construction of timeless childhood is further explored through Gérard Genette's iterative frequency (1980), Mog's symbolic death, and Pierre Nora's reflections on memory and history (1989). The article then considers cultural dimensions of Mog's heroism through her relationship to Simon, an honored World War II naval cat, to trace how Mog's narrative engages with British wartime memory. This analysis illuminates how picturebooks employ child-pet relationships to negotiate time and timelessness within childhood, shedding light on the interaction between literary imagination and cultural attitudes toward animals.

KEYWORDS: Judith Kerr, *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, picturebook, childhood representation, mythic and linear time, history and memory, child-pet relationship, Simon the War Cat

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朱迪絲・克爾文本中兒童與寵物關係裡的時間與永恆

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摘　要

本文探討了線性和循環敘事之間的相互作用，這些敘事在朱迪絲・克爾（Judith Kerr）的阿默圖畫書系列（Mog picturebook series）中構建了對童年的獨特描繪。它探討了家貓阿默（Mog）如何作為情感催化劑塑造兒童主角尼基（Nicky）的社交和情感發展，同時保留童年純真和家庭和諧的記憶。阿默以克爾家貓為原型，於 1970 年首次亮相，她與托馬斯（Thomas）家族的持久聯繫引起了一代又一代年輕讀者的共鳴。本文借鑒浪漫主義的童年觀念、敘事學和歷史背景，討論了該系列中的時間二元性。它應用瑪麗亞・尼古拉耶娃（Maria Nikolajeva）的神話和線性時間框架（2000）來分析阿默如何影響尼基的漸進發展以及他在語言和視覺文本中反覆出現的童年經歷。通過熱拉爾・熱奈特（Gérard Genette）的迭代頻率（1980）、阿默的象徵性死亡以及皮埃爾・諾拉（Pierre Nora）對記憶和歷史的反思（1989）進一步探討了永恆童年的建構。該文繼而透過阿默與二戰海軍貓西蒙（Simon）的關係，探討阿默英雄主義的文化維度，以追溯阿默的敘述如何與英國戰時記憶互動。這項分析闡明了圖畫書如何利用兒童與寵物的關係來協商童年時期的時間和永恆性，揭示了文學想像力與對動物的文化態度之間的相互作用。

關鍵詞：朱迪絲・克爾、《健忘的阿默》、圖畫書、童年表現、神話和線性時間、歷史和記憶、兒童與寵物的關係、戰貓西蒙

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"I was enchanted by the strangeness of cats," said Judith Kerr (Pires). Inspired by her household cat's quirkiness and enigmatic gloominess, Kerr created Mog based on her eponymous cat to entertain her children and enrich their reading experience (*Judith Kerr's Creatures* 68). Mog, a plump and amiable tabby, lives with the Thomas family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas and their two children, Nicky and Debbie. This beloved feline character first appeared in the story *Mog the Forgetful Cat* (1970), whose success brought about the creation of a picturebook series. Mog's remarkable escapades, particularly her frequent domestic scrapes, and the intimate bond between her and Nicky, have established a unique memory for readers worldwide and thus frame the central theme of this article.

Despite the perennial popularity of this feline character, scholarship on Kerr's works remains emerging. Louise Sylvester interprets the functions of dreams and nightmares in the Mog picturebooks within the context of *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971), Kerr's semi-autobiographical novel recounting her childhood experiences (16-30). Inés Condoy Franco expands on Sylvester's work by analyzing the depiction of war (205-26). Tim Beasley-Murray inspects gender and patriarchy in *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968), another bestselling picturebook by Kerr (199-214). This article turns attention to Kerr's primary intent behind the Mog picturebooks: to craft stories for her children. This approach delivers a profound interpretation of the author's conception of childhood, layered and intertwined with her nostalgic memories of domestic cats. More than through human experiences alone, "through Mog's eyes, child readers are invited to explore themes of friendship, family, and the magic found in the most ordinary of circumstances" (Willis). Given that nonhuman animal presences often haunt the margins of literary studies, philosophy, sociology, history, and anthropology (Talairach ii), this article paves a cross-disciplinary path to untangle the intricate verbal and visual narratives of Mog. In essence, it aims to explore the traces of pets and their relationships with human family members in children's literature by concentrating on the child-pet dynamics depicted in Kerr's picturebooks.

If all children's fiction contains a linear progression of maturation in which "changes and the necessity to take the first step toward initiation, toward adulthood, become a natural central theme" (Nikolajeva 7), Mog plays a distinctive role in shaping Nicky's social-emotional development while immortalizing the playfulness and harmony of the boy's childhood. The

creations of Nicky's childhood, the realms of time and timelessness, and the dialogues "between history and memory" (Nora 7) find their embodiment in the relationship between the cat and the boy.[1] Drawing from Maria Nikolajeva's depiction of time in her publication, *From Mythic to Linear: Time in Children's Literature* (2000), this article primarily looks at the literary use of Mog as a companion animal that facilitates a unique narrative structure, intertwining mythic time within the child's linear growth. Besides highlighting animal characters in forming childhood imagination and development, it provides additional insight into the broader implications of animals in literature. One of these implications is to "reveal the ways in which animal lives have been shaped by human culture" (McHugh et al. 10). In *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, the event of Mog being awarded a medal by the police for her heroic act provides this article a pathway to explore the life of Simon, a cat serving on the HMS Amethyst during World War II. Acknowledging that this brief exploration offers only a glimpse into animal-human history, it intends to reimagine some experiences of those without a voice in the past and to bring their stories alive in the present.

