Introduction

> [S]ome of the most eminent literary critics of our time have believed that Wordsworth was not a nature poet, or that there is no such thing as nature, or that if there is such a thing and Wordsworth was interested in it then that interest was very suspect on political grounds. The common reader's view of Wordsworth derives from the Victorian way of reading him, John Stuart Mill's way, John Ruskin's, Leslie Stephen's; this book will argue that, unfashionable as that way now is in literary circles, it might just be the most useful way of approaching Wordsworth in the 1990s and the early twenty-first century.—Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology* 4.

> Much modern environmental wisdom . . . has as its main theme the message that humans are animals and have the same dependence on a healthy biosphere as other forms of life. On the surface, it is puzzling that an apparent truism should find so much resistance and should need to be stressed so much. But the reason why this message of continuity and dependency is so revolutionary in the context of the modern world is that the dominant strands of western culture have for so long denied it, and given us a model of human identity as only minimally and accidentally connected with the earth. —Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 6

We might, on a dull day, perform the experiment of scribbling substitute terms about children's literature into Jonathan Bate's observation about critical readings of Romantic poets. The result would read something like this: "Some of the most eminent children's literature critics of our time have believed that children's literature is not a nature-oriented genre, or that there is no such thing as nature, or that if there is such a thing and children's literature is centrally concerned with it, then that concern is very suspect on psychoanalytical grounds." Our new statement would illuminate as unfortunate a truth as does Bate's original. Children's literature surely constitutes by far the largest repository of nature-focused writing to be found in Western culture, with the great majority of books in the canon and on the best-sellers' backlist being explicitly about nature, animals, the fascinations of countryside living, the wonders of the frontier: *Charlotte's Web*, *The Secret Garden*, the Little House series, *Heidi*, *Bambi*, *Rascal*, *King of the Wind*. . .The

list goes on almost endlessly, as I can attest, for in my doctoral field exam I read more than 50 children's chapter books with a strong focus on nature, and I was obliged to leave out as many canonical works as I fit in, including *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, *Black Beauty*, *Trumpet of the Swan*, *Sounder*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Incredible Journey*. Beyond the wealth of animal stories and more general nature-focused works, even many canonical children's texts that are not so obviously "nature writing" can be considered such. For instance, Elizabeth Enright's Melendy Quartet and most of the books in Cynthia Voigt's Dicey series qualify under all four of Laurence Buell's criteria as "environmental texts": they depict human history as being involved in natural history, non-human interests as being of value, humans as being accountable in their interactions with the environment, and nature "as a process. . .rather than as a constant or a given" (Buell 6-8).

Yet, as any survey of formal (i.e., academic) children's literature criticism will show, little scholarship exists that focuses on this aspect of the genre, and that which does has tended to treat nature as "suspect on psychoanalytic grounds." Kenneth Kidd notes that "the serious study of children's literature began with Freud" (*Freud in Oz* viii), and vice versa, and that over the years children's literature studies and psychoanalysis have been "mutually enabling" ("A is for Auschwitz" 164), or even "mutually constitutive" (*Freud in Oz* viii). Thus born into the era of Ricoeurian "hermeneutics of suspicion" (*Freud in Oz* viii), the critical corpus stood little chance of offering many of those happy correspondences when, in Jonathan Bate's words, "the critic's purposes are also the writer's, and. . .there can be a communion between living reader and dead writer which may bring with it a particular enjoyment and a perception about endurance" (6). Here, for instance, is Karen Coats, performing an extended examination of the best-selling children's chapter book of all time (*Publishers Weekly* n.p.), E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*: "As

a pig, [Wilbur] is not especially important to [Fern]. . .He is simply a symbol with whom she narcissistically identifies," and thus, when her father sets out to kill the runt piglet, "acting. . . as the primordial Freudian father, exercising complete control over who may or may not acquire the phallus in his wee tribe," Fern is motivated not by any caring for the animal but only for her own sexual power when she "loses control and grabs her father's, um, ax." (18) While this analysis may edify those who subscribe to Freudian theory, it is unlikely to accord with White's concerns about *Charlotte*, which ran to sending illustrator Garth William books on spiders so that he could come as close to the *Aranea cavatica* as the real-life Charlotte in White's Maine barn (*Letters* 325) and considering the critiques of young persons such as his step-granddaughter Caroline, who said, "'Charlotte should have told [Wilbur] not to eat, then he wouldn't have been killed because he would have been too thin'" (*Letters* 333). Asked to explain his own Fern-like rescue of a pig some years before he finished *Charlotte's Web*, as detailed in his essay "Death of a Pig," White told a critic, "[It] is a straight narrative. . .I was pursued by the shadow of the irony (or perhaps idiocy) of a man's desire to save the life of a creature he had every intention of murdering" (*Letters* 543).

Nor is psychoanalysis the only theoretical framework to keep the critic from accord with the author. If analytical approaches such as Coats' fail to line up with the writers' own purposes for and perceptions of their work, it is safe to say that they line up even less with the "common reader's" experience of the text. What, then, *is* the view of the "common" (child) reader, free of the hermeneutics of suspicion or, most likely, hermeneutics of any kind? What cumulative worldview does she or he get from reading after book about dogs and cats, farm life, the open prairie; about climbing trees and swimming in brooks; about tending orphaned wildlife and yearning more than anything for a horse? Does this reading "derive," generally speaking, from

any one direction or source, as Bate claims for readers of Wordsworth? And, as a related question, how does this ingestion of nature-rich books affect what Sidney I. Dobrin terms "ecological literacy" (*Wild Things* 233)—that is, what children's texts individually and collectively "teach" the child reader about the natural world, whether by omission or commission?

Simply put, I believe that children take textual depictions of affinity for nature at face value, that their attraction to nature in books is in a literal sense natural, and that their way of reading both stems from and affirms for the reader the "apparent truism," as Val Plumwood puts it, "that humans are animals" (6). And while I agree that one possible extension of this truism is that we "have the same dependence on a healthy biosphere as other forms of life" (6), others are that we need these interactions with the living world for our own emotional and physical well-being, perhaps for our species survival; that "animals may be social others to us with whom we can form relationships" (Myers "Animals as Links" 154); and, further, that "[w]e are in the fullest sense a biological species, and will find little ultimate meaning apart from the remainder of life" (*Biophilia* 80-81). In short, it is my contention that the genre of children's literature as a whole, including the books that I have selected for this dissertation, help to bring into the child reader's consciousness an active, articulated awareness of the evolutionary trait that myrmecologist and sociobiologist E. O. Wilson has termed "biophilia."

Wilson's biophilia hypothesis identifies humans as an animal species and posits certain predispositions based on our evolution in the natural environment. Chief among these are that we have "an innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (1); that "our consciousness races ahead to master certain kinds of information with enough efficiency to survive[;] it submits to a few biases easily while automatically avoiding others" (101); that we are either drawn to or

will try to recreate landscapes resembling the open African savannah to which our "bipedal locomotion and free-swinging arms fitted. . .very well" (109); that we "gravitate to about the levels of complexity" found in a natural ecosystem (79); and that "we learn particular things about certain kinds of plants and animals" with "quickness and decisiveness" (85). Wilson observes,

> The brain evolved into its present form over a period of about two million years, from the time of *Homo habilis* to the late stone age of *Homo sapiens*, during which people existed in hunter-gatherer bands in intimate contact with the natural environment. Snakes mattered. The smell of water, the hum of a bee, the directional bend of a plant stalk mattered. . .Organisms are the natural stuff of metaphor and ritual.. .[T]he brain appears to have kept its old capacities, its channeled quickness. We stay alert and alive in the vanished forests of the world. (101)

Insofar as a large number of children's books characterize people as expressing some or all of these predispositions, we could look on the genre as fostering among the Western child readership a fundamentally sociobiological outlook. I believe, and I argue, that this is the case. My conclusions about the role such texts might play in ecological literacy go so far as to propose that this perspective pervades modern Western children's literature to the extent of creating a separate, biophilia-fostering culture. However, these same books, including and perhaps especially those in my dissertation, present spiritual aspects of being a biological human—responses of awe, reverence, mystery and ineffable communion in relation to the rest of the natural world—that take them beyond the function of affirming and strengthening the child's innate affinity for life. It may be closer to the mark to see children's literature within the Western

culture as a crucial keeper of what Native American/American First Nations advocate John Collier calls "the long hope": the hope that overlooked pockets in the techno-industrial world have resisted and will continue to resist biophobic, industrialist and post-industrialist values, thereby keeping alive an ember of the "ancient, lost reverence and passion for human personality, joined with the ancient, lost reverence and passion for the earth and its web of life" (Collier 7) by which humans may yet discover or recover more harmonious, fulfilling, and sustainable ways of living within our ecological niche.

