

Humour in Literature: Why Gross Works for Kids

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What is humour?

Alvin Schwartz, a folklorist and author, says 'humour is a slippery subject' and after researching the area, I'd have to agree. What makes one person laugh is quite different to another. What a person finds funny is influenced by many things: the historical period in which we live, cultural and social experiences, age, gender and their own unique personality.

Moira Robinson, in the book, *Give Them Wings: The Experience of Children's Literature* (1987) states, 'Our personality, our mood, our particular hang-ups, all influence our response to humour, and the older we become and the more hung about with quirky beliefs or inhibitions or prejudices, the more individual our response (p 280).' From personal experience with the 'So' series: *So Gross!*, *So Feral!*, *So Sick!*, *So Festy!*, *So Grotty!* and *So Stinky!* most kids love them and adults fall into a love 'em/hate 'em dichotomy.

In Grey Matter, a marketing study on '*The Serious Impact of Kid's Humor*' which was prompted by an astounding lack of information about the critical role that humour plays in kid's lives, the authors came to define humour as 'what most kids found funny most of the time.'

One of the perplexing things about humour is that so little is known about it. Moira Robinson has said, 'Humour is the Cinderella in the world of children's literature. Volumes are devoted to fantasy, to folklore and myth, even – belatedly – to poetry, but humour is lucky to rate even an occasional chapter or article ...' (p 277). Although these sentiments were expressed 18 years ago, little has changed.

We do know that humour has been of interest for thousands of years, even though that interest is minimal when compared to the volumes written on tragedy. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenberg, editors of *A Cultural History of Humour. From Antiquity to the Present day* (1997) can shed some light on this matter. They define humour as 'any message – transmitted in action, speech, writing, images or music – intended to produce a smile or a laugh' (p 1). Looking back through history Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) was perhaps the first to recognise that tragedy is not superior to comedy, that they are of equal importance:

Humour is the only test of gravity and gravity of humour; for a subject which will not bear raillery is suspicious, and a jest which will not bear serious examination is false wit.

It's such a shame that this insightful observation has been ignored by the academics, the clergy, the aristocracy, teachers, parents, librarians, publishers etc although I will take a moment to offer these modern orators as hope:

The world is a tragedy to those who feel, but a comedy to those who think.

Horace Walpole (1717 – 1797)

Humour is a way of saying something serious.

T.S. Eliot (1888 – 1965)

Comedy is simply a funny way of being serious.

Peter Ustinov (1921 – 2004)

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is
when you walk into a sewer and die.

Mel Brooks (1926 -)

Perhaps humour fell by the wayside when the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics* (350 B.C.E.), which concentrated on comedy and laughter, was lost and this book got lost to future generations. We have built our understanding of world and art on Aristotle's *Poetics*, but without regarding his whole work. His theory of tragedy may have a different meaning when viewed in the light of his theory of comedy. So, we study only parts of his thoughts and maybe this is why we find our thoughts on humour today are somewhat confused, inconsistent, and lacking insight.

After Aristotle we can jump to Cicero who in 55 B.C. discussed humour in an elaborate and systematic way in *De oratore*. This led to breakthroughs in the Roman vocabulary with words such as *facetiae*, meaning 'wittiness' or 'joke', in contrast to *gravitas*, meaning 'seriousness' and 'respectability'. Today's adults find the gross humour of children to be crude. In Cicero's day, crudeness was when humour led to a loss of dignity to the upper-class readership of the day. This changed in the Renaissance when in 1528 Castiglione cautioned not to make fun of men and women from good background. Crudity, he warned, involved crying, laughing or miming the gestures and postures of other people within the same group or rank, although it was perfectly respectable to do this to others from a different social group or rank. Already we see a blueprint for today where adults who

are of a different group and in a position of power, decree that children's humour is vulgar or crude.