This article begins by reviewing existing scholarship and criticism to support a multifaceted analysis of Judith Kerr's portrayal of Mog. It integrates perspectives from literature and historiography to identify the varied roles of animals and their relationships with humans in narratives, particularly in children's literature. The core theoretical framework is based on Maria Nikolajeva's theories, supplemented by Pierre Nora's notion of memory, which grants philosophical insights into time and eternity. This framework is used to analyze linear and mythic time in the relationship between Mog and Nicky. For interpreting picturebooks as a distinct genre, Perry Nodelman's *Words about Pictures* (1988) and Angela Yannicopoulou's focalization are instrumental in decoding the visual symbols and the interplay between text and illustration (65-85).[2]

Having laid the theoretical groundwork of Kerr's Mog, the article proceeds to examine the linear progression of Nicky's development through the boy's

[1] Pierre Nora's essay, "Between Memory and History," examines how collective memory influences historical narratives and highlights the tension between lived memory and recorded history (7-24).

[2] Yannicopoulou proposes types of focalization to study the use of perspective in children's picturebooks. Her insight resonates with the irony between words and images suggested by Nodelman. Together, they provide tools for reading viewpoints beyond human characters in stories (Yannicopoulou 65-85; Nodelman). For further explanations, see Yannicopoulou's "Focalization in Children's Picture Books: Who Sees in Words and Pictures?" and Nodelman's *Words about Pictures* in the Works Cited.

connections with the cat in *Mog and the Baby* (1980) and *Mog's Kittens* (1994). It considers childhood history and child development through lenses, including Katie Barclay and Kimberley Reynolds' "Histories of Childhood" and John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1977), to illustrate Nicky's behavioral and emotional changes influenced by Mog.[3][4] To evoke mythic time and the everlasting bond between Mog and Nicky, the narratives employ the devices of "iterative frequency" and "transitory death" to convey nonlinear narratives and signify timelessness (Nikolajeva 6-8). These devices aid in underlining the use of space, behavior, and memory, building an enduring innocence and harmony for Nicky's childhood in *Goodbye Mog* (2000) and *Mog's Kittens*.

Lastly, we shall reflect upon the historical significance of animals by considering the heroic image of Mog being awarded a medal for her actions—a concept that may appear peculiar to contemporary readers who view pets differently. This image found in *Mog the Forgetful Cat* opens a window into the culture of awarding medals to animals in twentieth-century wartime Britain, exemplified by the extraordinary story of Simon, a naval cat. By retelling Simon's story, this article seeks to create a dialogue of "remembering and forgetting" and to forge a new memory (Nora 8), a bond that bridges the animal past with the present.

I. Traces and Representations of Animals in Children's Literature

"The reliance on animals in children's literature over the past two centuries has become a key means by which the civilizing process that children go through has been mediated by the animal body" (Ratelle 10). Literary animals have been omnipresent in serving didactic purposes in books written for children. Yet, they are not mere instructional devices but contain rich cultural nuances and social expectations whose complexity has increasingly stimulated researchers to untangle them. This section reviews perspectives from literary criticism and historiography to lay out diverse approaches to studying Kerr's Mog. It traces the duality of time as reinforced by the presence of animals in

[3] Barclay and Reynolds reconstruct childhoods by investigating how different historical contexts shape children's emotions and experiences (1-24). It presents emotions as cultural products influenced by societal norms and historical changes.

[4] John Bowlby's Attachment Theory in "The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds" investigates the formation of early emotional connections (201-10), their influence on development, and the consequences of disruptions on psychological health.

childhood, marks the complexity of focal points in animal picturebooks, and addresses the challenges in animal-human history.

Romanticism studies furnish tools for identifying the traces of animals within historical contexts and their representations in literary narratives. They also illuminate the ideological constructs of childhood that continue to influence contemporary children's literature. Humanitarian movements of the eighteenth century saw the rising awareness of animal rights. Romantic writers were distressed by the thought of cruelty to animals, insects, and fish. Some writers "who saw children as their audience often used animals as a didactic tool for encouraging benevolence and sympathy to both the working poor and animals themselves" (Ratelle 7). *Evenings at Home* (1792) by John Aikin and Anna Letitia Barbauld presented a fly-centered view of mankind, delivering moral and educational content for young readers. A father explains to a child what flies are made for in the story. He said, "Suppose a fly capable of thinking, would he not be equally puzzled to find out what men were good for?" (Aikin and Barbauld 233). This shifting attitude toward nonhuman beings also resulted in the practice of keeping pets, which was increasingly common in households during the same period. From the Romantic view of nature, David Perkins attributes this inclination to the belief that "bringing a pet into your home was to bring innocence, spontaneity, gladness, and goodness" (48). The depiction of domestic animals has been a frequent theme in children's literature. If pet keeping symbolizes the preservation of innocence and gladness, then children's stories that embrace this symbol tap into a rich reservoir of Romantic purity and nostalgia for nature, which has constantly shaped the narrative of childhood. The duality of or tension between animals serving as a means to cultivate children and to preserve the idyllic childhood is again manifested by the notion Amy Ratelle points out. She emphasizes, "Our contemporary conception of childhood as a state of innocence worthy of protections has its origins in the Romantic idealization of nature and reaction against the Enlightenment's valorization of reason, as well as the middle-class impetus for education and self-improvement" (Ratelle 5).