The nature of the project

In this dissertation I examine British and American children's fantasy novels that approach human immortality from an ecocentric or biological perspective. Broadly speaking, they exhibit this perspective in two ways. Firstly, they condemn "immortalism," i.e., religious and secular philosophies that promote a yearning and striving for eternal or unnaturally extended life. Secondly, they offer alternative paradigms and attitudes, ones that recast death as a way to participate in the natural cycle and reunite with the rest of the living world. Some of the books, such as Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and Diana Wynne Jones' *Drowned Ammet*, do the first by doing the second—that is to say, they condemn technological or religious immortalism implicitly by presenting alternative natural or biospiritual depictions of immortality. Others, such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* and Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting*, indict immortalism explicitly and sternly, and in like fashion enjoin the child reader to accept death as a natural inevitability.

In the course of examining my selected novels' treatment of immortality, I analyze how this treatment represents their larger "nature-endorsing" positions (Soper 8) and their biological

and biospiritual view of humans—in other words, their depiction of humans as animals and children as the young of the species, with much of the higher meaning and deeper gratification of life deriving from interactions with the biotic and abiotic natural matrix. I suggest that this orientation, in turn, typifies the overall lodging of much Western children's literature within a biological rather than a humanist or Judeo-Christian paradigm. What I mean by this is that the preponderance of texts for children, through their narratives, characterizations, themes and often interchangeable use of anthropomorphism and theriomorphism, to a greater or lesser extent present humans as an animal species, affirm the belief that "the phylogenetic continuity of life with humanity. . .does not diminish humanity—it raises the status of nonhuman creatures" (Wilson 130), and even, in many instances, overtly promotes the "monist" attitude (Soper 50) that, to use philosopher David J. Buller's summation, "human culture as a whole is not opposed to biology, but is part of it," and "the practices that constitute human cultures differ only in degree of complexity, not in kind, from the web-spinning habits of spiders" (422).

Given that Western society has for the past millennia and a half operated under a Judeo-Christian model which is, as Lynn White, Jr., puts it in his important essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," "[e]specially in its Western form the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" (9), and which "by destroying pagan animism. . .made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (10); and given, further, that for the past 150 years or so Western populations have lived within the complex of techno-industrialism, mass-production capitalism, and urbanization that constitutes an ever-increasing expression of "the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature" (White 12); to propose that children's literature promotes in the child reader a biological and biospiritual understanding of the world and her/his own species is by definition to assign it a

radical, countercultural status. I explore two key possibilities that arise from this premise. The first is that this strain of children's literature acts as a smuggler of pre-Industrial and non–Judeo-Christian perceptions and beliefs down through the generations in a "safe" vehicle, a genre which, to use Kimberley Reynolds' phrase, is "a curious and paradoxical cultural space: a space that is simultaneously highly regulated and overlooked, orthodox and radical, didactic and subversive." (3) The second, following from the first, is that these ecocentric children's texts help to create in modern Westerners a high degree of internal anomie—that is, a sharp conflict between values and allegiances acquired in childhood and those socially imposed in adulthood. This latter idea is hardly new. In fact, it works us right back around to Rousseau's distinction between the state of the human character before and after losing touch with "Nature within us" (13), echoes the Wordsworthian creed that "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!" but "Shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy" (67-69), and accords with Karl Marx's theory of the "estranged labour" of capitalism, which "in estranging from man 1) nature, and 2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity. . . estranges the *species* from man" (75). However, a new light can be shed on such ideas when the assumptions underlying them, the values assigned to differing relationships with nature, and the understanding of our own species psychology are based in a knowledge of evolutionary theory and an extra-humanist perspective.

Biology, ecocriticism, and the humanist echo chamber

In the four or five years since narrowing my dissertation topic to that of "ecological perspectives on immortality in children's literature," I have referred to my project casually and often as being "ecocritical." I find it necessary now to qualify this designation. As I have learned more about ecocriticism and about my own approach, I have come to understand that I am producing a work

of ecocriticism only in the broadest sense of the term, in that it "takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture" (Glotfelty xix) and studies "the relationship of the human and non-human. . .entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (*Ecocriticism* 5). Within any narrower bounds than this sweeping rubric, ecocriticism and I part ways.

My first point of departure from ecocriticism as most academics currently practice it is my dismay at the field's increasing participation in what I think of as the "humanist echo chamber." As a student of nature and a long-time aspiring biologist with a moderate amount of formal education and considerably more self-education in the life sciences, I share American ecocritic Glen A. Love and literature scholar Frederick Crews' desire to see "restore[d] [to literary analysis] something of the scientific method's empirical spirit," in which we bring to our readings "the scientist's alertness against doctored evidence, circular reasoning, and willful indifference to counterexample" (Love 47). Thus, I was excited by the claim made by ecocriticism's "founder," Cheryll Glotfelty, that "humanities scholars are increasingly making an effort to educate themselves in the sciences and to adopt interdisciplinary approaches" (xxii), and by ecocriticism's promise to "challeng[e] interpretation to its own grounding in the bedrock of natural fact" (Love 1). In similar vein, I had hoped to escape the obscurantism and illogic that had largely alienated me from the academic humanities during my years at school.

However, these promises remain largely unfulfilled. As to the "belligerent attitude to theory" (Parham qtd in Oppermann 768) that I found so attractive, this began a fairly rapid turnaround after a 2010 special issue of *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* (*ISLE*), in which, among other things, Serpil Oppermann criticized ecocritics' "phobia" of theory, arguing that it stems from associating theory with "poststructuralist interrogation of the referents of reality" (768) and saying that to continue to resist incorporating

theory as a modus operandi threatened to make "the future of ecocriticism . . .likely to be one of reactive rollback to dated paradigms" (768). This has opened the door to serious ecocritical consideration of such books such as ecophilosopher Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature,* in which he cites as key influences "Marx and Derrida. . .Benjamin, Freud, Heidegger, Lacan, Latour, Žižek, and. . .Hegel," along with judicious applications of Theodor Adorno (7), and in which he frequently interrogates the referents of reality.

More importantly, two decades after Glotfelty's claim of interdisciplinarity, Glen Love is still declaring that "serious interdisciplinary work between humanists and the sciences is one of the important tasks that literary ecocritics must take on *in the future*" (47; emphasis mine). Most of what gets published and discussed has little reference to or participation with the obviously associated fields of biology and evolutionary science, or even the field of ecology from which ecocriticism derives half of its name. This has the effect of perpetuating premises and assumptions that stem from either a Judeo-Christian/Enlightenment paradigm or, no differently, what David Ehrenfeld calls "the religion of humanism: a supreme faith in human reason—its ability to confront and solve the many problems that humans face, its ability to rearrange both the world of Nature and the affairs of men and women so that human life will prosper" (5). Few biologists or ecologists have joined in with ecocritical discourse—perhaps, as Love remarks dryly, because "the current diehard constructionism of many literary scholars strikes them as absurd" (46).

Meanwhile, ecocriticism has unwontedly shared with the humanities overall "a general coolness, even hostility. . . toward the sciences in recent decades" (Love 6), and, through this attitude, has indeed suffered a "reactive rollback to dated paradigms." To cite the trenchant William Major and Andrew McMurry, "[E]cocriticism has failed to live up to our expectations,

because it begins to look, twenty years or so in, more or less like just another professional discourse among professional discourses" (in Bartosch and Grimm 231).[i] Leading British ecocritic Greg Garrard, picking up on Glotfelty's statement "Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (xviii), has concluded that "[e]cocriticism is, then, an avowedly political mode of analysis, as the comparison with feminism and Marxism suggests." He further notes that "Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analysis explicitly to a 'green' moral and political agenda" (*Ecocriticism* 3). Although this reading of Glotfelty's meaning is questionable and the word "avowedly" an overstatement (or so we can hope), Garrard is undoubtedly right in implying that the field's basic identity is at this point rather as another stock member of the Humanities than one conducive to developing an interdisciplinary relationship with the life sciences. Ecocriticism extends in America from the environmentalist awareness and activism of the 1970s and '80s, while in European ecocriticism we see a strong enough left-wing presence, and a sufficient centrality of Marxist Raymond Williams' 1973 *The Country and the City*, to support Jonathan Bate's assertion that "predominantly in Germany but increasingly in Britain" the political Left has made "the move from red to green" (10). To quote Garrard in blunter mode, "Ecocriticism developed because ethically-minded or guilt-ridden scholars felt the need to address environmental degradation, species extinction and all the other aspects of our current environmental crisis" (*Teaching the Environment* 221).

