



THE AMERICAN NATURE WRITING NEWSLETTER

A BIENNIAL PUBLICATION DEVOTED TO THE STUDY OF WRITING ON NATURE
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF LITERATURE AND ENVIRONMENT

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LETTERS TO ASLE MEMBERS

Dear ASLE Members,

All eyes are looking towards Fort Collins. It will be exciting to meet so many of the people whose names are familiar because of their recent research in the field of literature and environment or from various ASLE materials. There was an utter deluge of submissions for the conference—such a vast and impressive range of new work in the field! I have tried to put together a coherent, interesting program, and I think it's going to be an extremely successful meeting. In addition to the academic portion of the program, the conference organizers from the CSU English Department have done a fine job of setting up a schedule of outdoor activities to refresh word-weary conference-goers.

The conference in June will feature more than sixty formal paper sessions and roundtable discussion groups. We will also hear keynote readings by Luci Tapahonso and Scott Russell Sanders, a keynote musical performance by Walkin' Jim Stoltz, and keynote academic papers by William Howarth, Lawrence Buell, SueEllen Campbell, and John Elder. On Sunday, June 11, following the final paper sessions, there will be an ASLE business meeting, meetings to discuss the future of *ISLE* and the new Garland encyclopedia devoted to literature and environment, and a workshop for ASLE job seekers.

There are a few conference issues to which I would like to give particular attention:

•**Please keep to your time limits.** The conference program is absolutely packed, so it is essential that individual talks and paper sessions stay within the scheduled time periods. Keep your actual presentation "short and sweet," even if this means trimming the materials that you've prepared for the conference. If your session has four speakers and a seventy-five-minute time slot, you should plan to talk for fifteen minutes—read the paper ahead of time to make sure you can do it in the allotted time. The additional fifteen minutes will be devoted to introductions and discussion. Participants in the one-hour paper session at the very beginning of the conference should check to see if their panel has three or four speakers, adjusting the length of their own presentations accordingly. Panel chairs will be instructed to watch the clock and cut off papers that go overtime. This will be an informal, lively conference, but we need to keep on schedule if we're to avoid complete chaos—sorry to be "hardnosed" about this.

•**Send back your outdoor activity sign-up sheets.** When the

conference programs went out in early May, there was a sign-up sheet enclosed for various outdoor activities (such as river rafting) that require an advance list of participants. If you want to do one or more of these activities, please return this sheet to the conference organizers at CSU *before* the conference.

The future of *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* is somewhat uncertain at this time. As Cheryll explains in the following letter, ASLE members have voted to adopt *ISLE* to be the organization's official journal. It is likely, therefore, that the newsletter will soon become a smaller, simpler publication, although perhaps we'll still try to do "special issues" in a more abbreviated way. In this current issue we are pleased to present a special focus on Children's Literature and the Environment. I would like to thank Anne K. Phillips, Carolyn Sigler, and Naomi J. Wood for their fine work as guest editors of the issue. Mrs. Joyce Holtermann's second grade class at Travis Elementary School in San Marcos, Texas, provided many of the delightful illustrations in this issue. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Southwest Texas State University's Center for the Study of the Southwest for making its computer facilities available to ASLE for the preparation of this newsletter.

See you in June,


Scott Slovic,
ASLE Co-President



Howdy Friends,

It will be fun and edifying to meet one another at ASLE's first conference, which is just around the corner. Scott Slovic has done a fabulous job of putting together the program, and Carol Cantrell has done equally heroic work making local arrangements. Thanks, also, to Scott's and Carol's "platoons" of student volunteers whose zestful energy kept us afloat.

It seems that with each issue of the newsletter, we have had some new, major development to report. This time the big news is that we, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), are now the adoptive parents of the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. I'll briefly fill you in on the history behind this momentous event.

Patrick Murphy of Indiana University of Pennsylvania

boldly established *ISLE* in 1993, with financial support from IUP and from the University of Nevada, Reno. Three issues of the journal have appeared, the latest of which caught the attention of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, which recently reported on *ISLE* in its "Hot Type" column.

Recognizing the mutual interest and similar mailing lists of *ISLE* and ASLE (not to mention their complementary acronyms), Patrick proposed at our 1994 fall business meeting that ASLE consider adopting *ISLE* as the official journal of the association. The ASLE officers agreed that the plan made sense for many reasons, not the least of which was to enable this newsletter to be down-sized to function as a *news*-letter rather than a mini-journal. A ballot was mailed to all 600 ASLE members, and although voter turnout was feeble, the vote strongly supported adoption (88 in favor, 2 opposed).

So, congratulations, ASLE colleagues! We have our own journal. ASLE now enjoys editorial control of *ISLE*, but we have also assumed financial responsibility and have agreed to handle subscriptions and renewals. Sincere thanks to our treasurer Allison Wallace and our secretary David Teague for being willing to take on the extra work. Deepest thanks, also, to Patrick, without whom there would be no journal to adopt, and who has agreed to continue serving as editor during the transition period.

ASLE now must take steps to maintain the high quality of *ISLE* and to ensure that it has a reliable source of future funding. We are in search of an editor who can bring experience, vision, and institutional support to the job. If you would like to be considered for this position, please see the application instructions in this newsletter. Or, if you know of someone who

would be a good fit, please encourage them to apply. There will be an informational meeting about *ISLE* at the conference.

The ASLE officers have established an ad hoc, editor selection committee, composed of senior members of our advisory board plus Patrick Murphy (if he does not apply for the position himself). This committee will review applications and make a decision based on the best interests of ASLE and *ISLE*.

Meanwhile, polish your conference papers and dust off your hiking boots so that we can have a peak experience in Colorado this summer.

See you soon in person,

Cheryl
Cheryll Glotfelty,
ASLE Co-President



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The American Nature Writing Newsletter is published twice a year and contains brief essays, poetry, book reviews, classroom notes, and information about activities relating to the study of literature and environment. *ANWN* also serves as the newsletter for the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, reporting ASLE's business and publishing letters from its membership. Items of interest, including news about conferences, forthcoming publications, and work in progress, are welcome.

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Letters to Members

Scott Slovic and Cheryll Glotfelty	1
--	---

Special Topic: Children's Literature and the Environment

Guest Editors' Introduction

Anne K. Phillips, Carolyn Sigler, Naomi J. Wood	4
---	---

Ecophilosophy in Children's Literature

Susanna van Essen	5
-------------------------	---

Gaia in the Nineteenth Century: Mothers and Teachers in *The Water-Babies*

Naomi J. Wood	6
---------------------	---

"The Stile Between Two Worlds": Merging the Wilderness and Civilization in Sterling North's *The Wolfing*

Margaret Belk Shealy	9
----------------------------	---

Nature Restored: Introducing Children to Environmentalism

Donna L. Potts	13
----------------------	----

Classroom Notes

Nature and Children's Literature: A Natural Progression

Julie Seton	15
-------------------	----

Revisiting Nature Through Children's Literature

Vicki L. Stuckert	15
-------------------------	----

Book Reviews

A Crow Doesn't Need a Shadow: A Guide to Writing Poetry from Nature. Lorraine Ferra.

Mary F. Heller	17
----------------------	----

"Tell Me A Story," *Orion Magazine* 12.2 (Spring 1993). Ed. Laurie Lane-Zucker.

Rochelle Johnson	18
------------------------	----

The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places. Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble.

Ian Marshall	19
--------------------	----

"Ecology and the Child": *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (Winter 1994-95). Ed. Betty Greenway.

Susan Naramore Maher	20
----------------------------	----

Conference Announcements

General Announcements	21
-----------------------------	----

ASLE Membership Form

ASLE Membership Form	22
----------------------------	----



from *The Water-Babies* by Charles Kingsley, published in 1863

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Anne K. Phillips, Carolyn Sigler, Naomi J. Wood

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things
We murder to dissect.

Enough of science and of art:
Close up these barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

"The Tables Turned," William Wordsworth (1798)

In this issue of *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* we focus on children's literature and the environment from philosophical, historical, and contemporary perspectives. Children's literature, as Susanna van Essen points out, has long been one of the most ecologically aware literary traditions. Children's literature, with its dual appeal to intellect and emotions, is particularly effective at communicating both information about and concern for the environment. In fact, the most important theme of this issue is that emotional appeal leads to political action. Children can and do try to enforce environmental principles on the basis of emotional connection with animals and other living things. Their familiarity with Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* inspired children in Laytonville, CA, to question the practices of the logging industry there (Lebduska 170). To maintain the false binary between reason and emotion—the idea that emotion is not mature and somehow suspect—is to relinquish one of the major rhetorical strategies available to environmentalists. As Philip Fisher has pointed out in *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*, "the liberal humanism of sentimentality" has always been one of "the primary radical methodologies within culture" (92).

Naomi Wood and Donna Potts further this notion by analyzing its rhetorical effects in both nineteenth- and twentieth-century children's literature. As Wood writes in her discussion of Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*, "By figuring Nature as our mother, Kingsley draws on the formidable power of the Victorian iconology of motherhood as the site of all that is holy and right with the world. Nature's dictates should be obeyed not simply because she is an authority, but also because she does only that which is for our good, if we only listen. Offering Nature as a mirror and as a model, Kingsley suggests that being out of connection with Nature harms her and harms ourselves. . . ." Wood "take[s] exception to assertions like Paul Shepard's, that the mother-metaphor 'favor[s] infantile ideals' and should be discarded for a more 'mature metaphor'." Kingsley instead offers us a mother who not only wants us to grow up, but insists that we do so in order to become responsible, productive children of the earth. No more powerful metaphor can exist to mobilize children—and others—to work to preserve and strengthen the environment.