The interplay between innocence and civilization, nature and society, in the Romantic ideology of animals threads through Nikolajeva's concept of time and timelessness in children's fiction, indicating the dynamic impact Mog could potentially have on Nicky's childhood. The linear progression in children's fiction is "the discovery of inevitable growth that must be the most traumatic in

a child's life" (Nikolajeva 7). It usually captures the maturation process, the social-emotional development, toward adulthood. Mythic time, on the other hand, is reversible, cyclical, and everlasting; it constructs a perpetual paradise, an enchanted playground where even "death is always followed by resurrection" (6). Pierre Nora's interpretation of memory and history lends a philosophical depth to underscore this framework. He suggests, "Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past" (Nora 8). Memory, in his words, is affective and magical, and it "takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (9). The memories Nicky recalls after Mog's passing in the story of *Goodbye Mog* are situated in various domestic corners that Kerr delicately describes both in the text and the images. Nora's memory provides valuable insights to interpret these "sites" and to highlight the cyclical essence of Nicky's childhood. Thus, these reflections on the Romantic ideology of animals and childhood, together with Maria Nikolajeva's explorations of time in children's literature and Nora's observations on memory, suggest a dynamic structure of temporality and timelessness in the child-pet relationship, which forms the basis for deeper investigation in this article.

Nodelman argues that "when words and pictures combine, irony emerges from the way in which the incompleteness of each is revealed by the differing incompleteness of the other" (223). This suggests that only by considering words and pictures as a unified whole can readers fully grasp the meanings performed in picturebooks. Nevertheless, the dual symbolic systems in picturebooks complicate narrative interpretation, as verbal and visual narratives apply distinct focalization options. An analysis by Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller on "the disturbance of the human and the proximity to animality" in animal literary history can be a potent vehicle for evaluating multiple interpretive positions (1), including those of both humans and animals, in picturebooks. This analysis allows for viewing animals not merely as passive adjuncts but as active participants in human cultures. As McHugh, McKay, and Miller suggest, reading animal imagery unfolds along two dimensions. The first is "metaphorical," where literary animals embody ideas about human life. The second is "material", focusing on their portrayal as accounts of their own material or experiential reality (2). Navigating between them, picturebooks present multiple viewpoints through text and images, which together reveal the tension between animal lives and the meanings humans assign to them.

The Story of Black Beauty (2008) showcases the dynamic focal points of picturebooks, inviting readers to interpret the story from standpoints beyond humans. *The Story of Black Beauty* is adapted from Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* published in 1877. The story is an autobiography narrated from the perspective of a horse named Black Beauty, delineating animal experiences within human cultures. It raised awareness of animal cruelty and inspired nineteenth-century animal welfare initiatives. Retold by Susanna Davidson and illustrated by Alan Marks, the 2008 picturebook version offers additional interpretive perspectives to explore the irony between human characteristics and animalistic behaviors in animal representations. In the first double spread, the narrative recounts Black Beauty being purchased by a man and facing separation from his mother (Davidson 1-2). On the recto side, narrated remarks from the mother serve to remind Black Beauty before his departure:

> "Be brave, Black Beauty," said my mother.
>
> "All young horses must leave their mothers, and make their way in the world."
>
> "Just remember—never bite, or rear, or kick. And, whatever happens, always do
>
> your best." (2)

The verbal text is explicitly didactic and projects human ideology regarding the life of a working animal. However, the illustration on the same page presents a third-person viewpoint that features a close-up of two horses. Both of their heads are lowered and touching, leaning on each other, showing a deep tie between the mother and Black Beauty. Their body language reflects the mare-foal bond developed through animal social behaviors comparable to what veterinarians identify as "gentle nipping, nuzzling, and rubbing" (McGreevy 129). Instead of visually making the mother a focalizer, the illustration offers a third-person point of view, a relatively objective position that can possibly be performed by other characters, including the other horses and the merchant depicted on the verso side. Some may see anthropomorphism as a problem in representing animal life through human manners or terms. And yet, Keri Cronin argues that "the representation of speaking animals allowed readers and activists to recognize animal agency" (203-23). The irony created by the dual

narrative systems in picturebooks expands interpretive options to include the agency of nonhuman beings and to welcome the imagination of animal life.

Judith Kerr expressed her fascination with the quirks of cats, and this fascination also stems from the discrepancy between human and animal experiences, as discussed above. In *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, Mog is portrayed as forgetful and clumsy because she frequently forgets her cat flap and struggles to find her way back home. From a cat's viewpoint, Mog probably does not comprehend the function of a cat flap, which leads the cat to numerous adventures within the human household. Beyond Mog's symbolic significance in Nicky's childhood, the shifts in perspective between text and images are crucial for unpacking Mog's experiences as a subject and for disclosing the life of a domestic cat.

Research on animal-human history has been thriving across multiple disciplines. The ongoing debates about animal agency, representation, and the materials used to reconstruct the past lives of animals remain vibrant and expansive. Hilda Kean suggests focusing on the role of historians in animal-human historiography, as opposed to the subject matter itself, in questioning the purpose and function of writing animal history ("Challenges" 57-64). This notion sets the stage for this article to deliberate on the intention and meaning behind probing into the historical and cultural influences on Mog's heroic image.