This set of motivations includes me out for a number of reasons. For one, I am neither ethically minded nor guilt-ridden. For two, I find the idea of inserting a "morality" and imposing an "agenda" offensive to the notion of scholarship: "should"-based thinking is inevitably an

enemy of reality- and evidence-based thinking. I object to the idea of agenda even more because, as Garrard rightly points out, "it will be the prismatic unpredictability of the classroom that will 'refract' our work [as ecocritics] most beautifully" (*Teaching* 220). This is another way of saying that our attitudes toward scholarship will devolve upon our students. That possibility finds expression in such missionary stances as David Mazel's request for proof that "students who read and write about green texts turn into more thoughtful and effective environmentalists than they might have been otherwise" (42), Greg Garrard's proposal for a long-term study that will show this correspondence (or absence of), and the triumphant pronouncements of some Green Studies professors that every semester they "convert" a number of their students to vegetarianism. As I have argued elsewhere, I feel that studying or teaching from agenda is a bankrupt concept, one that "traduces and terminally vitiates" the purposes of scholarship and pedagogy (Swanigan 237).

My personal opinions about the persistence of humanist and Judeo-Christian beliefs and assumptions within ecocriticism are obviously secondary. It is more to the point that remaining ignorant of and/or resistant to basic biological, ecological, and evolutionary premises undermines the positivist and interdisciplinary promise of ecocriticism and produces some dubious work. Philosopher Kate Soper's much-cited book *What Is Nature?* (1995) demonstrates some of the problems of theorizing about humanity in relationship to nature through a typical humanist/Humanities lens. For example, concerning sexuality, Soper writes that "Animals, notably other primates, do indeed manifest sexual hierarchies, and appear to observe certain rules of intercourse, but it is only human beings, who, in virtue of language and conceptualization, can be said to experience themselves as sexual beings, with all the sources of pleasure and pain which that entails" (125). These are pronouncements about the awareness and existential

experiences of other living beings that neither Soper nor anybody else can possibly support, but that the observations and data sets of many zoologists and naturalists would reject.[ii]

In short, few professional observers of animals would subscribe to Soper's position about animal sexuality, language capacity, and possession of "consciousness"—and nor does Soper have the credentials, inasmuch as anybody does, to make such assertions. Yet she, like many in the culture of the academic humanities, not only makes such assertions freely and frequently, apparently without feeling the need to support them in accordance with academic principles and scholarly standards, but bases a good deal of her argument upon them. Soper's firmly unscientific work, and the ecocritical community's eagerness to latch onto it, sadly seems to herald ecocritics' increasing absorption into the conventional academic humanities, of which many members, as Frederick Crews says, "subscribe to a two-tiered conception of truth[, making] a token bow to empirically grounded knowledge, but . . .instead of merely avowing that the subjective realm is elusive. . . advanc[ing] their own preferred theory, which is typically sweeping, absolute, and bristling with partisanship" (9).

Glen Love charitably speculates that "much of this hostility [toward science] is an anachronistic holdover from the wholly justified reactions to the social Darwinist distortions [of sociobiology] a century ago" (6). I agree that the long memory of academe may account for a small part of the rejection of the basic precepts of biology, sociobiology and associated evolutionary theories. It seems more likely, though, that (as Love also acknowledges and explores at length) much of the hostility stems simply from a deep-rooted resistance to the idea that human beings are animals and that evolutionary concepts apply to us. As Human Ecology scholar Gene Myers remarks, "More than a century after Darwin, we have yet to come to terms

with our own animality, including the bonds it gives us, virtually ready made, to other species" (xiv).

The other major juncture at which I part ways with mainstream ecocriticism is in my focus on what human alienation from nature has done to humans, rather than what it has done to nature. It is fair to say that the vast majority of current and past ecocriticism puts its focus the other way around. Cheryll Glotfelty, for instance, centres her introduction on "efforts to promulgate environmentally enlightened works" (xxiii) and says that "most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (xx). Greg Garrard's lucid primer moves from the headings of pollution and "positions" to pastoral and wilderness, but none of this touches on the damage done to *humans* by the past 150 years of industrialism, development, urbanisation, and life within "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen." Garrard has expressed to me in correspondence and conversation a deep skepticism that there is in fact any particularly detrimental effect on Western humans from our current way of living and thinking, citing the historically unprecedented quality of life, life expectancies, and happiness indices within modern-day Western and Westernized countries. Meanwhile, influential American ecocritic Lawrence Buell reaffirms his orientation toward the damage we are doing to nature with the subtitle of his 2005 book, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*.

This suggestion that the Abrahamic, post-Industrialist dispensation has had a sharply asymmetrical impact on nature and humans bespeaks most ecocritics' belief that we humans are, after all, independent of nature, fundamentally unlike other animals, and largely unharmed by

our removal from the natural environments within which we evolved over a quarter-million years. Perhaps it is true that our nearly unique level of sociability offsets to a degree the deprivations of living in minimal contact with nature and in conditions that bear little resemblance to those in which we evolved. If so, I do not believe that it is very great a degree—and certainly not enough, as evidence gathered in current "nature-deficit disorder" studies suggests, to mitigate the social and psychological effects of being torn between our deep social impulses and our equally deep biophilic ones.

This brings us to my chosen lens of E. O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis, and hence to sociobiology. This is a freighted term, still strongly associated (as Glen Love points out) with the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer, Arthur Jensen, and, falling chronologically between them, Adolf Hitler. (Since it was Spencer, not Darwin, who coined the term and developed the idea of "survival of the fittest," the assignation of this concept to Darwinism is a distortion in the first instance.) Wilson, in a 1978 defense of attacks against his 1975 *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, explains the term's origin in John P. Scott's suggestion for a more formal way of naming "the interdisciplinary science which lies between the fields of biology (particularly ecology and physiology) and psychology and sociology" and defines the discipline as "the systematic study of the biological basis of all forms of social behavior, including sexual and parenting behavior, in all kinds of organisms including humans" ("What is sociobiology?" 10). As Wilson understates the case, his theories met with "stiff resistance" ("What is sociobiology?" 10). A raft of scientists, philosophers and graduate students, among them Wilson's illustrious Harvard colleagues Stephen J. Gould and Richard Lewontin, ran a letter strongly rejecting sociobiology in the November 13, 1975, *New York Review* which set the tone of anti-sociobiology arguments thereafter. The group accuses Wilson's book of being "[t]he latest

attempt to reinvigorate. . .tired theories" of genetic determinism that "provided an important basis for the enactment of sterilization laws and restrictive immigration laws by the United States between 1910 and 1930 and also for the eugenics policies which led to the establishment of gas chambers in Nazi Germany" ("Against 'Sociobiology' n.p.)—an accusation that Wilson, in a countering letter to the same paper, calls "ugly, irresponsible, and totally false" ("For Sociobiology" n.p.). The signatories' main contention was that Wilson was exercising expediency in the scope and flexibility of genetic determinism, allowing him to "confirm selectively certain contemporary behavior as adaptive and 'natural' and thereby justify the present social order" ("Against 'Sociobiology' n.p.). Significantly, they also state, "While evolutionary analysis provides a model for interpreting animal behavior, it does not establish any logical connection between behavior patterns in animal and human societies" ("Against 'Sociobiology' n.p), a statement that in my view betrays this group's resistance to the idea, or fact, that humans are animals. It should be noted here, in the interests of fairness, that Wilson's letter pointed out misquotations and misrepresentations in the original letter of such an egregious nature that they could hardly have been accidental. For instance, Wilson writes, "The letter signers. . . allege that I make institutions such as slavery 'seem natural in human societies because of their "universal" existence in the biological kingdom.' I have done no such thing. In the book slavery is stated to occur only in ants and men, and the many distinctions between its practice in the two groups are made clear" ("For Sociobiology").