Potts' analysis of contemporary children's environmental literature shows children's literature has continued to anthropomorphize for strategic, not naive, reasons. Countering criticism from Frederick O. Waage that "Anthropomorphism is the curse of much children's literature," Potts argues that "[r]ather than

simply dismissing tales like Cherry's or Grimms' as scientifically inaccurate, we should acknowledge that truth need not always be synonymous with scientific accuracy. Rather, children's stories may offer equally valid metaphysical, sociological, and psychological truths for which science does not purport to account."

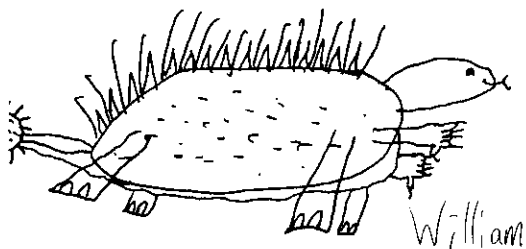
As all of these writers assert, fictions are important vehicles for opening up new possibilities for understanding nature and its relationship to culture. Van Essen points out that "[s]tories have the power to appeal to the emotions as well as to reason. Non-fiction can explain and argue, but a story can make a person actually feel what it would be like to live in a world without birds or an ozone layer. A well-told story can demonstrate the principles of ecophilosophy in such a way as to make them understandable to a four-year-old." We would also add that the audience for these texts clearly includes adults—that the appeals of the texts also reach that adult audience. Adults who purchase these books, read them to their children, and teach them in their classes are also engaged through their emotions as well as their intellects.

Children's literature does not only raise consciousness about the need for environmentalism; it also offers the possibility of solutions. Margaret Belk Shealy's essay on Sterling North insists that humans' interactions with nature need not be antipathetic but rather cooperative and mutually supportive. As the metaphor of the half dog, half wolf "wolfing" suggests, we are essentially hybrid—having stakes both in nature and in civilization. Her optimism provides an important counter to the prevailing environmentalist pessimism about the possibilities for action. As she writes, "People must battle their own fears and prejudices about the wilderness and overcome them. They must learn, like Thoreau, to appreciate the duality within themselves. . . . Wolf has taught Robbie that the two—civilization and nature—can reach a middle ground. They *can* get along together and yet be different. Each will profit." Children's literature, with its enduring optimism, offers concrete possibilities for doing something rather than simply wringing our hands.

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following people to the production of this issue. For use of the resources at Kansas State University, we would like to thank Dean Hall, Head of the English Department. For assistance with preparation of the manuscript, and her expertise in computer technology of all kinds, we thank Kenda Morris. Many thanks as well to our contributors, those who wrote articles, reviews, and classroom notes. Cheryll Glotfelty called our attention to the *Orion* issue "Tell Me A Story." Mike Branch ably solicited and edited the book reviews. Tom Stuckert's Classroom Notes provide useful applications of environmental principles. Finally, Scott Slovic arranged for and submitted the children's illustrations—in an issue about children's literature and the environment, it is particularly appropriate to acknowledge children's contributions to environmental activism through art and politics.

Works cited

Fisher, Philip. K. *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.



ECOPHILOSOPHY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Susanna van Essen

The primary function of literature has always been to explore the great questions of life. How should people relate to each other and with the natural world? A study of children's literature tells us what values were upheld in a particular time and culture—what the adults thought was important for children to know. Children's books not only passively reflect the values of a culture but also actively promote certain values, either implicitly or explicitly. Often the values presented are conservative and help to maintain the status quo for those in power, but sometimes books become a catalyst for changing values.¹

The evolution of human attitudes towards the natural world can be clearly seen in an ecocritical study of children's literature. The Biblical stories which tell of human "dominion" over all God's creation were often interpreted as justification for unrestrained exploitation of the natural world. The rationalist philosophies of the Enlightenment further distanced humanity from the natural world and led to the prevailing mechanistic world view. Western beliefs of human dominion have had occasional critics through the ages—St. Francis, the patron saint of ecology, for example—but these beliefs have only come under concerted critical scrutiny in the last thirty years as a direct result of escalating ecological problems. The issue of cruelty to animals, however, has long been present in children's literature. Antithetical to the Cartesian view of animals as unfeeling machines—a doctrine designed to help justify vivisection in the 1600s²—*Little Goody Two-Shoes* (one of the first books published specifically for children) includes the prevention of cruelty to animals amongst her good works.³ Sarah Trimmer directly questioned this Cartesian view in *Fabulous Histories: Designed for the Instruction of Children, Respecting their Treatment of Animals* in 1786. In this story, a lady admits she had "been for a long time accustomed to consider animals as mere machines, actuated by the unerring hand of Providence, to do those things which are necessary for the preservation of themselves and their offspring . . ." but she modifies this belief when she encounters a pig showing obvious intelligence.⁴ Stories told in the first person from an animal's point of view also have a long tradition in children's literature. The animal hero is often subjected to thoughtless or contemplated acts of cruelty by human adversaries. The reader, by identifying with the animal's thoughts and fears, learns to

respect the creature as a sentient being capable of suffering and deserving of moral consideration. Books such as Anna Sewall's classic *Black Beauty*, first published in 1877, captured the public imagination and did a great deal towards promoting the concept of animal rights.

Recognizing an animal's rights or intrinsic value is the first step towards recognition of ecocentric values generally. Ecocentric values refute the precept of human dominion and state that the non-human world has intrinsic value. The rights conceded to sentient animals can be further extended to recognition of the rights of all life. Life-based ethics operates from the principle that an organism need not be sentient to have an interest in objects for aesthetic appreciation.

Ecosystems also strive to maintain themselves as balanced interconnecting webs of life. Ethical holism recognizes the rights of the ecosphere (sometimes called Gaia) above the rights of individual species—a concept which people in our culture often find difficult to accept.⁵ Many ecophilosophers now believe that the dominant anthropocentric or human-centered attitudes of Western cultures have led to the environmental destruction which threatens our survival and until we have a major paradigm shift towards ecocentric values, the future of the earth will remain in jeopardy.

Since the publication of *Silent Spring* and the advent of the modern environmental movement, the early imperialist view of the natural world as an evil or fearful place is less common in children's literature. Just as the human rights and women's movements have constrained the sexist and racist values which largely went unnoticed in children's literature pre-1970s, presenting the natural world as a place with infinite resources allowing unrestrained exploitation no longer appears in children's books. Heroes no longer march forth to conquer the wilderness. Modern children's book heroes fight greedy and unscrupulous developers by organizing public meetings, sending around petitions, and alerting the media—as demonstrated by Lockie Leonard in *Lockie Leonard, Scumbuster*, by Tim Winton (1993). The traditional heart-racing adventure story no longer involves tracking down wolves or crocodiles but rather bird smugglers and animal poachers, as in *The Bird Smugglers*, by Joan Phipson (1979). Modern-day heroes like Henry in *Henry Goes Green*, by Maureen Stewart (1990), encourage their peers to recycle waste, use public transport, and raise money for conservation organizations. Children sometimes decide to adopt an area in their local environment, clean it up, and encourage local plants and wildlife to live there.

However, arguments for the protection of the environment in children's literature, as in the wider community, are still largely anthropocentric and instrumental. Many stories demonstrate that human lives are enriched by the presence of wild species and natural habitats. Stories often explore the human need for wild places as spiritual sanctuary—places to enjoy the peace, beauty, and harmony of nature as shown in *Kenju's Forest*, by Junko Morimoto (1989). A common argument states that the natural world is our life-support system, providing the air, water, and food we need, or that the natural world is a stockpile of genetic material and chemical substances which will provide future cures for AIDS and cancer. Some stories, for example *My Sister Sif*, by Ruth Park (1986), show the natural

world as an early warning system which tells us when our exploitative activities have gone too far and place our own survival at risk. Often authors will use intrinsic value arguments backed by instrumental arguments to cover all persuasions. However, the perennial danger in arguing from an instrumental value position is that economic interests will always threaten a natural area if it can be shown that large profits can be made from exploiting it—luxury hotels catering for thousands of tourists can destroy a national park as effectively as mining.

While the majority of stories arguing for the protection of the natural world have been primarily from an anthropocentric perspective, increasingly in recent times, children's stories have begun to present ecocentric values. Ecocentric stories do not place human interests above those of the nonhuman world. Some books, such as *The Paddock*, by Lilith Norman (1992) give humans, and especially modern civilization, only a fleeting part in the story of the earth's history. Other stories, such as the simple tale of *The Fisherman and the Theefyspray*, by Paul Jennings and Jane Tanner (1994) show people willing to sacrifice their own desires so that other creatures may live.

Ecocentric stories reflect the principles of ecology—that the human species is interconnected with and dependant upon the myriad of other species which share the earth. But this self-evident truth needs to be amplified by an ethical stance: that humans do not have dominion. Other species and values will steadily increase in children's literature. The old mechanistic, anthropocentric world view must be replaced by a new ecocentric paradigm. Futuristic fiction, such as *The Lake at the End of the World*, by Caroline Macdonald (1988), demonstrates what will happen if we don't change our ways of thinking.