Instead of offering a comprehensive analysis of the evolving feline-human relationship throughout history, one purpose of this exploration is to raise recognition of a former feline presence and privilege the role of animals in the past. Simon served on the HMS Amethyst during World War II and was the only cat to receive a medal from the PDSA Dickin Medal in 1949. Simon's popularity, which led to his appearance in newspapers, postcards, and other media at that time, offers insight into the connection between a naval cat and the public. Examining Simon's life, the reasons for his medal, and the founding of The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA) gives a modest view into this special connection.

Walter Benjamin points out the importance of ensuring that specific events from the past are not forgotten but made relevant to the present moment (253-64). Approaches to ensure Simon's relevance in today's landscape have been extensively proposed by New Historicism studies. Stephen Greenblatt emphasizes that reading cultural productions, including books, "does not posit

historical processes as unalterable and inexorable, but it does tend to discover limits or constraints upon individual intervention" (15). This view helps achieve the other purpose, which is to interpret the "resonance and wonder" of the feline hero represented by Mog (Greenblatt 19). By resonance, it focuses on the cultural forces that affect the depiction of Mog. By wonder, it stresses the uniqueness and imagination in the character that makes the cat relatable to contemporary readers. Questions that aid in examining Mog as a cultural production include: Do Mog's actions, whether more human-like or animalistic, contribute to her receiving a medal and other gifts? Is there a reciprocal change or any alteration in the relationship between Mog and the humans? Attention to the historical context values the past lives of animals and celebrates the cultural richness and imagination in Mog. Judith Kerr has made Simon a memory through Mog, whether intentionally or unintentionally, guiding this article to reintroduce the naval cat into people's lives.

II. Linear Time, Inevitable Growth, and Detachment

"Time has, since Aristotle's day, been associated with change, with successiveness, or sequentiality, whether as a perception of the human mind or an actual characteristic of external reality" (Vaninskaya 6). Life in time has an end, and the process of dying encompasses various transformations, as opposed to the state of timelessness, which is characterized by the "absence of life (nothingness), a different kind of life (the afterlife), or God's eternal now" (Vaninskaya 6). Linear time in children's literature, often characterized by the process of growth, emphasizes the recognition of the end of innocence. This awareness of inevitable transformations disrupts harmony and eventually results in intense emotions and the formation of childhood memories. This section examines the characteristics of linear time in children's stories by exploring the portrayals of Mog and Nicky in three of Kerr's picturebooks: *Mog and the Baby*, *Mog's Kittens*, and *Goodbye Mog*.

According to Nikolajeva, linear time in children's fiction is constructed through the maturation process. This process "invokes the problems of growing up, aging, and death" (6), which have become prevalent themes in children's literature. A world without these problems is a magical place without time, such as Neverland, where Peter Pan and other children who never grow up reside. Nineteenth-century literature also frames social and emotional upheavals as

markers of maturation that signal the end of innocence (Austin 2003). Developmental challenges thus give chronological meaning to childhood while simultaneously threatening its idealized harmony. Whether physical or psychological, such transformative challenges represent the progressive development of children within measurable time and are used to temporarily or permanently disrupt the innocence of childhood in narratives. This premise provides a foundation for identifying linear time in the picturebooks and analyzing the roles of Mog in Nicky's social and emotional development. Companion animals are considered influential in shaping a child. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry proposed that pet ownership can help fulfill children's physical and emotional needs, including physical activity, comfort contact, empathy, and experience with the cycle of life ("Pets and Children"). The interaction between Mog and Nicky offers a rich ground for tracing the problems of growing up, many of which trigger "strong emotions arising from the formation, the maintenance, the disruption, and the renewal of attachment relationships" (Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss* 40). These emotions facilitate the identification of linear progression within the child-pet relationship and underscore significant socio-emotional events that shape the boy's early years.

Mog and the Baby, written and illustrated by Judith Kerr, was first published in 1980. Mog's peaceful life is disrupted when a neighbor asks Mrs. Thomas to look after her baby. Mog is wary of the baby, who pulls her tail and chases her around the house. Eventually, Mog decides to leave the house. The baby then follows Mog outside and immediately gets into danger on the road. In the end, Mog bumps into the baby—whether intentionally or accidentally is unclear—and prevents it from being hit by a car. On the book's cover, the baby is illustrated hugging Mog tightly with both hands. Mog, however, appears upset and reluctant, with the edges of her mouth turned downward. The conflicting emotions of the two characters create tension that invites readers to explore further. A similar visual appears again on page 10, accompanied by the text, "But Mog and Nicky had to stop playing ball because the baby did not know how to play" (Kerr, *Mog and the Baby* 10). Standing next to them, Nicky also appears distressed. This tension becomes apparent only after the baby arrives. Before that, the author dedicates a double spread to illustrating Mog and Nicky's daily routine of playing together (4-5). They engage with strings and balls, spending joyful moments in the house. When Nicky tickles Mog's

tummy, she is depicted as happy; her body feels relaxed, with her stomach facing upward and her limbs spreading. This harmony ends when their playtime is interrupted by the baby's arrival. Nicky's frequent expressions of frustration reveal his disappointment at being unable to play with Mog and having to assist Mrs. Thomas in looking after the baby. Despite Nicky's efforts, the baby continues to cry until Mrs. Thomas suggests, "It wants Mog" (18). The humans place the cat next to the baby, who then stops crying, even though the cat seems reluctant, narrowing her eyes and looking away.