The vitriolic infighting within the scientific community has continued over the past four decades, with British ethologist Richard Dawkins spearheading the anti-Wilson contingent in the late Gould's stead. In this period of time, several factors—chiefly, new data in animal studies, a growth of disciplines dedicated to the study of humans as animals (human behavioral ecology,

evolutionary psychology, evolutionary ethics), and, perhaps most significantly, an enormous increase in the use of magnetic-resonance imaging (MRI) techniques to study neurological responses in both humans and other animals—have led more scientists to at least a nominal acceptance that humans are animals and that to some degree their social and individual behaviors and perceptions derive from evolution. To what degree, at what level of determination, and by what processes, however, are issues that have led to a "calving-off" of theories within the wider sociobiological set and "spawned a large amount of rather acrimonious debates" (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett 10), particularly between the human behavioural ecology and evolutionary psychology camps, that are little less savage than the initial ones about genetic, evolutionary, and biological determinism. In fact, they are in many respects the same ones. For instance, proponents of so-called "massive modularity" of the brain argue for a much greater human capacity to adapt to new conditions such as urbanization than do the believers in general-domain functioning. Likewise, the proponents of "environment of evolutionary adaptedness" argue vigorously over whether most of the relevant hominid responses arose in the Pleistocene or a significant number of evolutionary changes were still occurring in the early Holocene. Meanwhile, many sociobiologists moot the preponderance of their findings by employing in their theories and studies the "phenotypic gambit," in which they "ignore the details of inheritance (genetic or cultural), cognitive mechanisms, and phylogenetic history that may pertain to a given decision role and behavioural domain in the hope that they don't matter in the end result" (Barrett, Dunbar and Lycett 10) .

To the extent that I feel qualified to comment on these arguments, which is not very far, I perceive in them a number of seemingly false binaries, and suspect that many of these scientists are operating out of the "dualistic dynamic" that Val Plumwood observes to permeate the

Western world outlook, the overcoming of which involves "recognition of both continuity and difference[:]. . .acknowledging the other as neither alien to and discontinuous from self nor assimilated to or an extension of self" (6). As a whole, I subscribe to the "third way" of Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, whose theory of "dual inheritance" ("dual" being the genetic and the cultural) "emphatically does not license . . .an ontological separation of culture and biology [with] separate levels of organization with only simple biological 'constraints' on cultural evolution" (2) and is predicated on the view that "If culture itself has the attributes of an inheritance system, then it makes sense to apply Darwinian analytical methods to [it] as well as to the genetic" (4).

Complications and infighting aside, in this project I use the term "sociobiology" more crudely, and no doubt simplistically, to represent the belief that "Being human simply means being one variety of animal on planet Earth" and that "Our similarities with other species, with whom we share a great deal of our genetic inheritance, turn out to be more remarkable than our differences" (Gribbin and Gribbin 1). I need and appreciate both the basic platform for viewing child readers as part of the animal kingdom and the space that sociobiology provides, however crowded with warring factions, as "the interdisciplinary science which lies between the fields of biology (particularly ecology and physiology) and psychology and sociology" ("What is sociobiology?" 10). Social scientist Alexander Rosenberg rightly remarks that Wilson's definition of the sociobiology as studying "the biological basis of all forms of social behavior, in all kinds of organisms, including man" ("What is sociobiology?" 10) "does not distinguish [the] discipline from that of biology *tout court*," and that if Wilson merely means that "there is a causal connection between genetic inheritance and each and every event involving the anatomical, physiological, behavioural machinery of the organism," then "[the] claim suffers, not

from falsity, but from obviousness" (155). It would be a fine thing indeed if everyone thought that such a connection were too obvious to need stating or defending. But, as Val Plumwood remarks in the epigraph, "in the context of the modern [Western] world," the view of humans as animals and as guided by evolutionary impulses runs so counter to the "dominant strand of thought" as to be not only non-obvious but "revolutionary."[iii]

A new way of reading (or: hermeneutics schmermeneutics)

I read the texts in my dissertation from the premise that much children's literature simultaneously taps into and fosters in child readers a biological, pre-/non-Christian, non-Humanist sense of themselves as members of an animal species interactive and interdependent with their environmental surroundings, and thus acts as a keeper of John Collier's eco-spiritual "long hope." By all rights, this perspective should be considerably less "alternative" than it is within the forty-year history of academic children's literature criticism. It is true that my approach differs in the ways I mention above from the more "humanist" and political modes of ecocriticism; I picture myself to be on the much-promised science-facing edge of the ecocritical sphere, trying to open a section of literary criticism's boundary to the interdisciplinary space between life sciences and social sciences that Wilson originally conceived for sociobiology. But since, as I note at the top and as is fairly obvious to even the most casual observer, "[C]lassic children's literature has long been preoccupied with natural history, ecology and human-animal interaction" (*Wild Things* 4), to the extent that [here insert Sam's note about animal population] it came as a surprise to me that the intervening space between my position and the first crossing-point into the substance of children's literature criticism was so wide and so barren. I had expected to be working from a decent fund, if not a wealth, of extant scholarly and critical work

on the nature-based content of children's literature. What I found instead was very little criticism that focused on this aspect, or acknowledged it, or even, in terms of theoretical outlook, allowed it: a special "green" issue of the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* in 1994 and one of *The Lion and the Unicorn* in 1995; a chapter in Julia Mickenberg's 2005 *Learning from the Left* on the Soviet and American "nature study" movements in children's literature in the 1950s; a somewhat animalistic depiction of the child, derived from Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of the "monster child," in Kimberley Reynolds' 2007 *Radical Children's Literature*; and Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth Kidd's 2004 compilation *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism*, in which Kidd observes that children's literature criticism and ecocriticism have to that point been "largely separate undertakings" (*Wild Things* 3).

The short explanation for this disconnection is that, as I have intimated, the two fields consolidated their legitimacy as academic disciplines with very different relationships to the theoretical trends of the day. Both emerged in the academy in the mid- to late 1980s: children's literature, arguably, with the 1984 publication of Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, and ecocriticism with the adoption at a 1989 Western Literature Association conference of the word "ecocriticism" as an umbrella term for disparate nature-oriented analyses, followed by WLA member Cheryll Glofelty's 1990 appointment as the first American professor of Literature and the Environment. Ecocriticism, seeking status as a meta-outlook that "claims as its hermeneutic horizon nothing short of the literal horizon itself" and mounts a "challenge to most postmodern discourse as well as to the critical systems of the past" (Love 1), opened up "a theoretical space. . .that was] largely antipathetical to theory in its then prevalent modality" (Rigby and Goodbody 2). It sought to reclaim an objective reality from the constructionists, to assume that "something is already there, asking to be actualised or

understood," in contradistinction to standard critical theory that "seems to have been dedicated to repudiating any such 'realisation' [;]. . .In various schools—formalist, psychoanalytic, new historicist, deconstructionist, even Marxist—the common assumption has been that what we call 'nature' exists primarily as a term within a cultural discourse, apart from which it has no being or meaning" (Coupe 2). In the early focus on "how modern conventions of reading block out the environmental dimension of literary texts" (*Environmental Imagination* 14), there was, in short, a "widespread rejection of . . .critical or cultural theory by most first-wave ecocritics" (Rigby and Goodbody 1), and the field developed as a hallmark the "belligerent attitude towards critical theory" that John Parham would decry by 2008.

Children's literature criticism, meanwhile, was knee-deep in suspicion, and wading in farther with every step. In *The Case of Peter Pan*, Jacqueline Rose contends that children's fiction constructs the child within the book as innocent, fixed and "knowable in a direct and unmediated way," (9), as part of an "often perverse and mostly dishonest" desire on the part of adults to "hold off a panic" (10) about their own sexuality and the unknowable nature of the world. Peter Hunt, in 1994 writing that "the writers and manipulators of children's books are adults; books are makers of meaning for their readers, and their readers are children" (2), concludes that "[W]hat needs to be emphasized is that children's literature is a powerful literature, and that such power cannot be neutral or innocent, or trivial. . . .Equally obviously, the primary audience is children, who are less experienced and less educated into their culture than adults. [This] means that [children's books] are part of a complex power-relationship" (3-4). Perry Nodelman., who views writers as "workers in a field of economic production" (4) and consistently refers to children's books as "productions," similarly paints the children's novelist as a sinister being, one who by means of double focalization and other techniques inserts a

"hidden adult" behind the texts to exploit the power differential and didactically manipulate the child reader. "I am convinced. . .adults have imposed their own theoretical assumptions about children on children–constructed them as the limited creatures the adults have imagined them to be," writes Nodelman. (85). Karen Coats, working within her psychoanalytic approach with some degree of laity-friendly (and even ecocritic-friendly) ideas—e.g., that the "subject" is "split, a construction of both natural and cultural influences, of conscious and unconscious processes" (6)—opens the door to a more paranoiac way of reading when she accepts and applies such Lacanian precepts as that "the child must come under the "Law of the Father" in order to take up a position in the Symbolic; he must, paradoxically, become his own cause" (7) and, perhaps more significantly, "Since our encounters with difference are always linked to the grief of separation from the mother, our imaginary constructions of race and gender are fraught with sadness and fear" (8).