Children's literature can play an important part in helping to promote an ecocentric world view because stories have the power to appeal to the emotions as well as to reason. Nonfiction can explain and argue, but a story can make a person actually feel what it would be like to live in a world without birds or an ozone layer. A well-told story can demonstrate the principles of ecophilosophy in such a way as to make them understandable to a four-year-old.

Endnotes

¹ For example, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the anti-slavery movement.

² Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Sydney: Primavera Press, 1990) 17-18.

³ The earliest known copy of *Little Goody Two-Shoes* is a third edition published by John Newbery in 1766.

⁴ Quoted in F. J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*. 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982) 159.

⁵ Warwick Fox, *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*. (Boston: Shambala Publications, 1990).

University of Tasmania, Australia



from *The Water-Babies*



GAIA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: MOTHERS AND TEACHERS IN *THE WATER-BABIES*

Naomi J. Wood

Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863) is an exuberant celebration of Nature and of natural beauty. The book has been analyzed on a number of levels, but I wish here to concentrate on Kingsley's book as a book about Nature. Kingsley wishes to teach children about Nature, and by teaching them about Nature, seeks to teach them about themselves. To this end, Kingsley depicts Nature as a goddess-like mother who nurtures and disciplines her children lovingly. Environment can determine moral aptitude and status, and so it is important to be influenced by the right kind of environment. By configuring Nature as Mother, Kingsley also figures the Good as feminine, a metaphor that has important implications for Victorian men's relationship with Nature.

Kingsley's Nature is similar to James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis's Gaia, in that "she" is a "she," and that she is a self-regulating organism regulating life on earth through organic and inorganic networks (Cokinos 5). Although the plot of Kingsley's fairy tale focuses on human moral development and might be considered only tangentially environmentalist from that standpoint, Nature, in many different forms, is a crucial actor both in the plot and in Kingsley's many digressions. Kingsley's digressions have been criticized silently by twentieth-century editors, who have deleted them in order to streamline the plot trajectory of Tom's quest for development. However, the digressions contain what contemporary reviewers saw as the greatest value of the book: its luxuriant, detailed, accurate and loving depictions of English land- and water-scapes (1864 review of *The Water-Babies*). One of Kingsley's many purposes in the book is to celebrate Nature's beauty as magical, suggesting that the "rational," utilitarian goals served by the masculine urban world are at odds not only with human development, but also with Nature's ways. Rather than torturing Nature through factory emission and befouling industrial waste, Kingsley advocates reverence and respect for Mother Nature—cleaning up after ourselves, appreciating Nature's workings as being as interesting and as significant as the activities of the human world.

The epigraph to Kingsley's first chapter figures Nature as feminine and suggests that men violate her—and by violating her, violate other men: "To her fair works did Nature link / The human soul that through me ran; / And much it grieved my heart to think, / What man has made of man." Mother Nature here re-connects men with their humanity, with their souls, and thus

makes them fully human, while association with men does the opposite. In the beginning of the book, our hero Tom the chimney-sweep is bestial--the adjectives and similes used to describe him are all animalistic. Tom's bestiality is a direct result of his environment in the masculine city, where men abuse others weaker than themselves and befoul the environment with their wastes. In Kingsley's view, the city is more savage than is the natural world. In this epigraph, as well as the other epigraphs to each chapter, Kingsley acknowledges his connection with the nature poets of English Romanticism, and announces his similar goals.

Tom lives "in a great town in the north country, where there were plenty of chimneys to sweep, and plenty of money for Tom to earn and his master to spend" (Ch 1). This is urban masculinity, an unholy blend of the bestial and the industrial, represented by Grimes the master-sweep and Tom his apprentice, who are brutal, filthy, drunken, stolid, and ignorant. The city is a masculine place; Tom's world is populated exclusively by master-sweeps, poachers, policemen, and other apprentices like himself--there are no women, working-class or otherwise, even mentioned. Tom looks forward to becoming a master-sweep in his turn and being able to treat others as he has been treated. In the beginning of the book, Tom is a natural animal. Kingsley compares him to an assortment of beasts of burden, vermin, and game--analogues of Tom's relationship with society: he is only an animal because he has never been taught to be anything more. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that Tom's urban environment has warped his potential to be human.

Animal-like Tom knows nothing. "He could not read nor write, and did not care to either; and he never washed himself. . . . He had never been taught to say his prayers. He never had heard of God, or of Christ. . . ." The only thing Tom has going for him is his bestial, Grimes-style manliness. He takes "chimney-sweeping, and being hungry, and being beaten . . . for the way of the world, like the rain and snow and thunder, and [stands] manfully with his back to it." Tom's environment, whatever it lacks in civilizing values, has bred into him admirable survival skills: when in trouble, he is cunning and clever, resourceful and brave, and he never gives up until he is "b-e-a-t, beat." He is a good man of business, he is civil when business requires it, and he has a strict sense of justice. Brutalized as he is, he has the makings of a good man--but these qualities do not make up for the fact that he is black with grime and soot and cannot say his prayers. Before Tom can begin his quest for humanity, then, he must recognize the need to change his filthy environment for a clean one. He must be taken from the crudely masculine world he now inhabits, where his highest ambition is to become his master; he must be restored to the bosom of Mother Nature, where he will become clean and new.

The beginning of Tom's redemption is his trek into the country to sweep the chimneys of a country manor house. As he and his master trudge through the town, the landscape changes dramatically:

[T]hey passed through the pitmen's village, all shut up and silent now; and through the turn-pike; and then they were out in the real country, and plodding along the black dusty road, between black slag walls, with no sound but the groaning and thumping of the pit-engine in the next field.

But soon the road grew white, and the walls likewise; and at the wall's foot grew long grass and gay flowers, all drenched with dew; and instead of the groaning of the pit-engine, they heard the skylark sing his matins high up in the air, and the pit-bird warbling in the sedges, as he had warbled all night long. (Ch 1)

The change is remarkable: as they move through the urban industrial waste, the road is black, the walls are black, and the only sound is the "groaning and thumping" of machinery. The landscape is under a blight, recalling Blake's "dark Satanic mills." But the farther they go into the country, the cleaner and more inspirational the environment becomes: the landscape whitens, the sounds become devotional birdsong rather than groaning machines. The only color mentioned in this first description of the countryside is "white." Kingsley wants to stress that the country is opposite from the city, and he does this by choosing the opposite color on the spectrum from black.

In this new environment, whiteness and cleanliness are also associated with femininity: Tom and Mr. Grimes are leaving the world of men and entering a female order: we are told that "old Mrs. Earth was still fast asleep; and, like many pretty people, she looked still prettier asleep than awake" (10). This first mention of a female in the text corresponds to the beginning of Tom's redemption into humanity, paradoxically by leaving the urban environment in which he was raised and entering the natural, hence naturally moral, world of Nature. A mysterious Irishwoman appears, who takes a fancy to Tom, and asks him about himself. She is particularly interested in "whether he said his prayers; and seemed sad when he told her that he knew no prayers to say." The Irishwoman tells him of her home by the sea, and Tom longs to go bathing in the water--a new desire for him. The Irishwoman leaves them with a newly moral choice: "Those that wish to be clean, clean they will be; and those that wish to be foul, foul they will be. Remember" (15). These words will echo through the rest of the action. To be clean is to be good, and to be feminized, and to be one with Nature. To be dirty is to be foul and masculinized and alienated from Nature.

Up until this point Tom has been rather thoroughly characterized as savage and animal-like because of his filth, which is in turn a result of his environment. He is black, which in the Victorian imagination connotes his benightedness: inferior, savage, in need of enlightenment. Redemption comes for Tom when he is able to recognize himself as black, as dirty, and when he wants to remedy it. In this new setting, Tom recognizes for the first time that he is dirty, and he is impelled to search for water to clean himself, to become part of this better environment. In order to pursue his quest for water, Tom runs away from the human world that has bestialized him, and enters into the body of Nature, to be reborn as a water-baby. During Tom's flight, Kingsley offers us vignettes of the natural world he is now entering, deliberately obstructing the flow of the narrative to make us as readers stop and notice the wonders of the natural world--Kingsley notes the beauty of spiders, lizards, and foxes in their natural setting, and comments on the fresh, bracing air and the beautiful moors of Northern England. Finally, Tom enters into a "quiet, silent, rich, happy place; a narrow crack cut deep into the earth. . . ." a place called Vendale (Ch 2). Appropriately, Tom's entrance into this womb-like space results in his rebirth: he finds

a stream, discards his human body as a useless, black "shell," and becomes a water-baby--a naked, almost eel-like creature who is "3.87902 inches long, and [has] round the parotid region of his fauces a set of external gills (I hope you understand all the big words) just like those of a sucking eel, which he mistook for a lace frill, till he pulled at them, found he hurt himself, and made up his mind that they were part of himself, and best left alone" (Ch 2); he is amphibious, and he is about to embark on a new developmental trajectory.¹

This new world of mothers is characterized by cleanliness, sensual delight, and internalized education rather than external beatings and threats. Tom's new concern with his external appearance is complemented by a new concern with his internal appearance. "This pretty little real Tom," even reborn as a water-baby, is still "a savage . . . and like the beasts which perish" (66), but in this new environment he now has a chance to develop into something better. He needs to internalize the values that the external qualities of Nature represent. Kingsley recounts Tom's time in this little stream as an idyllic, almost Edenic one: Tom "had been sadly overworked in the land-world; and so now, to make up for that, he had nothing but holidays in the water-world for a long, long time to come. He had nothing to do now but enjoy himself, and look at all the pretty things which are to be seen in the cool clear water-world, where the sun is never too hot, and the frost is never too cold" (Ch 3). Kingsley uses Tom's time here to recount the wonders of the stream, the strange and marvelous creatures that live in it: Tom sees caddises, who "build their houses with silk and glue"; a "wonderful little fellow" who makes bricks by putting mud "into the little wheel on his breast, which really was a round hole set with teeth; and there he spun it into a neat hard round brick"; he witnesses a dragon-fly's metamorphosis from a dirty ugly nymph into a creature with "the most lovely colors . . . blue and yellow and black, spots and bars and rings; out of its back rose four great wings of bright brown gauze; and its eyes grew so large that they filled all its head, and shone like ten thousand diamonds" (Ch 3). Throughout the book, in addition to touting his moral lessons about cleanliness and persistence, Kingsley also insists on the wondrous, awe-inspiring aspects of Nature which humans ordinarily overlook.