One point made by Bremmer and Roodenburg was particularly appealing to me, a kid's author of gross humour. They explained that the English originally derived the word 'humour' from the French word, *humeur*, which means the four main fluids of the body – blood, bile, black bile and phlegm. How appropriate, given kid's fascination with what was described by Sophie Best as 'snot, bot and grot'.

Bremmer and Roodenburg point out that laughter and humour are two different things. In fact, it is possible that laughter was not an attack of the jollies, it was an aggressive display of bearing the teeth. Today, laughter is liberating. It can diffuse a tense situation and it can also give respite from rigid social codes by which we must live. This is especially true for children. They laugh a lot more than adults, up to 400 times a day as compared to our pitiful 15 times or so.

This brings us to a key ingredient in humour in children's literature and folklore, in fact adult literature and folklore, too – humour often ridicules those who hold power. It's natural then, that kids love to ridicule adults. This mocking of authority, this subversive laughter, is what so often disturbs adults.

In 1988 June Factor published *Children's Folklore in Australia* and in it she states, '... children's mockery challenges the core of authority by reversing it so easily. There is a sense in which irreverent role-playing undermines the hierarchical structures on which much status and power depend.' (p 176). This is evident in playground rhymes and chants where no authority figure escapes – teachers, parents, family, police, politicians, royalty and even

religious teachers are mocked in some way. I'd like to share some of these with you.

[Sung to the tune of 'Clementine']

Come to our school, come to our school

It's a place of misery,

There's a teacher in the doorway

Saying, 'Welcome unto thee'.

Don't believe it, don't believe it,

It's a pack of dirty lies,

If it wasn't for the teachers

It would be a paradise.

Build a bonfire, build a bonfire,

Put the teachers on the top,

Put the prefects on the bottom

And burn the bloody lot.

[Sung to the tune, 'On Top of Old Smokey']

On top of a mountain

All covered in blood,

I shot my poor teacher

With a four-forty slug.

I done it with pleasure,

I done it with pride,

I went to the funeral

But just for the ride.

I went to the funeral

I went to the grave,

I didn't throw flowers
I threw a grenade.

Or this one...

My Old Man's a dustman,
He wears a dustman's hat,
Farted through the keyhole
And paralysed the cat.

Or ...

Mother's in the kitchen
Cooking fish and chips,
Father's in the lavatory
Bombing battleships.

And another.

God save our gracious cat
Feed her on bread and fat,
God save our cat.
Keep her from harm and traps
Don't give her any raps,
Lord to reign over us.
God save our cat.

And lastly, religious teachers get a serve ...

Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
 Who eats the fastest eats the most.
 Holy Mary, Mother of God,
 Send me down a chocolate frog.

This mockery can be seen in Norman Lindsay's book *The Magic Pudding*, first published in 1918. It is a gentle, humorous satire that deflates people who are pompous, full of their own self-importance and those who make major issues out of trivial things. We can already see this in the tongue-in-cheek and grandiose title – *The Magic Pudding: Being the Adventures of Bunyip Bluegum and his Friends Bill Barnacle and Sam Sawnoff*. The trial scene is a major mockery of this pomposity and conceit.

'If you've a case without a Judge
 It's clear your case will never budge
 But if a Judge you have to face
 The chances are you'll lose your case
 To win your case, and save your pelf
 Why, try the blooming case yourself!'

When interviewed about *The Magic Pudding* Norman Lindsay is supposed to have said, 'Roughly stated the theme is eating and fighting, which is child psychology at its simplest.' The appeal for kids is in the constant clashes between the Puddin' owners and the Puddin' thieves resulting in adventures and misadventures of epic proportions. The

interesting thing about this pudding is that not only does it produce unlimited meals of great variety but it is also a pudding that speaks and grumbles and is, in effect, a very crafty pudding. Kids can relate to this pudding. They accept its shortcomings but revel in the vigour of the plot, the drollness and the magic that pulls the authority figures down.

If we jump to 1939 we see the birth of *Blinky Bill*, created by Dorothy Wall. This is another character that is completely irreverent to authority figures.