As a field that studies humans exclusively as humans, classical psychoanalysis is by definition among the most highly anthropocentric lenses through which a subject can be viewed. While ecocriticism (at least theoretically) admits the idea of human as animal, and claims an interest in expressions of, and possibilities for, our existential reintegration with the non-human world, most lines of psychoanalysis and its related fields focus on the child's purported process of learning that he or she is separate from and "above" the merely biological and animalistic. This has created in children's literature criticism an historically biophobic culture, one with not only a disproportionate focus on psychoanalysis-amenable texts that are at least as anomalous as they are canonical—most signally *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland*—but a tendency to "problematize" the idea of child-nature affinity from a position of dismissal, if not contempt.

For instance, Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*, waning gradually in influence but still cited by hundreds of scholars and widely used in university courses, reads child-animal bonding in fairy tales and fantasies as not as archetypal expressions of humans' inherent connection with other members of the living world, but as an indication of the "pre-rational" state of the child, who is still (Bettelheim notes pityingly) ignorant enough to believe that "whatever has life has life very much like our own" (46). It has also led to tendentious-seeming and perhaps even wilfully anti-ecological readings of key texts in children's literature criticism such as the Karen Coats reading of *Charlotte's Web* that I cite at the top.

Where children's literature scholars followed the more general critical trends, they ran equally afoul of an ecocritical mandate to have natural elements in texts read "as a … literal reference or as an object of retrieval or contemplation for its own sake" rather than for "its formal or symbolic or ideological properties" (*Environmental Imagination* 85). Theoretical frameworks such as deconstructionism and post-structuralism (see, for instance, Karen Lesnik-Oberstein's 1994 *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child*), with their "radical textualism" ("Radical Pastoral?" 183), propounded, in Kate Soper's words, an "irreducibly cultural and symbolic order of human being," "consistently criticized naturalist explanations of the being of humanity," and looked on the idea of inherent value in nature "with suspicion. . .as an attempt to 'eternize' what in reality is merely conventional" (6).

The aspects of psychoanalytic literary theory and other modes of "suspicious" critique that create separation from ecocriticism (at least early ecocriticism) are manifold. Firstly, they discourage critics from considering in any kind of face-value way the causes, functions, and effects of the strong presence of nature in children's literature; they forestall the recognition that, as Gene Myers puts it, "as a child's social abilities develop, he or she perceives an animal an

another being with subjective experience of its own," and that "animals may be social others to us with whom we can form relationships" ("Animals as Links" 154).duplicated. In the same wise, they agitate against the commonsensical perception that a strong identification with nature results not from a person's life-stage, but from "the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms," as Wilson puts it in his biophilia hypothesis (Kellert and Wilson 31). Instead, Myers suggests, those engaged in traditional theories of child development and the literature that forms part of it "do not see animals as fundamentally important to human life. . .[and] have dispersed them to the official domains of child psychology: here in conceptual development, a bat that is not a bird; over there in psychoanalysis, the horse that is the father. Encounter is mediated, indirect, because some more important human feature intervenes" (*Children and Animals* xiv).

Myers, summarizing the ways in which fields within the academic humanities have historically characterized interactions between children and animals (and, by extension, other aspects of the biotic world), clarifies how operating from within this set of traditional humanist perspectives makes it almost inevitable that the nature-based content of children's texts will be read for [?]

> Some, influenced by psychoanalytic traditions, will argue that the child's interactions with the animal are actually projective episodes, in which some intrapsychic conflict is acted out on the animal, with indifference to its distinct being. Others (though this position is weakening) are likely to object that the child's cognitive apparatus is too egocentric to differentiate the animal as a nonanthropomorphic other; instead, the child

> assimilates the animal to the human pattern. Still others, as noted previously, hold that language and culture are determinative over all else and that the meanings of the animal to the child are explained by such human-generated sources. (*Children and Animals* 8)

Myers goes on to assert that "there are truths—or at least Western traditions—behind each objection. But when we carefully unfold interactions between child and animal, none of these objections holds absolutely. Indeed, a more fundamental pattern is evident in ordinary child development. Preverbal, intersubjective, and language abilities all contribute" (8).

Despite all of the above-going, it would seem on paper that no number of theoretical incompatibilities could keep ecocriticism and children's literature criticism wholly apart, for their fields of analysis share a common progenitor: the Romantics. Humphrey Carpenter proposes, and most critics agree, that the modern genre of children's literature—that is, the post-tractarian trend that began in the so-called "Golden Age" of Victorian and Edwardian children's books (*Secret Gardens* 2)—emerged from "a change. . . in the attitude of adults to children, a change closely bound up with the Romantic movement" (14). Carpenter views Wordsworth's "Ode" and William Blake's Songs of Innocence as "a call to revolution against the view of childhood [in which]. . .a child was simply a miniature adult, a chrysalis from which a fully rational and moral being would duly emerge" (16),[iv] and toward the idea that "children are in a higher state of spiritual perception than adults, because of their nearness to their birth" (ix). But although "the soil was ready as early as 1830 for the development of imaginative writing for children" (18-19), books such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Secret Garden,* and *The Wind in the Willows* didn't emerge until the later 1800s and early 1900s, when "[t]he mid-Victorian belief in progress. . .was starting to be shaken" (21) and the squalor and miseries of Industrialism began to come clear.

Meanwhile, the "received wisdom" (Bate 7) and common-sense view of the Romantics themselves is that they were nature-writers: "[I]f the French Revolution was one great root of Romanticism, 'the return to nature', associated above all with the Rousseau of the second *Discourse* and the *Nouvelle Heloise,* was surely the other" (Bate 8). In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Romantic writers and artists presented "a new narrative [which] came to challenge the earlier story of divine order" (Nichols xvi) and gave rise to a "view of the interconnectedness of all living—and even non-living—things" (Nichols xvi).

All of this would be fine and well, and ecocriticism and children's literature surely prepared for an ardent sibling embrace, were it not for the infiltration of Romantic Studies themselves by that same "hermeneutic of suspicion" that bedevilled children's literature criticism. As Jonathan Bate outlines, the "Victorian way of reading" the Romantics—that is, chiefly as "nature writers," though with moderate recognition that political events, particularly the French Revolution, played a major role—gave way in the mid-20th century to "idealizing, imagination-privileging critics like Geoffrey Hartman and Harold Bloom" (6). These influential figures strove to bring philosophy to the center of Romantic readings, and, following Paul de Man, argued that poets such as Wordsworth placed so much premium on the imaginative faculty as to suggest that we do not need nature: we can create it, in effect, through our mind's eye. Things got no better for a nature-centered view of the Romantics with the new historicism of Jerome McGann. Greg Garrard[v], performing a brief but persuasive rehabilitation of pastoral as a "radical" form of literature, cites historicism as "the critical hegemony that would most object to the [idea of radical pastoral], that is most hostile to ecocriticism, and that nevertheless seems its *sine qua non*" ("Radical Pastoral?" 182). He cites ecocritic Karl Kroeber as observing that McGann imported into Romantic studies a theoretical lens "that extended Cold War psychology

into academe and cemented assumptions of "the superiority of the critic over the artist" (182-83). This approach, as Garrard notes, allowed for a vision of the Romantic poets and other ecocentric artists as "collaborationist" and "complicit" with repressing "true history" (183). As Bate sums things up, "Hartman threw out nature to bring us the transcendent imagination; McGann throws out the transcendent imagination to bring us history and society" (8).

The end result is that ecocritics (starting particularly with Bate) had considerable work to do before they could "find English and American romanticism congenial surroundings from which to launch a coherent attack on the critical orthodoxies of today" ("Radical Pastoral?" 182). Children's literature critics would need to perform something of the same rehabilitation to restore the Romantics as the common denominator between the two critical that they seem *prima facie* to be.