After being nurtured in the stream for a time, Tom is spurred to make his way to the sea (using his masculine, "British bulldog" self to tear himself away from the comfortable womb where all is available for his physical, if not his moral, self). He is spurred by a desire to go where there are others like him. At the ocean, he is disappointed not to find water-babies immediately, but when he disinterestedly helps a lobster he has made friends with, he has finally evolved enough to be with other water-babies. This new step of Tom's development is overseen by new, more tangible mothers. Two fairies, Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby nurture and oversee all of the water-babies in the world. Mrs. D is beautiful: "the most nice, soft, fat, smooth, pussy, cuddly, delicious creature who ever nursed a baby" (Ch 5), while her sister Mrs. B is "gnarly and horny, and scaly, and prickly" (Ch 5). Together, the sisters represent the two aspects of Mother Nature--the nurturing, welcoming and consoling aspect, and the harsh, punishing, exacting aspect. If Tom is in right relationship with Nature by treating the sea-creatures as he would like to be treated, he is

rewarded by Mrs. D's caresses--but if he torments them and does not act responsibly, Mrs. B punishes him. Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid is dressed in black, which links her metaphorically with the blackness of the urban landscape at the beginning of the book, and she is extremely ugly; this is appropriate, for she can only be beautiful when humans redeem themselves and others: "I am the ugliest fairy in the world; and I shall be, till people behave themselves as they ought to do" (Ch 5). The lesson in elementary ecology is one that continues to be taught today: "Don't mess with Mother Nature!"--if you act responsibly, you can expect all the sensual pleasures Nature has to offer, but if you don't, you besmirch Nature and destroy your own enjoyment.

The lesson is particularly important for mid-Victorian men because, as Claudia Nelson has pointed out, their virtue depended upon their internalizing feminine virtues and values (1991). In Tom's case, he moves from the city, where lessons are merely external, and the beatings may make him cry but will never make him good, to Nature, whose lessons are as much internal as external. Tom's motivations for being good as a water-baby must come from the effects badness has on his body--when he steals sweets, for example, he breaks out into prickles, which only go away when another goddess-like female, Miss Ellie, teaches him how to be good. Mrs. B. makes the lesson even clearer--people are responsible for their own development--if they do not internalize the good lessons Nature teaches them, they will pay the price with their own degradation. In environmentalist terms, Nature's punishments fit the crimes, and her education is always suited for the abilities of the person who is learning. If men submit to her dictates, follow the natural and good ways she seeks to teach them, all is well. But if they do not, their path can only be downward.

Tom's final task, and quest, in the book, and the one that allows him to re-enter the land world as an adult man of status is to recuperate urban masculinity in the form of Grimes the master sweep. Grimes is in a prison, a nightmare version of the world we began with. This prison, consisting of men stuck in filthy chimneys, guarded over by truncheons, recapitulates in all the important details the urban masculine world Tom left so long before. Here, however, the master-sweeps are the ones in the chimneys, and it is Tom's job to free his master. Tom's feminine-inspired sympathy and forgiveness, together with the news that his mother has died, enable Grimes himself to soften and to give way to feminine water. "[H]e began crying and blubbering like a great baby . . . 'I'm beat now, and beat I must be. I've made my bed, and I must lie on it. Foul I would be and foul I am, as an Irishwoman said to me once' . . ." (Ch 8). Even as he cries, Grimes' "own tears did what his mother's could not do, and Tom's could not do, and nobody's on earth could do for him; for they washed the soot off his face and off his clothes; and then they washed the mortar away from between the bricks; and the chimney crumbled down; and Grimes began to get out of it" (Ch 8).

With Grimes' surrender to Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid and her redemptive feminine world, Tom's job is done, and he can actually grow up. Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, grown beautiful because of Tom's actions and Grimes's repentance, declares: that "[Tom] has won his spurs in the great battle, and become fit to . . . be a man; because he has done the thing he did not like" (Ch 8).

Tom then becomes an engineer, a man of science, and one who "knows everything about everything . . . And all this from what he learnt when he was a water-baby, underneath the sea" (Ch 8).

By figuring Nature as our mother, Kingsley draws on the formidable power of the Victorian iconology of motherhood as the site of all that is holy and right with the world. Nature's dictates should be obeyed not simply because she is an authority, but also because she does only that which is for our good, if we only listen. Offering Nature as a mirror and as a model, Kingsley suggests that being out of connection with Nature harms her and harms ourselves. Child-readers, too, are adjured to think of Nature not as something to be dominated, but something to revere and obey. Certainly the metaphor can be and has been abused; mothers have taken a great deal of pummeling in the twentieth century. However, I take exception to assertions like Paul Shepard's, that the mother-metaphor "favor[s] infantile ideals" and should be discarded for a more "mature metaphor" (11). Although there are many ways in which Kingsley's anthropomorphized depictions of Nature may be criticized, still they connect us at the most visceral and basic level with our environment. Furthermore, Kingsley's love for natural beauty, his fascination with Nature's connections with human behavior, and his insistence that humans are responsible for respecting the earth and its processes continue to be messages we need to hear today.

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Endnote

¹ This quotation is typical of Kingsley's narrative stance throughout—he mixes scientific accuracy with fairy-tale events, alternating between making truth claims for his narrative and denying any such intent.

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from *The Water-Babies*

"THE STILE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS": MERGING THE WILDERNESS AND CIVILIZATION IN STERLING NORTH'S *The Wolfing*

Margaret Belk Shealy

In his biography *Thoreau of Walden Pond* (1959), Sterling North reveals how his early years on his father's farm resembled Thoreau's own life: "In my late teens I also built a cabin of hewn oak logs and limestone on the shore of Rock River in southern Wisconsin. The spirit of *Walden* was there in Wisconsin, also--the sound of a lonesome train whistle rushing through the night, a whippoorwill calling through the dusk, . . . and the frequent 'roar and pelting' of rainstorms on the tight roof" ([5]). With his descriptive memories of rural life, North blends both civilization and nature by incorporating the noise of the railroad and the sounds of the wildlife. This same duality appears a decade later in his book *The Wolfing* (1969), which tells the story of twelve-year-old Robbie Trent's efforts to capture and tame a young wolf. Set in 1870s Wisconsin, the book demonstrates Robbie's attempt to blend civilization and the wilderness, to come to terms with the acceptance of both. While his father's farm represents a view of conquering the wilderness, of caring only about society, his neighbor's property reflects an attitude of protecting nature, of thinking only about the wild. Robbie, however, stands somewhere in the middle; he enjoys the village, where he could find "food for the mind as well as for the stomach" by buying copies of "*Harper's Illustrated Weekly*, *The Toledo Blade*, and *The New York Tribune*" (20), yet he treasures nothing more highly than "to have a rare half-holiday in the woods" (44), to discover "where the grouse were bedding, what animals had left their tracks upon the snow, and whether the raccoons had yet come forth from their hollow trees" (16). With the help of his father, his neighbor, and his wolf pup, he eventually realizes that nature nor civilization have to be mutually exclusive, that he can live within society and still care for and respect the wilderness--both can form part of the circle of life.

As a farmer, Ezra Trent settled in Wisconsin in 1843. At that time, the land was comprised of "virgin forests of huge deciduous trees . . . where the deer grazed almost undisturbed except by a few prowling wolves or an occasional panther or black bear" (33). Through diligent work, he cultivated and eventually controlled the wilderness. Now "corn shocks stood in neat rows. A well-kept vineyard and orchard surrounded the big, double log cabin. The barn, smokehouse and tobacco shed were freshly whitewashed." On "land that had once been prairie," the Trent farm, "simple and sturdy, bespoke long hours of hard labor and a rigidity of conscience that never left a weed unhoed" (16). The well-controlled setting of the farm reflects the Trents' ambition of making nature work for them. Ezra was so intent on developing the one hundred and sixty acres of land he staked out for himself and his family, that "the one acre of wilderness left . . . was a bit of bog which was too wet to plow" (36).