Both Nicky and Mog are entrusted with the new responsibility of comforting the baby, which brings about anxiety as they navigate a transformation in their daily interactions. For Nicky, the loss of Mog as a playmate forces him to face the external reality and to adapt when being detached from the companion animal. For Mog, the human intervention in altering the previous bond and assigning new duties compels her to react, ultimately leading her to run away from the house. This outcome, as a silent act of resistance, occurs when Mog is napping, and the baby suddenly pulls her tail to wake her up (22). Neither Nicky nor Mrs. Thomas steps in to prevent the baby's action in this scene. This time, Mog refuses to compromise and instead chooses to jump out of the window to escape for safety. Bowlby notes, "Attachment behavior has become a characteristic of many species during the course of their evolution because it contributes to the individual's survival by keeping him in touch with his caregiver(s)" (*Attachment* 40). Mog's behaviors reflect not only a response to a traumatic change in an animal's life but a manifestation of her security being threatened, as her needs are inadequately addressed by her human caregivers. The co-evolution of humans and animals has been documented across various cultures and contexts. Scientists have suggested that "both humans and their animals can serve as attachment figures for each other" (Amiot et al. 557). The alteration of the harmony between Nicky and Mog operates as evidence of their evolving relationship, indicating the problems and changes in both Nicky's childhood and Mog's cat life.

The analysis of the next story focuses on Nicky's social development, which is affected by his interactions with Mog and the other cats. Published in 1994, *Mog's Kittens* narrates Mog's experience of giving birth to kittens. These newborns introduce several challenges to Nicky as he takes on the role of their caregiver. The shift in household dynamics elicits a mix of emotions. Eventually, Nicky gives the kittens away to his friends, restoring the routine he

shared with Mog prior to the kittens' presence. "Mog no longer sleeps on my bed. She has two kittens to look after" (1). On the same page, the illustration portrays Nicky lying in bed while observing Mog and the two kittens on the recto side of the spread. The conflict arises from the contrasting facial expressions of Nicky and Mog. Nicky appears forlorn, while Mog and the kittens display contentment. This visual contrast, coupled with the textual description, highlights Nicky's discomfort with Mog's altered status and indicates his sense of insecurity due to the detachment. By attending to Mog's subjectivity and her experiential reality, it is evident that her gaze remains on Nicky on the verso side while she tends to the kittens. However, the depiction of Mog's pleasure in motherhood visually captures aspects of animal behavior and animality that are universally observed across species. These mixed emotions are conveyed through the use of "variable internal focalization" (Yannicopoulou 70), which shifts the perspective between the two focal characters on the spread and consequently enriches the representation of literary animality. The following double spread demonstrates Nicky's immediate adaptation to reality. He assists with bathing the kittens, invites friends over to play with them, and follows the kittens throughout the house. His body language and facial expressions convey a sense of ease and satisfaction with his new responsibilities. Notably, other family members are absent from the entire story and provide no assistance in managing this significant domestic change. The didactic purpose of children's literature, established during the Romantic period, remains influential and is still evident in Kerr's picturebook. John Stephens observes that in children's fiction, "the use of story as an agent of socialization is a conscious and deliberate process" (9). Despite the lack of direct parental guidance in the narrative, the companion animal becomes a pivotal figure in facilitating Nicky's social and emotional transformation and reinforcing the author's ideology of the child-pet relationship.

The final story, *Goodbye Mog*, is analyzed through the lens of the history of emotions to investigate grieving practices, particularly the process of emotion management, as "a social phenomenon" (Barclay and Reynolds 5). This process stimulates children's awareness of the life cycle and guides them in performing bereavement and expressing feelings. *Goodbye Mog* (2002) centers on the end of Mog's life and her afterlife. The elderly Mog passes away, yet her spirit lingers to observe her grieving family. Through Mog's afterlife and the introduction of a new kitten, the narrative delineates the process of

moving forward and the value of remembering an animal that has passed. Barclay and Reynolds note:

> [H]ow childhood was understood, and its application to different groups of children, often affected what it was held children should be taught about death. Expectations of their capacity to process this information and emote in what was considered appropriate ways have similarly varied across time. (7)

This observation features the dynamic nature of childhood experiences shaped by emotions and learned as cultural constructs. Emotions, in this context, are products of historical moments and cultures. They are not merely reactions to change (such as the distress caused by Mog's new role in *Mog's Kittens*) but rather cultural forms that direct and place children within their communities. *Goodbye Mog* includes children's engagement in the grieving process and integrates them into a series of mourning practices. From grieving, burying, and commemorating, children expand their capacity to understand the meaning of death and to manage their feelings. The Thomas family grieves together, with everyone weeping. Both textual and visual descriptions represent the sorrow of bereavement when they discover that Mog has died. "She was our family pet. We'll all miss her," said Mr. Thomas (2). The following page showcases the Thomas family's funerary practices. Mr. Thomas holds Mog's empty basket while Mrs. Thomas and the children hold flowers. They stand around Mog's grave, marked with a tag, in their garden. Tears stop, and gentle smiles appear on their faces in the illustration on the same page. The history of emotions operates on the premise that emotion is learned. The bereavement process for pets witnesses the emotional curve that is accepted by the cultural norms and values and informs the development of a child's emotional management. Helena Cortés Gabaudan adds, "Death becomes the subject of a type of literature that serves a didactic and ideological purpose" (40). Mog's death represents the end of the physical bond between a child and a pet; moreover, it reveals the significant social and cultural impact on the formation of emotional expression in childhood.