But what about ecocriticism? Why should it be the task of children's literature criticism to accommodate an ecocritical view, and not the task of ecocritics to explore the immense trove of material in the realm of children's literature? This is actually the more perplexing direction of oversight in the gap between the two fields, for ecocriticism is possibly the most expansive and accommodating critical view ever to grace academe, yet children's literature has featured even less often in ecocriticism than an ecocritical view in children's literature criticism. For instance, *ISLE*, the official journal of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), has thus far failed to publish any major articles on children's literature. Until 2011, ASLE's "Bibliography" for "Children's Environmental Writing" comprised a short 2005 email thread initiated by leading ecocritical author Karla Armbruster, who sent out the query to colleagues, "Do you have any recommendations for where to find some of the best writing on nature and the environment for children and young adults?" (ASLE.org). Few texts in the

responses were fictional and none, outside of *The Lorax*, were in any way canonical or well-known.[vi] Further, none of the major ecocritical anthologies published to date—for example, Laurence Coupe's 2000 *Green Studies Reader*, Glotfelty and Fromm's 1996 *Ecocritical Reader,* or Armbruster and Wallace's 2001 second-wave compilation *Beyond Nature Writing*—mentions children's literature at all, much less dedicates essays to it. I can find no explanation for it except simple obliviousness.

Clearly, then, those of us hoping to advance either ecocritical approaches within the field of children's literature or children's literature within the field of ecocriticism face something of a challenge, and one that makes establishing an ecocritical children's canon a more effortful enterprise than one might think. Kenneth Kidd identifies some children's texts as "challenging the consensus understanding of ecocriticism" (12), but even the most humanist forms of ecocriticism look likely to have a harder time challenging "the consensus understanding" of children's-literature studies, and this is doubly true of a biological and evolutionary form such as mine. There are, however, some hopeful signs. Kenneth Kidd, Sidney Dobrin, and Nathalie Op de Beeck have done consistent work in examining children's texts through ecological viewpoints. The MLA sponsored a forum on "Ecocriticism and Young Readers" at its 2012 convention. And, in turn, the 2013 biennial ASLE conference included several children's literature–focused seminars: Companions in Wonder: Children and Adults Exploring Nature Together; Revising Place-Conscious Composition; and Sense of Nature and Ecopedagogical Design in Swedish and German Children's Literature**.**

As the ASLE conference titles suggest, what points of intersection do exist between ecocriticism and children's literature criticism right now rely on the humanities-based mode of ecocriticism that I describe and criticize at the beginning of this introduction. It would certainly

seem to be the case that thus far, formal children's literature criticism has remained almost untouched by extradisciplinary ideas that have evident consonance with its genre's nature-oriented content, such as the biophilia hypothesis, which states that humans are "ultimately obedient to biological law" (80-81); ecopsychology, which "overtly acknowledges and promotes our biological connection with nature as a therapeutic recovery from our misguided detachment from earth" (Henderson et al., "Pedagogical Response to *The Lorax*" 137); and descriptive evolutionary ethics, a largely empirical and explanatory discipline that examines human and non-human moral behavior vis-à-vis its possible evolutionary survival functions.[vii] Time will tell if my approach has the potential to extend the boundaries of each field to a point of overlap, or if they will remain for all intents and purposes incommensurable.

To read children's texts through a biological lens and from the premise that many of its authors are writing from a similar outlook has a surprisingly strong effect on the debate over the social and psychological role of children's fiction, a central issue about which children's literature critics have disagreed sharply. Kimberley Reynolds, revisiting Jacqueline Rose's thesis two decades later, notes that other highly regarded scholars of children's literature, such as Jack Zipes and Robyn McCallum, have joined with Rose in regarding children's fiction as "implicated in acculturation—in transmitting cultural values and 'civilizing' children." (2). Reynolds herself, however, points out that while children's texts are indeed remarkably effective at "filling the minds of generations of young readers with experiences, emotions and the mental furniture and tools necessary for thinking about themselves and the world they inhabit," this affective ability does not necessarily give children's literature "an innately conservative effect" (3), but may also make the genre "replete with radical potential." (2)

If we read from the view that much children's literature both depends on and fosters the primal trait of biophilia, these kaleidoscopic critical fragments fall into a coherent pattern. It may be true that many of the genre's texts are "implicated in acculturation"—but if we admit the biophilic premise, then the "cultural values" in which they are involved are often ancient, ineradicable ones which work *against* many modern-day values of the adult Western world, ones that stem "not just [from] culturally coded determinants but also [from] natural determinants that antedate these, and will outlast them" (Love 1). They are values that perhaps came most explicitly into the modern sensibility with the Romantics, but have found expression in many ways, even through the Christian millennia, even in the most repressive times. In other words, if, as the conspicuous abundance of nature-based texts suggests, one of the chief memes that children's literature transmits and conserves is the human impulse to stay oriented toward and affiliated with other living things and the natural world, then the genre is revolutionary by the very fact of being conservative, and radical in maintaining an otherwise sublimated and disavowed orthodoxy. My project therefore offers an alternative critical perspective that has the potential to unite some of the seemingly conflicting extant scholarly perceptions of the field.

Children's literature as a Trojan Horse

Lisa Lebduska illuminates a peculiarity of children's literature when she remarks of Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* that any extension or application of its ecological message would lead to nothing less than "a reexamination of American lifestyles" (qtd in Henderson, et al 142). In my view, the same could be said of many children's texts, and the repercussions would not stop at reexamination, nor at mere lifestyle, nor yet at Americans: they would involve a veritable revolution in the Western world of species self-perception, value systems, priorities and

behaviours. Within the dozen-plus books in this dissertation alone, for instance, reside environmental themes and theses that directly contest many basic precepts of Christianity and Judaism, strongly criticize industrialism and technological progress, assail equally the "single-visioned" Baconian science of the Enlightenment (Roszak 21-22) and the arrogance of humanism, decry the effects of industrial capitalism, present alternatives to Western conceptions of individuality, depict the notion of Manifest Destiny as a social and environmental disaster, exalt ritualized nature-worship, make persuasive cases for the superiority of Greco-Roman and pre-Christian Celtic belief systems, and offer fully realized syncretic spiritual alternatives to the prevailing Western social and religious orthodoxies.

Yet although the guardians of children's literature have been vigilant for "unsuitable" content within certain obvious categories (being chiefly sexuality, death, religion, and politics), they have let slip these texts with radical and potentially radicalizing ecological/existential messages. In fact, considering that most readers of children's chapter books have not yet reached the age of purchasing independence and many readers of picture books often have not reached the age of reading independence, it seems clear that the protectionist phalanx of parents, librarians, teachers, publishers and religious leaders must have been actively participating in transmitting these subversive texts down through the generations, despite knowing (surely) what many of them imply.

How do we account for this, and for the overwhelmingly nature-based content of Western children's literature in general? We could, of course, ascribe it to simple oversight, but this is to commit *petitio principii*, since the reason for the oversight is the issue at hand. It is my contention that the publishing history of children's literature since the late 1800s in Britain and the early 1900s in North America is a reflection of and a vehicle for our culture's biophilic

impulses. Far from being the agent of conformism that many early and late children's literature critics have proposed, the ecocentric core of the generic canon from the Golden Age onward has acted, I believe, as an agent of social subversion, keeping intact pre-Industrial, non-Abrahamic values and visions regarding our surrounding environment. It may even, as I argue in my first chapter, help psychological and cultural expressions of biophilia form a kind of protective Teflon layer that keeps biophobic beliefs from fully taking hold.

If this premise is granted, it follows as the night the day that the typical child reader becomes quite a conflicted adult. A key element of my argument is that the "Trojan Horse" function of children's literature—that is, its role in smuggling subversive values past a (deliberately?) blind spot of adult gatekeepers—by the same token fosters a sharp break in the Western reader's value system, as the nature-oriented perspective, impulses, and allegiances fostered by the genre are countered, once adulthood has been reached, by indoctrination into an orthodoxy that vigorously promotes a sense of human exemption and exceptionalism, models of lifestyle and ambition that can only be achieved through the exploitation of nature, progressivist ideas that seek to take the human population ever farther away from its animal identity, and so on. I refer to this as "internal anomie," and I explore it particularly in my chapter on Diana Wynne Jones's *Drowned Ammet* and Natalie Babbitt's *The Search for Delicious*. These books are valuable in having their protagonists cross from one paradigm/value set to the other and back again, exposing the stark and painful conflict between them.