Like many children in frontier America, Robbie is "'held to the plow' for so many days of the spring, and to the cultivator, hoe and hay fork so many days of the summer, that frequently [he] had no" leisure time to enjoy nature (48). Realizing, like

Thoreau, its importance, Robbie convinces his father to let him occasionally "buy a day" for fifty cents; the child knows "the most important thing that money can buy . . . is time for yourself. Time to study the birds and animals and flowers. Time to walk in the deep timber, or row on the lake" (44). Such an attitude recalls Thoreau's definition of "cost" in *Walden* (1854): "the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run" (1511). Since Ezra can "plow twenty lineal miles a day" behind his horses, Grant and Sherman (appropriate symbols of power against this post-Civil War battle of nature and the environment), he expects "Robbie to walk at least twelve miles behind the oxen." In fact, Ezra had even "sometimes whipped him for letting the oxen stand idle while the young naturalist went hunting birds' nests in Kumlien's woods" (35).

Ezra Trent's philosophy reflects the attitude many pioneers faced when combating the wilderness: they "worked hard" and "feared the Lord" (34). Thus, Robbie must find leisure time around his chores and duties on the farm. With reservation, Ezra occasionally allows Robbie to walk in the woods on Sunday, the day of rest on the farm, but only after asking him to quote the verse in the Bible (Exodus 20: 8-9) that reads, "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work" and reminding him that he must not "carry a gun or a fish pole" or "do anything wicked" (46-7). By connecting the strong religious convictions of Trent with his battle against nature, North illustrates the concept the Puritans believed--the wickedness of the wilderness. Joseph Campbell, in *The Power of Myth*, states that "the biblical tradition is a socially oriented mythology. Nature is condemned. . . . When nature is thought of as evil, you don't put yourself in accord with it, you control it, or try to, and hence the tension, the anxiety, the cutting down of forests, the annihilation of native people. And the accent here separates us from nature" ([23]-24). However, even during the church service, "Robbie's mind wandered far from the text"; his spiritual fulfillment comes not from the minister, who "seemed to drone on interminably," but is found hours later in the "many entrancing sounds" and the "everyday miracle of nature" discovered in the woods (47).

In contrast to the "grim severity" of the Trent farm, Thure Kumlien's property still offers "virgin forests, green in spring, gold, crimson and leather-brown in autumn" (16). The professor owns eighty acres, sixty of which remain "untouched wilderness" (16). Even on the land that Kumlien has cultivated stands "dry corn of the previous autumn . . . uneven in the rows, uncut, unshocked and unhusked except for the immediate need of Professor Kumlien's cow, his two pigs and his team of aging oxen. Rabbits and squirrels, prairie chickens and partridges knew where to find an easy meal" (17).

An "all but penniless naturalist" (21), Kumlien knows the Latin names of plants and animals and spends his time as a taxidermist so nature can be "thus preserved for generations that might never see the living species" (55). Unable to earn money at farming, Kumlien tries "to make a meager living by mounting birds and collecting birds' eggs and nests for museums in Europe and America" (34). Even though the Kumliens conserve their money by taking prudent measures, Thure

cannot afford to buy anything in the Busseyville store and instead must rely on the owner to let him borrow on credit. To the "farmers and loafers gathered to do their whittling and storytelling" (21) at the village store, the professor poses an enigma, a man "more interested in the natural sciences than in farming" (33-4).

From Kumlien, Robbie inherits his love of the outdoors and his knowledge about nature. Together, they explore the "Eden spread out before" them (18), often leaving "their respective oxen standing in the field" (37) or discuss books such as Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, a work that Ezra Trent "would probably thrash" Robbie for reading (152). One of the things Robbie most respects in Kumlien is his knowledge of the natural world, especially anything concerning wolves--a subject that Robbie finds fascinating from the beginning of the novel, when he first hears the howl of a wolf coming "eerily from the deep woods" (15). Robbie's interest in wolves reflects his love of the wild, untamed forests and symbolizes wildness itself. Every once in awhile, he can hear a wolf howling in the distance and the eerie sound sends chills down his spine, yet he knows "[t]raps and poison had almost exterminated these swift-moving hunters from the forests of southern Wisconsin," and that many others died under the clubs of wolfers (15-16). On a walk with Kumlien, Robbie comes face to face with an actual wolf. This wolf, Old Three Toes, is so named because she is missing a toe, and thus carries a mark of her battle with civilization. Robbie immediately feels sorry for the wolf, lamenting "Poor thing, she must have been in a trap" (28).

In North's book, we see the wolf not as a creature that deserves destruction as it is commonly portrayed in history and literature. For example, Cotton Mather in *Frontiers Well-Defended* (1707) claims that the "Evening Wolves, the rabid and howling Wolves of the Wilderness . . . would make . . . Havock among you, and not leave the Bones till the morning" (qtd. in Nash 29). Instead, the wolf is viewed as an animal, which when it howls "had the sadness of centuries of hunger and persecution, the loneliness of winter winds howling around a cabin far from civilization" (17). Here, North depicts humans as the real culprit, because animals like wolves "kill only to eat. Man kills for the mad, wanton joy of it" (98). Kumlien commends Robbie's sympathy for the maimed wolf, telling the boy he feels glad he is "learning with your heart as well as your head" (28) because he believes that "[m]ost birds and beasts are friendly, if you give them a chance" (25).

Robbie and Kumlien hear the mating call from Kumlien's dog, Ring (himself part wolf), and realize that Old Three Toes will give birth to his whelps, the name given to wolf pups. Immediately, Robbie thinks about finding and keeping one of the whelps as a pet. Since the pups technically will be wolf-dogs, and not full-bred wolves, they further represent the duality between civilization and nature--part domesticated, part wild. To Robbie, however, the wolflings represent a "wilder wildness" since "[h]e would rather be an adventurer and explorer than a plowboy" (35). Robbie appears "passionately determined" (60) to raise one of the pups on the farm; however, he is unable to find the wolf's home until the rich fur trader Zeke Mooney lets the location inadvertently slip out when he asks Kumlien for some arsenic to "kill that she-wolf so we

won't have to fight her in the den'" (57).

For Zeke and his son, Bubs, the wolf represents something to fear and conquer. They view the wolf, as Barry Holstun Lopez suggests in his book *Of Wolves and Men* (1978), "as a symbol of what you wanted to kill--memories of man's primitive origins in the wilderness, the remnant of the bestial nature which was all that held him back in America from building the greatest empire on the face of the earth" (142). These trappers symbolize a complete disrespect for nature in *The Wolfing*. Bubs too illustrates his disregard for nature since he kicks his own dog and thrashes his horse; when it is his turn in school to recall his summer experiences, he proudly describes how he "clubbed a wildcat to death, and left out none of the gory details" (113).

As a fur trader, Zeke feels that the sole purpose of all animals is for humankind's use, which is reflected not only in his profession, but also in his wardrobe: "He wore a coat and hat which had cost several bobcats their lives" and picks his teeth with a "gold-stemmed goose quill" (23). Zeke's intentions to poison the she-wolf upsets Kumlien and Robbie, and when they remind him that it also may endanger "skunks, mink, foxes, badgers, raccoons . . . blue jays, chickadees, nuthatches, [and] woodpeckers," the fur trader retorts that they are "useless, no-account critters" (57). Even without the arsenic, he plans to "dig [the wolves] out, knock 'em on the head and collect the bounty" (58). Later, he tells Robbie that "Varmints is jest varmints, put in the world to shoot and trap" (147). Like many late nineteenth-century fur traders and wolfers (men who hunted wolves professionally for their hides and for the bounty paid by the state), the Mooneys "had no concept of prior or inherent rights; the wolves, like the gold and the land and buffalo, were there for the taking" (Lopez 178).

Following Mooney's tip of the wolves' whereabouts, Robbie eventually discovers the wolf's den. However, he is not the only one interested in finding the location. Already, a group of wolfers have gathered in front of the cave, intent on destroying the animals. During this time period, many such men hunted the wilderness territories, and "[i]n the thirty years after 1865 they killed virtually every wolf from Texas to the Dakotas, from Missouri to Colorado" (Lopez 178). Unbeknown to the wolfers, which includes Ezra Trent, Robbie intends to save--not kill--the wolf, and he volunteers to crawl into the cave under the condition that he can choose the pick of the litter. And after he emerges safely, cradling one of the whelps in his arms, "some of the sheep raisers, particularly Ezra Trent, wondered just what they had promised" (63).

Against his better judgment, Ezra keeps his promise and allows Robbie to bring the wolf pup home, but he warns that "the first farm animal he kills, you gotta shoot him, Robbie" (71). Robbie assures his father that he "won't kill any of our creatures." . . . But no one there, including Robbie, believed that you can train a wolf to act like a lamb" (71). Robbie's choice of a name for the animal, Wolf, illustrates an awareness of exactly what he is bringing to the farm--a part of nature; and, for many people, of course, Wolf represents "what may have been man's first enemy" (64). Ezra himself fears Wolf is destined to "grow up to be a very large, fierce animal," yet Robbie insists that, through teaching him, Wolf instead can be

"[l]arge and gentle" (73).