This type of humour is not only seen in Children's literature it permeates all types of children's interactions – spoken rhymes, rituals and routines, insults, games, autograph albums etc. It is what Moira Robinson calls Defiance Humour. June Factor makes the point that this form of humour is as 'integral to childhood as milk teeth and unlined skin' (p191). Boys especially like defiance humour and enjoy stories with gross humour and horror, as well as fantasy and adventure. They love the yucky stuff, the more it gets under an adult's skin, the better. One component of gross humour is scatological humour, the mockery of the secretions of the human body. It is interesting to note that this type of humour is appreciated both the young and old. As much as some adults detest it, others love it.

William G. Plank in his study, *The Psycho-Social Bases of Scatological Humor: The Unmasking of the Self*, takes a close look at what happens in scatological humour. He says, '... scatological humor removes the props by which the self attempts to create and control its image: clothing, privacy, secrecy, composition of the face, and self-control.' It shows humans as being vulnerable and less than perfect and many adults just can not cope with this. But as David Lubar points out, 'Denial begets taboo' (1999). Anything taboo is highly appealing to children.

Plank quotes a poem of Jonathan Swift titled 'Strephon and Chloe' (1734) where Strephon and Chloe are forced to relieve themselves on their wedding night and romantic purity is shattered.

O Strephon, e'er that fatal day
 When Chloe stole your Heart away,
 Had you but through a Cranny spy'd
 On House of Ease your future Bride,
 In all the Postures of her Face,
 Which Nature gives in such a Case;
 Distortions, Groanings, Strainings, Heavings:
 'Twere better you had lickt her Leavings,
 Than from Experience find too late
 Your Goddess grown a filthy Mate.

Another Swift poem, 'Cassinus and Peter' (1734) has a besotted Cassinus, in love with Caelia, sneak into her bedroom but sinks into a great depression when he finds her chamber pot. He confides to Peter, his friend:

Nor wonder how I lost my wits;
 Oh! Caelia, Caelia, Caelia shits.

This loss of image leads to loss of power and for some this is too much to bear. Abu Hassan from the *Arabian Nights* broke wind during his marriage feast – translated as: 'Behold, he let fly a great fart,' and this was so abhorrent that poor Abu exiled himself and gave up his bride, his wealth and his native city. Obviously, a guy with problems.

Yet, when authors mock authority figures and use scatological humour in children's literature some adult readers are reviled. We see such articles as:

- *Gross, Grosser and Grossest: How far has children's literature sunk?* By Orlean Koehle in the Education Reporter, July 2003
- *How many more bum jokes can we stand? The current state of Australian children's popular fiction.* A presentation by Dr John Foster of the University of South Australia for the ASLA on-line conference, 2004.

Which brings me to the issue of censorship. This, in my opinion, is as widespread today as it has been in the past. When June Factor studied children's humour and folklore she found that in response to adult prudery '... until recently almost all English-language collectors of children's folklore expurgated such material from their compilations' (p 161). She adds, '... this is known in Australia as the wowser tradition.' Or, in other words, people who want to impose restrictions on others so they can have no fun.

Bremmer and Roodenburg concur with this pointing out that when the Brothers Grimm started to collect folk tales, 'they deliberately omitted jests and comic stories, concentrating instead on the more innocent genre of legends and fairy tales.' A huge part of children's literature was denied and as Bremmer and Roodenburg point out: 'We are still trying to fill that gap' (1997, p 8). It's part of a head-in-the-sand approach. If we can't see it, it will go away.

Today I see censorship in the following ways:

- teachers and librarians avoid the use of humorous texts
- academics dismiss them by ignoring them
- notable literary journals and magazines choose not to review or discuss them

- parents choose not to buy them
- in the past publishers chose 'issues' over 'humorous texts' to publish.
- Booksellers either choose not to stock the books, or if they do stock them, they may not promote them. In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Forget wizards – Harry Plopper's the new king of the bookshelf* (Michael Bradley, June 8, 2002) it is reported that the 'manager of children's bookstore Reading Matters, Carol Keeble, says she stocks one or two copies of the plop plots but refuses to promote them or recommend them to customers.'