Remarkably few children's books do this[viii]. In fact, despite its overarching tendency to foster love and reverence for nature, the genre maintains a conspicuous silence about the problematic relationship between these feelings and Western society's economic, cultural, and spiritual dispensation. Although some canonical children's books, such as *Charlotte's Web* and

King of the Wind, hint at this conflict by featuring adult characters with a much more utilitarian and domineering view of animals and nature, far more of them simply stay immersed in a childhood world and avoid the forced repudiation of values ahead. For example, dozens (if not hundreds) of "rock hound" and "young geologist" books published for pre-teens encourage children in a love for banging rocks open with a hammer without telling them that the most likely occupational outlet for this passion in the wage-earning world will be as a geological engineer for an oil company or strip-mining firm. Legions of both non-fiction and fiction books foster children's fascination with trees, flowers, moss, and other plants without mentioning that their main option for expressing this love in the adult world will be as a monoculture farmer or logger. The animal-lover does not get to the part of the story where she or he can only find work as a lab biologist performing vivisectionist experiments; the children's books portraying the nature-filled idyll of rural living rarely mention that there are few jobs available in these communities and the high-school graduate will almost certainly be obliged to move to the city. Thus, the "happy endings" of ascribed to the genre of children's literature books might be more accurately described as the absence of an ending—the tale of an intense relationship with the rest of the living world that stops just before the divorce. Although my dissertation focuses on the process by which the childhood end of this internal break is fostered, I feel that the implications and extensions are worth considering.

Jesus, technology, immortality, and fantasy

Given the prodigious number of children's texts which could support my argument about the genre's biophilic tendencies and "long hope" function, I felt it necessary to choose a narrow focus. The theme of immortality makes sense as that focus because the proposal that humans

have the potential to live beyond the limits of their natural biological lifespan, either through the "post-death" means of achieving an afterlife or the "pre-death" means of not dying to start with, has long served as a chief postulate of denial for the Western culture's two dominant doctrines: Christianity and its supposedly secular outgrowth, the rigidly empiricist mode of science and technology aptly referred to as "scientism." To put it the other way around, the observable, invariable, and ostensibly undeniable fact of every human being's physical death presents a serious obstacle for any belief system that holds humans to be exempt from the rest of the animal kingdom and the natural cycle of life, and overcoming this obstacle requires a strongly urged indoctrination into one form of immortalist belief or another. As the venerable Simon Tugwell puts it,

> It is self-evident that humans are liable or subject to death and are therefore not plausible candidates for immortality, unless we are willing to envisage a being which is simultaneously mortal and immortal. . .In light of the plain fact that humans die, and are therefore mortal, it is clear that some kind of conceptual jiggery-pokery must be involved in the contention that they are immortal. (5)

The novels in my project both assail the conceptual jiggery-pokery of immortalist thinking and offer ways in which we might conceive of humans as being simultaneously mortal and immortal. A number take on the anti-nature implications of the eternal afterlife promised by the Christian belief system. More respond with alarm to the techno-secular brand of immortalism, typified by J. Robert Adams' rhetoric: "Can the Grim Reaper be held at bay? The answer is, yes. How? By halting the aging process, use of stem cells, nanobots, freezing, gene splicing. . .nerve impulses, electromagnetism, quantum mechanics" (2), as well as "the Saved Consciousness" (5). Others

reconfigure and reconceive immortality in ways that propose an ecologically integrated rather than segregated humanity.

Any depiction of humans either living forever or being alive after their death belongs rather to the realm of speculation than of observed reality. To put it another way, "Those who affirm immortality have usually been more hopeful than certain, whereas those who deny it have commonly regarded their positions as having the force of a demonstration" (Hocking 23). Of the two main speculative literary genres, science fiction and fantasy, I have chosen the latter for two reasons. The first is practical: fantasy treatments of human immortality are relatively plentiful in children's literature, while science-fiction treatments of it are almost non-existent (a fact I consider telling in itself). The second is that the theme of human immortality marks probably the point of sharpest disagreement between the two genres. Roger Zelazny explains the divergence of outlook by noting that science fiction "presuppos[es] that people are able to understand and control their lives and surroundings," while fantasy "presupposes human inability to understand or control individual lives or the general environment [and therefore] depicts immortality as an undesirable condition" (qtd. in Yoke and Hassler, 135), a distinction that lies equally at the heart of differing attitudes toward nature and parallels Greg Garrard's categories of "cornucopian" and "Deep Ecology" beliefs, respectively. While it is true that some fantasy texts portray revenants positively as (good) angels or spiritual mentors, the majority of it exhibits repugnance for the idea of human immortality. Carl B. Yoke notes that, science-fiction writers' putative optimism notwithstanding, they as much as anyone tend to depict immortals as "leading boring, meaningless, and lonely existences" and have equal difficulty in envisioning a "life without termination" (15)—a fact that, intriguingly, Yoke ascribes to evolutionary biology: "It seems that

built into [our] genetic code is a termination point, a program which when completely produces. . .death. There seems to be a grammar for death built into life itself" (15).

I have identified within my primary texts four different ways in which treatments of immortality potentially abet the biophilic impulse and serve to "smuggle" nature-oriented values from generation to generation. Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, texts that might be categorized with equal validity as pantheistic, animistic, or simply mystical, portray humans (or anthropomorphized animals) as being bio-spiritually integrated within the natural matrix and able to draw on it in mystical ways for their own "eternal life." Natalie Babbitt's *The Search for Delicious* and Diana Wynne Jones's *Drowned Ammet* work with animistic belief systems and frameworks of what Wilson terms "ecological time," in which "individual people and other organisms are no longer distinguishable" (*Biophilia* 43), to remind readers that the human species depends for its continued existence on the "immortality" of the earth and its abundance. Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* and Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* unite characterological and ecological bases in their fierce objection to the modern-day quest for human bodily immortality through new life-extension technologies. Finally, Le Guin's *The Other Wind* and Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* present humans' atomistic return to the living universe after their bodily death as a natural and ideal process from which Western religious and scientific values have severed us.

Immortality figures to greater and lesser degrees in these books: it is the central concern of all the Le Guin novels that I analyze, for instance, and more peripheral or intermittent in *The Wind in the Willows, The Search for Delicious*, and (arguably) Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials books. I focus my analysis correspondingly more or less narrowly on the theme of

immortality in any given book, and frequently pull back to a wider perspective on the context surrounding that theme.

(Judeo-)Christianity and modern technology come in for an equally rough ride in this dissertation. This is partly because I, like most other ecocritics, agree with Lynn White, Jr., that the Abrahamic belief system, which White calls "the greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture" (9), is the main culprit in Western societies' alienation from and exploitation of nature. As my section on sociobiology should make clear, I also agree with White that "modern Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology" (11) and that "Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians" (12). That my selected texts are fighting immortalism on two fronts, the Christian and the technological, signifies the extent to which same arrogation of humans over nature pervades both paradigms. It is hard to argue against White's assertion that Judaism's "concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear" (9), its insistence on "a dualism of man and nature" and its belief that "it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends" laid the psychological and eventually the socioeconomic groundwork for "an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or the Orient." In turn, it is easy to concur that this faith "is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology" (9).

That said, glib over-use of such quotes misrepresents both White's fairly nuanced argument and my own outlook. White notes that the technological means for exploiting nature, starting with the eight-oxen plow that replaced the two-ox scratch plow (8) and continuing through watermills and blast furnaces, arose only in the West, while "the Greek East, a highly

civilized realm of equal Christian devotion, seems to have produced no marked technological innovation after the late seventh century" (10). Thus, it was a certain trajectory of Christian precepts, rather than the precepts themselves, that opened the way to the wholesale exploitation, destruction, and urbanisation of recent times. And the Christian concept of *usufruct*, or the human responsibility for and stewardship over the land that comes along with our "dominion" over all other living creatures, provides sacral material for nature-revering syncretisms such as the one that John Gatta argues for Thoreau and, for that matter, the one I argue for children's literature, especially in the first part of the 20th century (e.g., *The Secret Garden*, the Little House books). Conversely, Judaism, alone of the world's major belief systems, has no conception of immortality, and so this particularly damaging notion, which allows (at least intellectually) for a cavalier attitude toward the earth during our physical lifetimes, must be ascribed to Christianity alone.

At the same time, I deeply disagree with White's conclusion that "Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim" (12). In our *heads*, perhaps, depending on our nationality and individual upbringing; Gene Myers is probably justified in speaking for the average American, at any rate, when he remarks, "More than a century after Darwin, we have yet to come to terms with our own animality, including the bonds it gives us, virtually ready made, to other species" (*Children and Animals* xiv). But if the phrase "in our hearts" symbolizes something closer to "in our cellular make-up, in the deepest and most primary impulses of our being," then of course my dissertation is arguing quite the opposite: despite God and Christ and Abraham Darby and Steve Jobs, we are, in our hearts, ineluctably entwined with and fascinated by the natural process, and "will find little ultimate meaning apart from [it]" (*Biophilia* 81).