Wolf quickly becomes integrated with society while also retaining his ties to the animal world. From his first moment with Robbie, the wolfing appears at ease with civilization. The whelp nurses milk from the Trent's dog, Old Tessie, who recently lost a litter of puppies. Ironically, Tessie still limps as the result of an "old wolf wound on her hip" (16), a mark which symbolically unites the two animals, a union which is also seen in Wolf's ability both to howl like a wolf and bark like a dog. Replacing his missing den mates with people, Wolf plays games like tug of war with Robbie or pilfers his mother's feather duster so she will chase him. Wolf also views "the chickens and other barnyard fowl as playmates" (83). When Wolf gets a thorn stuck in his paw, his howl sounds "like the cry of a baby," which is "calculated to produce instant mother love and concern. Both Old Tessie and [Robbie's mother] Ellen came running. The foster mother nosed the puppy and licked him all over," and the human mother "removed the thorn" (82). Ellen even welcomes Wolf into the Trent house and allows him to accompany her as she works outside "to cultivate her vegetables and flowers" (82), further illustrating the meshing of wildness and civilization. By perceiving both people and animals as members of his pack, Wolf accepts both worlds.

Both animals and humans also work to teach Wolf acceptable behavior within society. By treating Wolf with respect and love, Robbie helps the animal react in the same manner to people. For example, he warns his friend, Inga, "Don't slap him or he'll bite" (80). Later, a gander provides the whelp with a lesson when Wolf tries to wrestle a grasshopper from a hen; the bird swoops down and gives "the wolfing an agonizing pinch and twist" (84). Robbie comforts Wolf, holding him in his arms, but reiterates the lesson the bird teaches him: "Never jump on any chicken or duck or any farm animal, do you understand?" Wolf responds by licking his face, hoping "he had been forgiven" (84). The most memorable example of how Wolf learns to adapt occurs when, in trying to help Old Tessie round up sheep, he bites one on the leg. Old Tessie "roar[s] at Wolf and . . . bite[s] him so severely that blood ran from his flank. In no uncertain dog language she told this whelp that he must never again injure a sheep" (91). Since sheep are normally thought of as domestic animals that wolves prey on, Wolf comprehends an important message. Symbolically, at least, the wolf does indeed learn to lie down with a lamb.

Even though Wolf proves to be protective of domesticated animals and gentle with humans, many people, including Robbie, still have perceptions about wolves that are rooted in myths and fables. For example, for as long as Robbie can remember, he has had nightmares about wolves, dreams which were precipitated by a picture hanging in the Trent cabin, "a ferociously realistic print of a pack of famished wolves pursuing a Russian troika pulled by three terrified horses. In the sleigh an aristocratic man and wife, wrapped in coats of sable, were obviously in a state of panic. As the father leaned forward whipping the horses, the mother glanced back at the wolves" and "seemed to be letting the baby slip over her shoulder." North, in his "Documentary Notes," suggests, "There were many variations on this melodramatic lithograph. Some were entitled 'Throwing the Baby to the Wolves.' These prints,

which were extremely popular at the time, left little to the imagination. They probably contributed as much to the prejudice against *Canis lupus* as did the story of *Little Red Ridinghood*" (157). Lopez has observed that the story of the terrifying wolves pursuing sleighs "is the most oft-repeated wolf scene in literature" (268). Perhaps the most well-known accounts appear in Willa Cather's *My Antonia* (1918) and in Robert Browning's "Ivan Ivanovitch" (1879). However, Robbie stops having a similar nightmare of being overtaken by wolves with the aid of "his own gentle wolf-dog whose sympathetic nuzzling awakened the agitated dreamer" (158). He also decides "'that picture on the wall is a dirty lie'" (163) when, during a horse race, Wolf cannot catch up with the horses even though he "was galloping with all his might" (161).

Others in the community also dispel some of their misinformed beliefs about wolves with the aid of Wolf's presence. At first Wolf frightens most of the community, except for children, "who had never been taught fear" (195). Through experience and understanding, mothers, "who at first had been frightened by his slanting green eyes and long white fangs, now patted him" (170). When Robbie takes Wolf to school, the children observe that Wolf likes to be stroked, and when they ask Robbie if "wolves kill human beings" (121), he tells them "those are just stories" and that the tale of the grandmother being eaten in "Little Red Ridinghood" is "just a fable" (123). He also informs them that Romulus and Remus, the mythic founders of Rome, were not really raised by a wolf, but that "Romans told that story to show how courageous Romulus and Remus were, and where they got their fighting qualities" (123). Instead of fearing Wolf, the class now wants to pet him.

Although Wolf learns to abide by society's laws, he still belongs in the natural world. Demonstrating his animal urges, he sometimes snaps a tree branch "in two with a single crunch, as he might the leg of a sheep" (128). Robbie has tried to channel Wolf's instincts, yet he has not discouraged wolf from killing animals like rabbits and mice, since these do not need to be protected for domestic use; Wolf kills them even though he is not hungry. Robbie knows that "you can *tame* a wolf. But it is very hard to completely *train* one" (121). As the wolfling matures, Robbie also notices that the animal stays in the forest for longer periods of time; he tells Kumlien that at first "he merely ran around our garden and buildings. Now he circles the entire farm and your farm, too" (151). Despite Wolf's adaptation to society, he remains a "wild" animal, and his howls continue to sound "eerie and wild" (110). Just as Robbie really belongs within the boundaries of society, Wolf belongs in the wilderness, and in the "Author's Postscript," North informs the reader that "by fortuitous circumstances [Wolf] was taken to the unbroken wilderness far to the north" (203). Even though North explains that "wolves may be partly 'tamed' to become pets," he does "not recommend the experiment. It is far easier to reverse the process. Deep in their hearts there lingers the strong lupine urge to be utterly free and unfettered" (203-04).

In the same way that Wolf can exist in both society and civilization but prefers the wilderness, Robbie finds the balance where he can become a successful member of society, while also respecting the wilderness. Unlike his mentor, Thure Kumlien, who possesses no financial sense and seems to care

only for nature, Robbie also wants to be well versed in business, learning from Heath Henderson, a local businessman, and reading in journals such as *Prairie Farmer* to keep up with current grain prices. While the boy remains entranced by nature, he is, at the same time, "fascinated by the busy settlement" (19).

Illustrating his acceptance of society, Robbie also becomes interested in human relationships, especially with Inga. Able to buy a day on his thirteenth birthday, Robbie decides to spend the time fishing with Wolf. Although they spend a carefree morning together in nature, they change when Inga shows up, and the "afternoon took on additional interest." Wolf darts off into the woods when she arrives, and it takes Robbie several tries to coax him to return when it is time to leave. No longer is Robbie willing to devote all his time to nature, and no longer is Wolf content to spend short periods of time in the wilderness. With Inga, Robbie talks of his future; he knows that they both "have to grow up sometime . . . and carry our responsibilities" (107).

For Robbie, part of those responsibilities is learning not to take advantage of nature, but to respect it fully. Even though early in the book he earns money through trapping animals for their fur, he eventually believes that killing animals unnecessarily is unethical. He would, he realizes, have to find another way to earn money. With Inga, Robbie devises a plan to rent two acres and work the land together, "setting out the [tobacco] plants, hoeing, cultivating, harvesting" (189) as a way to pay for school at Albion Academy, fulfilling both Ellen Trent and Thure Kumlien's wish for him to become more educated. North himself sees education as vital for the improvement of society and the individual. In *Something About the Author*, he expresses his belief that "we must teach children not only how to read well . . . but inspire in them a love of books and of knowledge" (172). Robbie has changed from the boy who leaves his horse in the field to the mature youth who now plans his own crop. He has learned that nature can serve people's needs, but that it is also their responsibility to care for and to respect it.

Robbie decides a compromise must be reached between the way Ezra Trent approaches nature (all conquering) and the way Thure Kumlien views it (all embracing). Robbie's desire to attend the academy shows he wants to seek the knowledge of humankind, not just the knowledge of nature; and his desire to form a relationship with Inga illustrates that he is becoming a full member of society. Yet at the same time, Robbie has learned truly to appreciate the wild, to respect it, and to care for it. Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, in his review of *The Wolfling*, correctly argues that the book is "a deceptively subtle tale of woodlife and cement life. The enemy is not the land, but the human interior" (30). People must battle their own fears and prejudices about the wilderness and overcome them. They must learn, like Thoreau, to appreciate the duality within themselves. In *Walden*, Thoreau explains that "I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both" (1600). Wolf has taught Robbie that the two--civilization and nature--can reach a middle ground. They *can* get along together and yet be different. Each will profit. Lois Crisler points out in *Captive Wild* (1968), a true account of her relationship with wolves, that she too learns

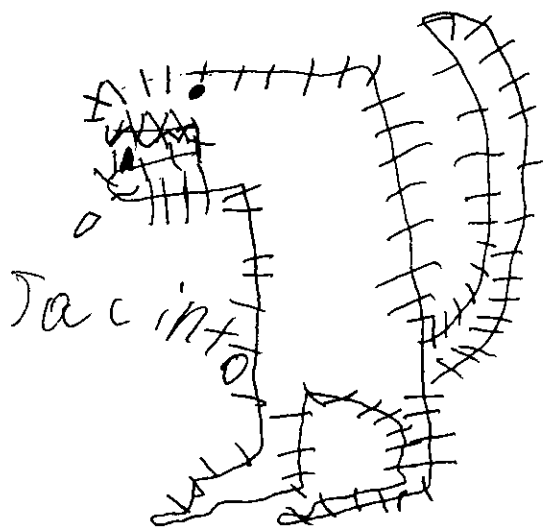
the same valuable lesson: "I had given [the wolf] something--I did not know what in a wolf's mind. I had given her of my humanness. She had given me her wolfness" (237).