Not everyone dismisses gross/yucky/toilet humour. Sharon Millyard and Angie Masters published the article, *Don't pooh-poooh toilet humour* for *Classroom Parent* magazine and made the point that Roald Dahl shocked readers when he took 'disgusting' to the absolute limits but today he is an icon in children's literature and is responsible for fostering a love of reading in children around the world.

Sarah Long in her *Daily Herald* article (October 18, 2004) *Librarians focus on boys and books* reports that Sara Milovanovic, a librarian, worries about boys who do not like to read but adds: '... boys do read: joke books and funny books, magic books, books about sports teams.' She quotes Michael Sullivan, another librarian who observed 'As for the edgier selections that appeal to boys – books with gross humour or scary stories – well, school isn't an institution that encourages challenging what's socially acceptable.' He also observes that '... most teachers and librarians are women, who typically favour books that foster internal reflection and emphasize the emotional rather than the physical.'

Australian author, James Moloney, in an article *Ideas for getting boys to read*, states that 'Boys love the ghoulish, the gross and the disgusting,' then challenges us with '... how often is this allowed to appear in children's books?' He, too, mentions censorship. 'When it does (appear in children's books), it is carefully sanitised so as not to offend adult sensibilities. Almost every title that has ever attempted to make a story out of the messy, the uncouth and the horrible that so fascinates boys has attracted criticism or outright bans.'

Our society has been inculcated to believe that all great literature is tragic – the novels of Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Flaubert and Henry Handel Richardson are some that Maurice Saxby has pointed out (1969). Tragedy speaks to every person. It does not depend on age, culture, social standing, social era, etc. as humour does. All humans are moved by death, disease and disaster. As a writer I would take this one step further and say that tragedy, to a certain extent, is predictable. As readers we take comfort in this. Humour, as we have seen, is not predictable. In fact, it relies on surprise. It relies on logic being suspended in some way. It is not familiar and thus comforting, it is confronting and because of this we shy away. All us steadfast logical stuffy old adults just can't cope. Call us Old Adult Serious.

Moira Robinson believed that we underestimate humour and dismiss it as 'lightweight' and 'second-class literature'. This is evident by; 1) the paucity of research on humour; 2) the focus on issues-based texts in libraries, schools and homes; 3) the absence of humorous texts that win literature awards and; 4) the constant linking of words like 'quality' and 'high culture' with issues-based texts and words like 'popular', 'mass market' and 'low culture' with humorous texts. In fact, in America, it was only in 2003 that we saw the first award to honour humorous work in children's literature - The

Sid Fleischman Award. Apart from humorous books getting into children's choice awards, I know of no such award for humorous children's literature in Australia.

I have pondered this for a long time and have a couple of thoughts of my own. Some humorous books are what I would describe as performance texts – books to be heard, not read. They are one long stand-up comedy routine. And stand-up comics make it look so easy. There is a sense from the audience of 'I could do that.' Of course, put most of us in front of an audience and tell us we have to be funny, and our sense of humour is guaranteed to disappear. I was chatting about this to John Larkin one day and he came up with another interesting theory. He said the reason that humour is not valued is because Shakespeare could not write it well - that his tragedies were by far superior to his comedies. According to John, because Shakespeare was no good at it, we lost interest.

Robinson explains that in the tragedy of the classics we see the collapse of a noble person who is nearly perfect but is marred by one fatal flaw. But in comedy we see survival of the individual – 'the ordinary person, warts and all' (pp 284 – 285). Warts, bad breath, farts, vomit, bowels and bladders, pimples, the list goes on. June Factor takes this further, saying that the core element of humour is the recognition that we, as individuals are not perfect. In fact she cautions that humour like this is vital. She says, 'Such a perspective is an essential antidote to hubris, the dangerous pride that sets human life on a pinnacle of perfectibility and invulnerability.' (pp 155 – 156).