The well-documented effect of Emotion-Enhanced Memory (EEM)[5] establishes that emotionally evocative details are better encoded and recalled than neutral information. Kerr makes Mog a powerful emotional trigger and an "indicator of the potential value of a stimulus, suggesting that priority should be given to recalling that particular stimulus or event" (Luminet and Cordonnier 10). It is impossible for one to remember all past events; thus, the cat modulates Nicky's ability to remember what is important, both individually and collectively, and to respond appropriately to similar events in the present and future. In Nicky's evolving relationship with the feline characters, the narratives illustrate the passage of time in the boy's childhood by dealing with themes of growth, aging, and loss. The Mog picturebooks show how these transformative experiences form a child's social and emotional development while interweaving the inevitable journey of growing up. The next section will look at the construction of mythic time in *Mog's Kittens* and *Goodbye Mog* to investigate how they build a sense of an eternal childhood.

III. Mythic Time, the Eternal Bond between Nicky and Mog

The concept of childhood as a state of innocence has long been reflected in symbols of purity and renewal in children's fiction. These symbols contribute to a mythic time that fosters "an illusion of a never-ending paradise" (Nikolajeva 10). In this paradise, "the wanderer in search of lost time and an escape from death" is a key element that relieves the suffering caused by chronological time and restores an idyllic and harmonious state (Vaninskaya 8). The following discussion examines the use of two literary devices, including "iterative frequency" and "transitory death," suggested by Nikolajeva, which construct achronic time in *Mog's Kittens* and *Goodbye Mog*. It also adopts Nora's insight into memories that take root in the domestic spaces that mark an everlasting attachment between Nicky and Mog.

The story of *Mog's Kittens* begins with Nicky feeling distressed due to Mog's new identity as a mother. In the illustration on page 1, Nicky is lying in bed without Mog beside him. He holds his head in his hands and looks toward the recto side of the spread, where Mog happily accompanies her new babies.

[5] Emotion-Enhanced Memory (EEM) has been reported for over a century in psychology, demonstrating that emotional load influences all stages of information processing and applies to both humans and animals (Luminet and Cordonnier 1-17).

A physical gap, or gutter, between the two pages extends the tangible distance between Nicky and Mog. Margaret R. Higonnet notes that "books that make narrative use of their own physical structures permit the reader to animate the text, in a modest echo of imaginative animation every reader engages in" (48). This physical separation on the pages visually reinforces the psychological distance between Nicky and Mog, deepening Nicky's sense of emptiness and enhancing readers' engagement with this gap. To ease the frustration of change and restore childhood harmony, the narrative employs two steps to counteract the linear progression in the quest for lost time. One is to remove Mog's new identity as a mother; the other is to recreate a daily routine. The former aligns with Jane Hamlett and Julie-Marie Strange's description of pets as "flexible persons and emotional commodities—loved, but constantly vulnerable to removal from the home and family" (177). The latter applies an iterative narrative device, as Nikolajeva describes: "It tells once about an event that has taken place several times or is taking place regularly" (8).

After caring for Mog's kittens, Nicky makes a decision to rehome them, effectively stripping Mog of her motherhood. On page 13, it is shown that all the kittens are sent away. "Mog and I miss the kittens," Nicky remarks, as he holds Mog while sucking his thumb and looking puzzled (Kerr, *Mog's Kittens* 13). Mog, with a downcast face, appears depressed in the same image. The subsequent page immediately returns to Nicky's bedroom, where this time both he and Mog lie contentedly in bed together, with the text, "Mog can sleep on my bed again" (14). Mythic time, against change, is crafted through the repetitive nature of events that compose an everyday rhythm. Gérard Genette specifies that iterative narrative—the repetition—is in fact "a mental construction, which eliminates from each occurrence everything belonging to it that is peculiar to itself, in order to preserve only what it shares with all the others of the same class, which is an abstraction" (113). The comforting experience of having Mog as a bedtime companion every night is one Nicky is reluctant to abandon, but he realizes that Mog's motherhood interrupts their interactive rhythm. The abstraction of interruption and the reconstruction of a daily routine allow the boy to reestablish his previous relationship with the pet and to reclaim his idyllic childhood, even at the cost of severing a feline's maternal experience.

"Death as a motif in children's literature has always been present in every artistic manifestation created by man since he was conscious of its essence as such" (García 139). The death of an animal or pet is a frequently employed device, perhaps because "it softens the feeling of fear and sadness caused by the loss of a loved one and stimulates the reader to reflect on an existence beyond life on earth" (Kenfel and House 10). The earlier discussion of death in *Goodbye Mog* underscores mourning practices as social constructs that influence childhood development. The focus now shifts to the portrayal of the afterlife and the involvement of memory in maintaining the enduring bond between Nicky and Mog during bereavement. "They will never manage without me. But it's quite true I was very lovely," said Mog, depicted as a spirit floating and watching the Thomas family mourning next to her tomb (Kerr, *Goodbye Mog* 3). Mog's afterlife is represented through her spirit, which continues to appear in the familiar domestic spaces she occupied during her life. The spirit, when examined more closely in the illustration, appears to be painted in a soft pale white, defined by faint silver shadows and delicate lines. A faint, cloud-like background is consistently attached to the spirit, and this visual effect additionally diminishes its visibility. In contrast to the vivid gray and charcoal stripes that characterize Mog's physical form during her life, her spirit is rendered in a pale and nearly colorless palette. The expressions of color delineate the boundary between the afterlife and the living world, where the human characters and the household settings remain vibrant and colorful. As Molly Bang observes, "Both black and white are non-colors, and both represent death" (69). In the English language, he further notes that linguistic expressions such as "black as death" and "dead-white" underline the association of black and white palettes with the absence of life. However, the softening of Mog's spirit in a muted tone may carry an alternative significance. "As a result of our inability to see in the dark, black often symbolizes the unknown and all our fears associated with the unknown, while white signifies brightness and hope" (Bang 68). Bang's assertion may find support in the etymology of the term. The word "white" originates from a root meaning bright or light, a definition that corresponds to the fact that bright light gives white its characteristic appearance ("Inspiration"). In physics, white refers to the light perceived by the human eye when all wavelengths of the visible spectrum are combined (Kelley). To symbolize Mog's transitory death, the author selects white shades rather than dark hues to portray the cat's spirit, which denotes her passing and