In the conclusion, Robbie has both worlds, a member of nature (Wolf) and civilization (Inga) with him. The three stand at Inga's gate, a place between the house and the wilderness, recalling the title of the novel's first chapter: "The Stile Between Two Worlds" (15). Into the darkness, Inga's grandfather emerges "with his lantern held high," suggesting an unobtrusive offering of society into the natural environment. And in a symbolic gesture, Wolf circles the children "in a magic ring. The cicadas were shrilling. One whippoorwill spoke to another" (203).

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Concord, North Carolina



NATURE RESTORED: INTRODUCING CHILDREN TO ENVIRONMENTALISM

Donna L. Potts

Nature, true Nature, and the true idea of Nature, long absent, must, above all become fully restored, enlarged ...I do not mean the smooth walks, trimm'd hedges, poseys and nightingales of the English poets, but the whole orb, with its geologic history, the kosmos, carrying fire and snow, that rolls through the illimitable areas, light as a feather but weighing billions of tons. (Walt Whitman, *Prose Works* 2: 416-17)

In the introduction to her 1992 children's book, *A River Ran Wild*, Lynne Cherry quotes from John Berger's *Restoring the Earth*:

Imagine a world where the rivers and streams flow clean again, brilliant and teeming with fish. The air is fresh and crystalline. The earth, once bare and robbed of its topsoil, now is green with healthy vegetation. This vision of Nature thriving and restored can become reality.

A River Ran Wild and *The Great Kapok Tree* are Lynne Cherry's effort to illustrate for children her own vision of "nature restored." She introduces a range of environmental issues and philosophical positions on nature by means of the techniques that are common in children's stories: personification, fantasy, and allegory, as well as the obligatory happy ending.

Among the environmental issues that Cherry introduces are diminishing natural resources; the threats of extinction, erosion, and pollution; the existence of an ecosystem in which all forms of life are interdependent; fears about the destruction or disappearance of natural landmarks such as rivers and rain forests; and the aesthetic aspects of nature that are threatened by environmental degradation.

Both books communicate these issues through dreams. In *The Great Kapok Tree*, a child murmurs to a dreaming man who had been prepared to cut down a tree in the rain forest: "when you awake, please look upon us all with new eyes." In *A River Ran Wild*, the Indian Owean's dream, in which the tears of his ancestor fall upon the dirty river water until it is cleansed, is an allegory for his and Marion Stoddart's vision for the river cleanup. (Together they organized the Nashua River Cleanup.) By rendering the private experience of dreaming, Cherry conveys both our personal responsibility to the environment, and the efficacy of our individual visions of "nature restored."

Because childhood is the time when dreams are most vividly experienced and least distinguishable from reality, their power to transform reality is more readily accepted. In many children's stories, fantasy worlds intersect with the "real" world to provide new perspectives on or challenge accepted notions of reality. *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Nutcracker*, the Grimms' and Andersen's tales are among the many children's stories whose plots are sustained by dream narratives or flights of fancy.

Cherry's stories, like many classic children's stories, feature animals who talk and have feelings—characteristics which, though implausible to adults, go unquestioned by most

children. They readily attribute human characteristics to animals and inanimate objects, if only because they pay less attention to the distinctions. The photographer William Wegmann, famous for his pictures of dogs dressed as people, remarked in an interview that while adults are intrigued by his ability to get dogs into such extraordinary poses, children are never non-plussed by it, because they don't assume that getting dogs to pose would be any more challenging than getting people to pose. Cherry's use of personification is consistent with her environmental message: there is a real relationship between animate and inanimate life, between animals and people, the environmental term for which is "ecosystem."

Environmentalists, however, have objected to the anthropomorphism of nature found in children's literature, claiming that human judgments distort accurate observation of natural phenomena. In his *Teaching Environmental Literature*, Frederick O. Waage writes that "Anthropomorphism is the curse of much children's literature, as when animals talk and think and possess proper names" (36). Yet when humans struggle to understand or explain the world around them for the first time, anthropomorphism is the first response, and, in prescientific societies, the *only* response. In fact, despite its denigration by environmentalists, anthropomorphism continues to be a valid and compelling way of seeing the world and of beginning to understand one's relationship to it—which is not to imply that anthropomorphism is the *only* way. Folk tales such as the Grimms' "Cinderella," and Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," continue to be mainstays of the Disney movie industry precisely because of the appeal of anthropomorphism. By depicting a world whose creatures respond in intelligible ways—rather than a world entirely lacking in conscious purpose, much less spiritual design—Cherry fosters empathy in her young readers, thereby augmenting her chances of persuading them to share her vision.

Thus, rather than simply dismissing tales like Cherry's or the Grimms' as scientifically inaccurate, we should acknowledge that truth need not always be synonymous with scientific accuracy. Rather, children's stories may offer equally valid metaphysical, sociological, and psychological truths for which science does not purport to account.

Cherry uses allegory to contrast two familiar concepts of nature, again a reminder that there is more than one way of seeing the world: the European settlers' view of nature either as the embodiment of evil or as a collection of commodities (in either case, in dire need of human intervention and control) vies with the natives' "primitive" view of nature, which involves a mystical correspondence between all living and non-living things. Obviously, the idea of an "ecosystem," which emphasizes interrelationships between units rather than viewing them as isolated and extractable commodities, corresponds more closely to the latter view. Cherry presents her environmental vision through the voices of natives, who, because of their concept of nature and their prior claim to the land, have the best claim to the reader's sympathy.

Allegory has always been employed for didactic purposes, and clearly, Cherry's whole approach is designed to persuade young readers to share her vision of nature restored (her work is sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund). While her colorful

illustrations and straightforward storylines would appeal even to toddlers, other illustrations—such as maps that highlight tropical rain forests, labeled pictures of endangered species, and diagrams of the animals' habitats—are intended as learning aids for older children.

Many have objected to environmental literature for children precisely because of the element of didacticism in it, and parents' groups have even condemned environmental literature as propaganda designed to promote pantheism. One could argue, however, that virtually *all* children's books contain elements of didacticism, and because the purpose of education *is* instruction, *any* curriculum that one would propose to substitute would be equally vulnerable to the charge of didacticism.

However, many environmentalists have objected to "environmental" education on similar grounds. Patricia Poore, for example, claims that most environmental literature for children relies on guilt and fear as motivators, perpetuates outdated assumptions, spends more time explaining what *shouldn't* be done than what *should* be done, "contains oversimplification and myth, has little historical perspective, is politically oriented, and is strongly weighted toward a traditional environmentalist viewpoint, i.e., emphasizing limits to growth, distrust of technology, misinformation concerning waste management, and gloomy (if not doomsday) scenarios." She advocates instead, giving children "a healthy understanding of their strengths, pride in past successes, and some sense that the future may be an improvement over the past."

By these standards, Cherry's books succeed. Although both stories confront the horrors of environmental degradation, their final vision is of "nature restored." On the last page of *The Great Kapok Tree*, the man who had been prepared to cut down the tree drops his ax and walks out of the rain forest. At the end of *A River Ran Wild*, the river has been fully restored to its natural beauty:

Once again the river runs wild through a towering forest
greenway. Red-tailed hawks and barred owls live here ...
Nashua is what we call it—River with the Pebbled Bottom.

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Kansas State University



CLASSROOM NOTES

Nature and Children's Literature: A Natural Progression

Stories about nature and animals are ideal for teaching oral interpretation. Oral interpretation involves the visualization of words so that the audience "sees" the scene as well as the action in a story. I taught a course targeted for students in the Education program titled "Oral Interpretation of Children's Literature." The course was designed to expose student teachers to the potential of their own voices in classroom presentation of literature. I anchored the readings with Sutherland and Arbutnot's *Children and Books*, 8th edition (Harper Collins, 1991); an excellent resource text that clearly identifies genres of children's literature and offers an extensive bibliography of titles and authors for different age groups in each category.

Children's literature and nature are intimately linked. I stretched the idea that children are curious about the world around them to my "adult" students and began the course with "the performance of literature makes the fantasy world of books real." To make my students more aware of their senses, I took the class outside and asked them to play. They were expected to run their fingers through sand, feel grass between their toes, and/or exert energy climbing a tree or swinging from a branch. Sensory experiences helped them bring words from page to life.

Students chose six pieces of literature to perform, two of which were performed for children outside of class. Students were asked to write short analyses that identified the target audience, background, and description of the ideal performance setting for the piece. They evaluated their own performances in terms of audience reception, self-perception, and suggestions for future performances.