Kid's have an innate ability to sense this hubris in adults and an almost universal determination to pull it down. They know there is adult unease with some areas such as sexuality, toilets, underwear and other bodily functions and demonstrate an unceasing determination to explore these

taboo areas. Kids are testing out where they stand in relation to the world and are out to press buttons and push boundaries. But this is not a new phenomenon; kids have been doing this since time immemorial.

'Taboo' literature was published in Australia at the beginning of the last century. In 1917 The Bulletin ran a competition to compose a nursery rhyme to raise money for The Children's Hospital and this collection was published. One nursery rhyme that shows the cheekiness in kid's humour went like this.

Muster, muster
 All of a cluster
 Bring in the sheep to be shorn.
 Bluster, fluster, southerly buster
 Poppity's pants are torn.

Prior to this children's books were didactic, designed to teach morals and values and what was considered to be acceptable social behaviour. Then along came *The Magic Pudding*, a breakthrough text where the instruction and preaching to beware of vanity was minimal. It was one long expanded joke. For the first time a book was published that showed you could read for pure joy. We owe a lot to Norman Lindsay. He was one voice against the masses.

But even today, especially in the education sector, books are sought that instruct. Maurice Saxby has a cautionary word for today's children's authors who choose to ignore reading for joy. He says: 'In striving for political correctness it is possible to become either strident or so earnest as to be dull.' *Dull*, the dreaded *boring* of today. He says that 'Children need not only to be faced with reality but also to enjoy their lives, at times to escape reality and to have fun' (1998a, p264).

It is well-known that the development of a sense of humour parallels the intellectual and emotional development of the child. June Factor points out

that just as children play with marbles, balls and dolls, they also play with ideas – what she calls ‘linguistic playfulness’ (p 170). Much of this playfulness is what adults describe as vulgar.

Factor writes that children make a deliberate decision to separate themselves linguistically from adults, inventing codes, passwords, nicknames, word plays, puns, jokes etc which are *not meant* to be accessible to adults. The same can be seen in literature. Adults will shy away from words like bum, poop, pee, fart etc. When the universally popular *Winnie the Pooh* was published in 1926, I doubt that the author A.A. Milne was making a pun, but one wonders if the Pooh factor is part of the attraction for today’s children. June Factor reported comments from Hal Porter who reminisced about his childhood: ‘With faultless malice we ... nicknamed our class-mates and friends – Dopey, Skinny, Fattie, Monkey, Shitty, Stinko, Ferret, Pisser and Twitchy’ (p 173). If used today such names would be classified as bullying. Factor’s main point, however, is that humans need to play and be flexible – it is a normal part of our development before ‘integration’.

Young children enjoy picture books with the incongruity of exaggeration, as well as the slapstick. The wacky worlds of Dr Seuss have great appeal. They also love books where the characters are naughty. This wickedness supposedly highlights their own virtue. Blinky Bill has this appeal, in his encounters with Mrs Grunty and many others.

As they get older children love to assert their independence, they love linguistic play, and they love to read for fun. Roald Dahl was a master at writing literature for this age group with his ability to capture the impossible, the absurd and the bizarre, as well as thumbing his nose at authority. Kids love his quirkiness and his fun with language. The *BFG* is a perfect example with its ‘snozzcumbers’ and ‘froboscottle’ that make you ‘whizzpop’. Paul

Jennings is another author who is a master at this. And so is the brilliant Raymond Briggs. In his book *Father Christmas* (1973) the scene of Santa sitting on a dunny muttering to himself, 'I hate winter' is priceless.

Moira Robinson makes an astute observation about authors who write humour for children, those who write the silly stuff: 'It is perhaps the hardest stage for adults to recall, and only a few writers ... can capture the glory of pure silliness.' Spike Milligan was another who could do this, and Andy Griffiths today.