My animus against science, in the meantime, may seem at odds with my early exhortations for ecocritics to educate and orient themselves much more in this direction. The science that I find attractive and appropriate to ecocriticism (not to say accurate) are the life sciences, and more specifically the life sciences practiced in such a way as to position the human species within biology and to affirm this "phylogenetic continuity," as Wilson puts it. There is no longer any such thing as a naturalist, but the kind of observation-based, wondering and humble attitude that characterized that formerly glorious occupation has found its way into some circles of the life sciences, E. O. Wilson and his adherents being prime among them. The kind of science I do not advocate in ecocriticism and which many of these texts decry is, in Theodore Roszak's words, "reductionist science and power-ridden technology" (113), which not only arrogates humans even more persistently than Christianity, but leaves "painters and poets [the only ones] who *really* look at the world" (Roszak 109). This kind of science truly is, as Lynn White, Jr., says, "cast in a matrix of Christian theology."

Chapters

My first chapter, "Pan, pantheism, and natural immanence", explores the conceptions and functions of immortality in Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. Through their mutual evocation of the Greek god Pan, a post-Darwinist employment of Romantic ideas, and (particularly in *The Secret Garden*) a depiction of eternality as natural immanence rather than Christian afterlife, these two cornerstones of children's literature initiate what I contend to be a syncretic spiritual system peculiar to, and now characteristic of, the genre. This "children's literature syncretism," I argue, provides the Western child reader with a displacing alternative to the Judeo-Christian/techno-industrial orthodoxy, and

is one of the chief elements promoting biophilia and thwarting social messages that are inimical to nature.

Chapter Two, "Explicating Anomie," analyzes Natalie Babbitt's *The Search for Delicious* and Diana Wynne Jones's *Drowned Ammet*, especially the way in which (as I mention above) they take their child characters from a deep sense of inter-identity with nature to an anthropocentric adult value system (both via class politics) and back again, thereby not only exposing the conflict between the two outlooks but illuminating the nature-spurning adult priorities as a function of active social indoctrination rather than inevitable development.

Chapter Three, "The belief in [immortality] a blunder, the hope of it a sin," looks at the fierce and overt anti-immortalism of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore* and Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting*. These two books express a new urgency in the argument against scientific life-extension, and they place a particular premium on the trait of honour, which I define as "declining to exercise a power advantage." I propose that in reading books such as these, along with the more heroic brand of honour-based books such as Lloyd Alexander's Prydain Chronicles and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King*, the child reader learns about the crucial social, ecological, and evolutionary role of self-restraint, which both Le Guin and Babbitt's books use synedochally to stand in for species self-limitation.

My fourth chapter shows Philip Pullman and Ursula K. Le Guin assailing notions of the afterlife as trenchantly as Le Guin and Babbitt do the "ever-life". *The Amber Spyglass* and *The Other Wind*, take on, respectively, the Catholic and (perhaps) Greco-Roman conceptions of Limbo/Hades, comprehensive re-envisioning the nature of human post-death non-paradisiacal immortality and assigning it radically different traits in relation to the rest of the ecology. Pullman suggests that Catholic indoctrination has trapped the dead in a dim, painful, and

changeless eternity; once these dead souls are freed, they dissolve out of their individual identity and atomistically rejoin their daemons and the rest of the living world. Le Guin, working with her similar portrayal of a twilit, dry realm of the dead from *The Farthest Shore*, proposes that that land was created when humans—once the same creature as dragons but separated by a pact that gave dragons the air, the True Speech, and access to a land where "the self endures unchanged, unchanging, forever" (194) and humans the land, the sea, and possessions—broke the pact in an attempt to achieve the dragons' immortality. As with Pullman's realm, the milling dead have for eons sought "to be one with the earth again" (195), and they are able to do this when an assemblage of the book's protagonists dismantle the wall between life and death and release them.

A note on terminology

My diction in this project suffers from a paucity of available terms to signify the natural world. I use terms such as "ecology," "environment," "nature," "the biotic/abiotic matrix" and "the living world" with scandalous interchangeability simply to avoid repeating myself. I recognize that each of these terms represents a separate and sometimes quite different thing, and I only wish I could use the word "creation" to convey what most of the time I really mean. Sadly, I feel that this would run me into some trouble in literal-minded quarters. Likewise, I occasionally supplant the word "ecocentric" with Kate Soper's term "nature-endorsing," now that the former term has apparently fallen out of favour among the cognoscenti. That said, I find "nature-endorsing" inelegant and imprecise, so most of the time I go ahead and use the old-fashioned "ecocentric" or my own clunky term "nature-oriented."

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[i] It should be noted that these two eminently witty writers, tangling in an extended exchange with Greg Garrard, me, and Roman Bartosch over the purpose of a 2012 symposium at the University of Cologne (and, in a larger sense, over the purpose of ecocriticism in general), speak for me but from the opposition direction: they are lamenting the lack of activism, where I lament its presence.

[ii] Many species and individual animals within species demonstrate complex levels of awareness, non-biological patterns of sexuality, highly ritualized and symbolic behaviour, and so on. The notion in itself that only the human species possesses language and can use it symbolically is absurd on its face, and even a moderately educated layperson such as I can refute it with any number of examples. The waggle-dance of the honey bee uses symbolic language to direct other bees to food sources; chemical ejections given off by wounded or felled trees alert nearby trees to the presence of danger; observers of wild turkeys have noted at least 30 dialectics within their language, including different words for each different species of endemic snake. Then there is birdsong, a form of communication so highly complex that ornithologists have hardly begun to understand it. Likewise, cetaceans, corvids and members of *Pssitaciformes* communicate information and emotion through a vast and spontaneously recombinable repertoire of language. This is not even to address the enormous unknown realm of olfactory communication, with its innate ability to convey the subtlest emotional, psychological, and physical information, to which most mammals other than humans are privy. Meerkats and hyenas, among others, interact in complicated, non-deterministic ways in response to olfactory language.

[iii] The revolutionary nature of including humans in a Darwinist outlook is perhaps most readily apparent in the United States, where in a 2010 international assessment of the acceptance of Darwinism, 14 percent of

Americans said they believed the theory of evolution was "definitely true" (*Science*, Oct. 2010)—fewer than the highest national group (the Dutch) who believed it to be "absolutely false"—and a third of Americans rejected the theory of evolution out of hand; and where in a 2012 national poll 46 percent of Americans believed that God created humans in their current form and another 32 percent believed that God guided evolutionary processes to lead to humans in their current form, leaving only 15 percent who believed in evolution as a scientific process applied to the human species as well as all other species. However, as easy as it is to point fingers at the American insistence on creationism, E. O. Wilson notes that the "stiff resistance," not to say virulent backlash, to the basic precepts of sociobiology came chiefly from two extra-national groups: social scientists in general, who adhered to "the Durkheim-Boas tradition of the autonomy of the social sciences," and Marxists, who "cling to a vision of human nature as a relatively unstructured phenomenon swept along by economic forces extraneous to human biology" and whose "secular ideologies [which] rested secure as unchallenged satrapies of scientific materialism" now "were in danger of being displaced by other, less manageable biological explanations" ("What is sociobiology?" 10). While this may be an unfair generalization in light of Karl Marx's serious examination of the "species alienation" created by industrial capitalism's mass urbanization, it does go to my earlier point that many groups who ostensibly accept Darwinism are reluctant to step outside the "humanist echo chamber" and perform analyses that genuinely reposition humans within the context of evolutionary biology

[iv] Where Carpenter specifies a turn from Lockean to Roussean beliefs about childhood and education, Jacqueline Rose dates modern children's literature from "a time when the concept of childhood was dominated by the philosophical writings of Locke and Rousseau" (Rose 8). We can perhaps tell, however, from the common yoking of two thinkers who in their attitudes toward nature sat at opposing poles—Locke an empiricist and one of the chief agents of Enlightenment thinking; Rousseau not only a leading figure in early Romanticism but a proto-deep ecologist and evolutionary ethicist even before the mechanics of evolution were discovered—the degree to which ecological viewpoints have been neglected.

[v] Just to note: Jonathan Bate was Greg Garrard's Ph.D supervisor.

[vi] I have begun to correct this oversight with an annotated bibliography of nature-oriented children's literature on the ASLE website.

[vii] Note that descriptive evolutionary ethics takes an approach sharply distinct from, even inimical to, the prescriptive philosophical subfield of normative evolutionary ethics

[viii] Some canonical texts that do depict this existential disjunction are Laura Ingalls Wilder's *By the Shores of Silver Lake*; Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' *The Yearling*; Robert Newton Peck's *A Day No Pigs Would Die*; Astrid Lindren's *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*; W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*; and, almost certainly the most explicit of the group, Cynthia Voigt's *A Solitary Blue*.