simultaneously encompasses the connotation of illumination and renewal following her departure. This color choice demonstrates how Judith Kerr mindfully crafts her illustrations to build "a safe space in which children can explore emotional relationships, including some of the big issues of life" such as death (Salisbury and Styles 86).

As Lourdes Lorenzo García and Ana Pereira Rodríguez note, "Children are taught to believe in the resurrection of characters, whether in their original form or transformed, to ease the profound desolation and emptiness left by death, allowing them to perpetuate themselves beyond it" (202). The representation of Mog's afterlife, aside from its implied effort to alleviate children's trauma of loss, resonates with Nora's philosophical perspective that memories are a magical, perpetual bond to the eternal present. Mog's spirit preserves the cat's presence in Nicky's daily life, symbolizing an ongoing connection beyond death and the memories she retains with the Thomas family. "Remember how she used to hang her tail in front of the telly?" muses Nicky (Kerr, *Goodbye Mog* 4). As he and his sister watch television in the living room, Mog's spirit is shown resting on top of the set as usual, with her translucent white tail drifting over the screen. On the next page, as the children sit in bed with a doll and a teddy bear in their hands, Debbie reminisces: "She used to come into our beds" (5). Mog's spirit, in the meantime, lingers above their heads in the illustration. The visual narrative stages the coexistence of life and the afterlife and elicits the shared memories between the children and Mog. These memories turn the domestic sites into sacred places where past moments with Mog can be repeatedly visualized, and the linear progression of her death can momentarily be reversed. The cognitive system responsible for receiving, storing, retaining, and transmitting what-, where- and when-information about past events is referred to by neurologists as episodic memory (Amici 1). This system involves the capacity for mental time travel, a phenomenon for which researchers are gathering more evidence to determine whether non-linguistic animals can demonstrate it. And yet, Mog is clearly equipped with this system. The domestic settings, along with the human moments of grief and remembrance, have encoded an episodic memory within the cat's mind and her spirit. This memory enables Mog to revisit the Thomas family in her afterlife and culminates in the visual representation of her peaceful smile as the narrative concludes:

> Debbie said, "But I'll always remember Mog."
>
> "So I should hope," thought Mog.
>
> And she flew up and up and up and up right into the sun.
>
> (Kerr, *Goodbye Mog* 29-30)

Memories form as the past becomes history; only when childhood ends does it achieve a kind of immortality. As articulated, "To live in the tale, you must die in the world; for the flower to endure, it has to be pressed to death" (Vaninskaya 17). The dynamics of linear and mythic time within childhood are closely interconnected. Picturebooks offer an exclusive platform where the fluidity of time can be richly described, illustrated, and evolved. The abiding relationship between the children and Mog is gently strengthened by the feline's lingering spirit and immortalized in the memories they share.

IV. Memories of a War Cat

> "I've seen watch-dogs, but never a watch-cat. She will get a medal," said the police. (Kerr, *Mog the Forgetful Cat* 35)

At the culmination of *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, Mog is awarded a medal for her unintentional bravery, as her forgetfulness leads her to alert the Thomas family to a potential break-in by a burglar. Mog's forgetfulness, or "misinterpretation of household objects," initially causes some inconveniences for the family, such as when she flattens and wrinkles Mrs. Thomas's hat by using it as a cozy bed (18-19). Even so, one night, forgetting again to use the cat flap—a small door specifically designed for Mog—Mog attempts to enter the house through the kitchen window. As she jumps up, the cat accidentally startles the burglar, who is attempting to steal items inside the house. A meticulous portrait of Mog is illustrated on the final page of the story (36). Mog wears a gold medal and smiles contentedly, as she sits next to a boiled egg, which serves as an additional reward for her accidental act of courage. The medal is inscribed with the words "To Mog for Bravery" and features a visual crown symbol all within a dotted circular frame. Although the portrayal of Mog as a hero might seem purely imaginative, it is richly influenced by cultural forces, consistent with Greenblatt's "resonance" (11). This final section delivers a brief overview of the culture of animal medals during World War II,

with a focus on Simon the cat as a notable example of feline valor. It also breaks down Mog's representation, which contains a complex blend of cultural influences and the author's creative vision.