In the adults versus kids stand-off it appears to me that we have opposing yet identical behaviours. Children like to believe they are superior by being subversive to adults and adults like to believe they are superior by labelling children's humour as crude, depraved and disgusting.

Dr John Foster, of *How many more bum jokes can we stand?* comments facetiously 'Perhaps in fact, the popularity of these works makes as strong a statement about Australia in the early 21st century as it does about the children who like to read about bums' (p 118). I would put it to him that it makes no such comment at all, as this type of children's humour has been round for a very long time and is not only found in Australia. We see it in books from: 1) Steve Turner in the UK *The Day I Fell Down the Toilet*; 2) Andrew Collett in the US – *Potty Poems to Power Your Pants* and *Dad's Exploding Underpants: Bad Poems for Big Kids*; in Peter Viska's *Dan Dann the Dunnyman* and; 4) Werner Holzwarth and Wolf Erlbruch's *The Story of the Little Mole Who Knew it was None of his Business* to name a few.

Let's look at some examples of gross humour in the history of children's literature with particular reference to Australian children's literature. Moving on from *The Magic Pudding* and *Blinky Bill* we have:

- 1) *Bottersnikes and Gumbles* by S.A. Wakefield (1967) – About the lazy, uncouth, ugly Bottersnikes who inhabit junk heaps in the Australian Bush.
- 2) *Stuff and Nonsense* (1974) and *More Stuff and Nonsense* compiled by Michael Dugan (1980).

Rhinoceros Stew by Michael Dugan

Rhinoceros stew
 Tastes like glue,
 While giraffe casserole
 Sticks to the bowl.
 An emu roast
 Tastes like burnt toast
 While the pelican fried
 Turns the inside.
 But none of this feed
 Encourages greed.

3) *The Enormous Crocodile* by Roald Dahl and illustrations by Quentin Blake (1978)

In the biggest brownest muddiest river in Africa' two crocodiles lay with their heads above the water. One of the crocodiles was enormous. The other was not so big.

'Do you know what I would like for my lunch today? The Enormous crocodile asked.

'No,' the Notsobig One said. 'What?'

The Enormous Crocodile grinned, showing hundreds of sharp white teeth. 'For my lunch today,' he said, 'I would like a nice juicy little child.'

'I never eat children,' the Notsobig One said. 'Only fish.'

'Ho, ho, ho!' cried the Enormous Crocodile. 'I'll bet if you saw a fat juicy little child paddling in the water over there at this very moment, you'd gulp him up in one gollop!'

4) The four collections of June Factor

Far Out, Brussels Sprout! (1983); *All Right, Vegemite!* (1985); *Unreal, Banana Peel!* (1986) and *Real Keen Baked Bean!* (1989) which I understand have just been re-released by Brolly books this year.

5) *Putrid Poems* (1985); *Petrifying poems* (1986) and *Vile Verse* (1988), compiled by Jane Covernton and illustrated by Craig Smith. It was with great delight that I uncovered a poem in *Vile Verse* written by one of the icons in Australian Children's Literature, Mem Fox:

Sweet Samantha, Unrefined by Mem Fox

When sweet Samantha eats her food
 She is exceptionally rude:
 Her mouth is always open wide
 And you can see the view inside.
 It's not a pretty sight, my friends,
 To see how Sammy's dinner ends –
 Across her tongue the pieces float
 Around the teeth, towards her throat;

You almost vomit while she chews
And tells you all the latest news!
It's terrible when fish and chips
Come shooting forth between her lips
Or when she's eating lamingtons
And bits of coconut grow wings
And catch you right between the eyes –
Your stomach soon begins to rise!
So my advice is stand well clear,
Especially when she starts to cheer,
And do make sure that you have dined
Before Samantha, unrefined,
Attacks her stew and starts to chew
And sprays her food all over you ...

6) *Sister Madge's Book of Nuns* by Doug MacLeod (1986)

Sister Flo and the Vegies

Sister Flo, a gardening freak
Had quite a nasty shock last week.
While she was planting silver beet
A small voice cackled at her feet.