The practice of honoring animals for their service to humanity with medals is not without historical precedent. Medaling animals can be traced back to the year 1943. The PDSA Dickin Medal, often referred to as the "Animal Victoria Cross," was instituted by Maria Dickin, the founder of The People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), to honor the gallantry and devotion of animals during the Second World War. The recipients of this medal comprise thirty-eight dogs, thirty-two pigeons, four horses, and one cat ("PDSA Dickin Medal"). Simon, who served on HMS Amethyst, a British warship during the Yangtze Incident, was the only cat ever to be awarded the medal. Simon gained widespread recognition for protecting food supplies from rat infestations and surviving artillery fire while cruising along the Yangtze River. He also became a favorable figure in stories featured in magazines, postcards, and newspapers.[6] In 1949, *Time* dedicated a commemorative column to Simon's death accompanied by a black and white photograph that featured a close-up of Simon with the Dickin Medal around his neck ("In Honored Memory" 29). The medal was double-sided, with one side bearing the words "For Gallantry" and "We Also Serve," all within a laurel wreath, and the other side showing "SIMON HMS Amethyst July 31st, 1949." Simon was buried at the Ilford Animal Cemetery, which was founded in the 1920s as a final resting place for pets and military animals. As reported by *Time*, on the day of his burial, the cat was placed in a dark wood coffin draped with the Union Jack, the national flag of the United Kingdom. The ship's crew, along with hundreds of people, including children, attended Simon's funeral. The entire mourning process saw participation from the soldiers who had formed memories with Simon aboard HMS Amethyst, as well as from the nation and its people who experienced the events of the Second World War.

The life of Simon offers a historical lens for interpreting Mog's heroic image and identifying the cultural influences and the author's creativity. The instinct of cats to catch mice was recognized as early as the Victorian era, when the British Museum employed cats for this purpose, allocating a budget of one

[6] For a comprehensive account of Simon's story, see Robin Hutton in the Works Cited.

shilling per week for three female cats.[7] Simon, as a ship's cat also known for his mouse-catching ability and honored with the Dickin medal, exemplifies how such animality could deepen the animal-human relationship in specific historical moments. Compared to Simon's medal, Mog's award is based on her portrayal as a cat unable to fully comprehend the human world. This imaginative depiction of the domestic animal's experience lays the creative foundation for her heroic action. McHugh, McKay, and Miller note that "animals and animality have offered writers a limitless resource of expressive possibility" (3). The attempt to imagine the experiential nature of animal bodies and animal worlds contributes to this unique heroic representation of Mog, who wins not only a medal and an egg but also timeless popularity among readers. Notably, the text on the last page adds another layer of interpretation to Mog's medal: "Mog had a medal. She also had an egg every day for breakfast" (Kerr, *Mog the Forgetful Cat* 36) The egg, as the reciprocation, suggests Mog's new relationship with the family, perhaps as their guard. The food in this context is akin to the expenditure that established the employment status of cats at the British Museum. As Kean notes about the working cats in the British Museum in the 1800s, "If the cats did not succeed in catching mice, they would not be sacked, but their conditions of employment would deteriorate" ("From" 8). Indeed, Mog has been assured she will never be unemployed as a companion animal due to her enduring relationship with the Thomas family. Nevertheless, she must continue fulfilling her additional duty in order to keep receiving her daily eggs as an extra bonus.

Simon's animal life is couched as a loyal service to the nation during the historical event of WWII. Mog's, on the other hand, takes a twist but is eventually recoded in the logic of appropriation that opens a way for humans to critique or define her value. David Herman outlines three states of animality in literary narrative: first, an animal serves an anthropocentric plot; second, it acquires a conflicting meaning that disrupts the plot; and finally, it reaches a point where its relationship with human characters is altered. Passing through these stages, its value becomes suspended in undecidability, and its agency emerges before or during the process of anthropocentric recoding (433). Mog's animality, which causes domestic chaos in the Thomas family, is first represented as the cat's forgetfulness but is rarely understood or appreciated by

[7] Hilda Kean discusses the evolving status of cats during the nineteenth century in Britain in her essay "From Skinned Cats to Angels in Fur." For more of her work, see *The Great Cat and Dog Massacre*.

the humans. The author subsequently reconfigures the relationship between the animal and the humans by re-emplotting the cat's forgetfulness as usefulness within the cultural text and giving it an individuality that is praised by human language. The interaction between cultural forces and imaginative storytelling in Mog's portrayal preserves the memories of past animals while also unfolding the diverse experiences of a beloved domestic cat who reminds people of the richness and diversity of more-than-human worlds. The Mog picturebooks, while charming and whimsical, carry the weight of cultural significance that illuminates the contributions animals have made in both everyday life and extraordinary circumstances.

V. Conclusion

Mog plays an imperative role in weaving both linear and non-linear narratives within Nicky's childhood memories, acting as a vital emotional stimulus that directs the child's development and as a timeless presence that secures the innocence of youth. The text-image synergy diversifies focalization options that amplify the voices of animals and capture the narrative and symbolic continuum between the living world and the afterworld. Mog's fictional heroism, in the context of historical practices, reveals the integration of literary creativity and cultural attitudes toward animals. This enriches the interpretation of Mog's medal and places it within a broader historical framework. Judith Kerr has artfully positioned this feline character as a bridge between past and present by crafting stories of animal companions that reflect and shape a wide range of human experiences and memories. This exploration of animal-human bonds, though only a modest beginning, seeks to inspire a deeper appreciation for the profound and enduring significance of animals in our lives, both during and beyond the pandemic period.[8]

[8] During the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and social distancing measures encouraged people to spend more time in domestic spaces, leading to significant changes in family dynamics and routines. One notable change was the sharp increase in the number of households with pets. According to statistics from Braemar Finance, the percentage of households owning a pet in the UK reached an unprecedented high of 59% in 2020/21, nearly 20% higher than in 2019 when the global outbreak of coronavirus began ("Facts & Figures"). See "Facts & Figures – Pet Ownership" for an analysis of pet ownership and well-being.

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