'Hey, droopy-drawers! I'm talking to you!
You're ugly, big and pimply too!
I'm over here you silly old dill

Down beneath the window sill!

'How dare you!' scolded Sister Flo.

'You cheeky little so-and-so!'

For she had only just found out

The speaker was a Brussels sprout.

'It said, 'We've business to discuss!

Stop pouring that manure on us!

We don't enjoy it, not a bit

Would *you* like getting covered in it?'

A carrot by the garden gate

Said, 'It's the smell of it I hate

And while we have a chance to talk

I *loathe* being yanked up by the stalk.'

And all the vegies had a go

At nagging poor old Sister Flo

When scolded by an artichoke

Her temper well and truly broke.

Potatoes, leeks she dug the lot

And stewed them in her cooking pot

She baked a pastie, golden brown

Said, 'Serves you right!' then wolfed it down.

Alas, the vegies got her back
Flo suffered from a wind attack
So noisy was her sorry plight
It kept the neighbours up all night.

Explosions rocked her small abode
Her bathtub landed in the road
A flying sink complete with taps
Made fifteen blocks of flats collapse.

It happened just a week ago
Now things have changed for Sister Flo
When vegies to her rudely speak
She simply turns the other cheek.

And then, of course, there's the 'So' series, a collection of funny stories about yucky stuff, written by myself and illustrated by Gus Gordon.

So Gross! (2001) had stories about chewed spew, blue farts, a boogie collection, a friendly cockroach and black poo.

So Feral! (2002) had a bottled baby, putrid pickings, death breath, and goop soup.

So Sick! (2003) had jellyfish undies, foot rot, pigeon poo and B.O.

So Festy! (2004) went on to make fun of ring burn, farts, morgues, and a boy who thought he was a dog.

So Grotty! (2004) made fun of bed-wetting, smelly feet, cockroaches and cheese races.

So Stinky! (2005) closed the series with dinosaur dung, a human teeth collection, a quest to find out where babies come from and how to deal with an incontinent baby brother.

I'd like to finish up with some of my own putrid poems:

From *So Festy!*

Chug-a lug lug
Two snails and a slug
Were tossed in the witches brew.
She stirred it all up
Refused the tea cup
Preferring to drink from her shoe.

Hot cross bums! Hot cross bums!
Stroppy, shirty, aggro, dirty
Hot cross bums.
If you move too slowly
They will lock you in a scrum
Stroppy, shirty, aggro, dirty
Hot cross bums.

By gingo. By golly. By gosh.
I think I've forgotten to wash.
There's a terrible whiff
When I take a big sniff.

By gingo. By golly. By gosh.

From So Grotty!

The PE Blues

I cannot skip

I cannot tumble

I cannot flip

I cannot rumble

I cannot whirl

I cannot spring

I cannot twirl

I cannot swing.

Everone is at PE

They're having fun, except for me

I watch as they all flash their grundies

How could I forget my undies?

A Mother Cannibal's Advice

Chew your gristle. Chew your meat.

Never mind the smelly feet.

Bones are good for munching on.

So are noses, ears and tongue.

Avoid all hair. It's not nice.

Unless, of course, it's full of lice
Use fingernails as fine toothpicks.
Shins and thighs make great shashliks.
Wash it down with stale drained blood.
A final relish? Fresh eye crud.

The Meaning of Life

I know that I will never be
All warm and tinkly
Like a wee.
I have a bigger job to do.
Grunt! Groan! Plop!
I am Poo.

And from *So Stinky!*

Flies are crunchy.
Flies are nice.
Flies are best
In flied rice.

It really is very simple
This, on my face
Is not a dimple.
It is a huge,
Fat,

Juicy pimple.

Do you blow

Or do you sniff?

Do you dab

Or do you pick?

Are they slippery

Or are they crusty?

Moist like compost?

Or sawdusty?

It's an art form

To be sure

To clear the nose

Forevermore.

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