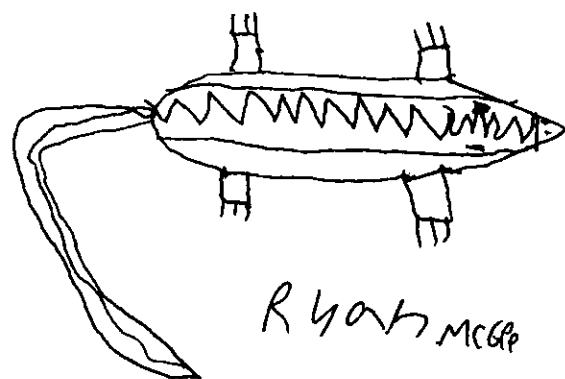
Students learned that visualizing the cemetery in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is very different from visualizing *Charlotte's Web*. The difference lies in focus area and detail about individual items in the scene. They learned to identify

place and detail about individual items in the signposts for themselves and their audience. Trees in the distance might be held in place by a clock at the back of the room or a spot on the wall. They were eventually able to connect their vision and the audience so well that the audience will be left drawing a breath to smell a fresh breeze.

Stories with animal characters and natural settings were most frequently chosen for performances. The most successful performance in the course came from *Where the Wild Things Are*. Students chanted the words and used illustrations in the book to see the forest. The book acted as a window for the team and allowed the audience to hear the words, feel the forest around them, and see the illustrations all at once. It was a very effective performance. Other impressive performances were drawn from "The Three Little Pigs from the Wolf's Perspective," *Jungle Tales*, *Charlotte's Web*, and "We're Going on a Bear Hunt." Shel Silverstein, Robert Louis Stevenson and A. A. Milne are other authors of children's literature with a natural bent. It is easy to find nature and children combinations in folk tales, myths, and poems.

Novice performers felt more at ease performing for younger groups and were less likely to suffer from severe presentation anxiety. Additionally, they preferred acting as animals, natural objects, and children more than acting as another adults or as themselves. This course demonstrated that nature and animal stories are ideal companions for oral interpretation to younger audiences.

Julie Seton, New Mexico State University



Revisiting Nature Through Children's Literature

Research shows that children use their prior experiences and knowledge to gain meaning and make sense out of new information. Sharing nature with children through children's literature can lead to opportunities to help form a solid base for both conceptual themes and environmental awareness. They can allow the students to reconsider previously learned information about nature and revisit those ideas again and again. This also allows students to touch on concepts from year to year and affords them the opportunity to gain new insights which may alter previously formed misconceptions. Teachers who rely solely on textbooks for their science curriculum are missing out on a very valuable resource. Textbooks are designed to cover a broad range of subject matter with a specific audience.

Children's literature, however, offers students a bird's eye view of a specific topic as well as a focus that is more in-depth than a textbook. This focus can appeal to a number of readers from children to adults. Teachers may even view the teaching of science with a "no fear" attitude and come to a better understanding of some concepts they teach by revisiting the concepts through the use of children's literature. Through the use of Native American children's stories, my students and I have begun a journey which has yet to end.

In the fall of 1994 I revisited my concepts of the moon in relationship to an across the curriculum unit I was doing with a group of 32 DH students in grades 10-12. I wanted to try a thematic approach to some of the daily living concepts we are expected to cover, so I chose the theme of time. In the course of some early brainstorming, some of my students suggested the moon had something to do with time. Because the students were part of the decision making, they had a greater sense of ownership in the overall moon project. I've always enjoyed the full moon, and, as a teacher, suffered the effects it has on student behavior but never truly understood the phases and movement of the moon. So together we began to observe and ask questions about the moon. This prompted a search for materials about the moon. Most of the information available at the secondary level was too technical for the reading/comprehension levels of my students, so I found myself turning to children's literature as I so often do in the content areas. There I found several Native American books and one Canadian story which served as great jumping off points. Three books that were favorites among my students were *Thirteen Moons on Turtle's Back* by Joseph Bruchac, *The Reindeer Herder and the Moon* by Bob Barton with illustrations by Wayne Anderson and "How Coyote Was the Moon" a Native American story from the book *Keepers of the Earth* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac.

After breaking into groups to find out what we already knew about the moon, I noticed on the calendar it was almost time for a full moon. A night hike to view the full moon was in order. After receiving permission from the local park district I went out to hike the area to find the best location to view the full moon. The full moon rose above a grassy meadow just across the river.

The river bank provided a great viewing area with the help of some downed trees and large rocks. Feeling confident and prepared, the hike was scheduled for the next night. The hike was voluntary and only 14 students showed up. High schoolers are not the risk-takers that elementary students are when it comes to trying something new.

At around 7:00 we started back to the viewing area. Several brought flashlights and were giggling loudly. I asked for the flashlights to get pocketed and for quiet to begin. At the viewing area, as we waited for the moon to magically appear above the horizon, I pulled out a huge turtle shell my dad had brought back from Florida some forty years ago. It had spent its time in my uncle's haymow until I resurrected it for the telling of *Thirteen Moons On Turtle's Back*. With flashlight in hand, I displayed the shell and shared the Micmac story of the ninth moon for September "The Moose-calling Moon." This prompted a request to count the scales on the shell and to their

amazement there were thirteen scales. The time was drawing near for the moon to show itself, but due to my not knowing that the moon rises 30 minutes later each night, the horizon remained dark.

With backup activity in hand, I demonstrated my owl calling skills and had a cassette tape of owl calls just in case my "original" calls didn't work. In the distance we heard the rhythmic hoot of a Great Horned owl and the excitement began to build, but to my puzzlement there was still no moon on the horizon. I've come to trust the dependability of nature but didn't know where the moon was. I decided to continue our night hike. It was truly dark with no moon so the trails I had hiked hundreds of times in the daylight suddenly became very new to me in the moonless night. I asked everyone to walk in single file and began to look for familiar landmarks that signaled we were on the right path. I continued the owl calls and we were rewarded several times with an answer. All of us tried to keep real quiet because we wanted to hear the owl. My students heard many sounds that night that they hadn't noticed before: the creaking of the trees, the river running its course, and rustling leaves as some nocturnal animal scurried away.

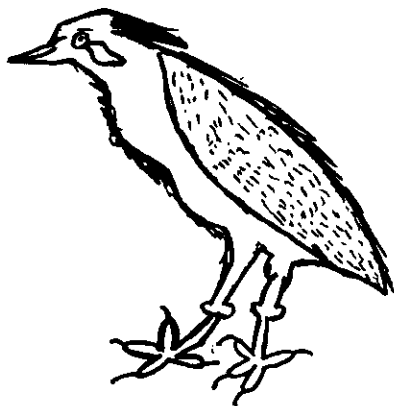
We reached the blacktopped path and headed for the cars when shouts of joy split the night air. There behind us, rising over the woods, was a beautiful full moon. It was time to head home, but my students begged to savor this discovery. We headed for the high side of the pond and laid down in the cool grass and gazed at the full moon. While we laid there, I read the story "How Coyote Was the Moon." I then mentioned that people around the world knew of the moon and asked if they would like to hear a Canadian tale about the moon. I told the story of the *Reindeer Herder and the Moon*. Our night hike under the full moon ended with my faith in nature restored. That week at school the students who chose not to go on the hike felt like they were left out of a special experience. They were.

For the next month, we kept a moon journal. Students were to observe the moon and make a drawing of the moon. This led to a discussion of the phases of the moon. My students were exposed to a variety of new vocabulary. Families shared moon stories which were brought to school and retold. This led to a discussion about the tides in Lake Erie and night time fishing. Some students couldn't find the moon at their house because there wasn't enough open space, so they discovered that they could observe the moon at school in the morning; as they parked their cars in the student lot there was the moon sitting over the interstate. We even got together in groups and came up with our own names for the 13 moons. Some examples of these are: "Deer Hunting Moon" for November and the "Giving Moon" for December. Students found in the newspaper that it gave times when the moon would rise. We even came up with a list of cliches and song titles that dealt with the moon or time in general. My students did a great deal of observing and questioning during this unit. We learned together to appreciate nature and its cycles, and the effect that time has on our lives. Just last week one student greeted me in the morning with "Did you see the full moon last night? It was gorgeous!"

Most of my students will spend their lives in our community and Native American stories and children's literature have

opened many doors to explore as I try to share nature with my students and build their passion for saving it. Children's literature finds many ages in its audiences from young children to graduate students. Each seeking to revisit the wonders of nature. As a teacher I see the need to empower the students I teach through risk taking, decision making, and problem solving. Below you will find a few more Native American stories I have used and some sources for further information: *Keepers of the Animals* by Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac; *Moon Mother* by Ed Young; *Earthmaker Tales* and *Star Tales* by Gretchen Will Mayo; *Science and Children*, a magazine published monthly for educators; **The Center for Children's Environmental Literature (CCEL)**, started by Lynne Cherry and husband, offers workshops for educators with a strong environmental theme. Write for more information to CCEL, P.O. Box 5995, Washington, DC 20016.

Vicki L. Stuckert, Findlay High School, Findlay, Ohio



Yellow-Crowned Night Heron
Shane Patterson

BOOK REVIEWS

A Crow Doesn't Need a Shadow: A Guide to Writing Poetry from Nature by Lorraine Ferra. Illustrations by Diane Boardman. (Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith, 1994. 127 pages, paper \$9.95.)

Children are natural poets whose instinctive talents will flourish in a classroom environment open to discovery. Nature has always been a rich source of inspiration for poetry, from classic nursery rhymes like "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" to Robert Frost's rhymed poem "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" to Eve Merriam's free verse "Landscape." Such poetic models are often introduced to children at home and in the schools. Anyone who has ever taught elementary or middle-school students knows that nature is a frequently chosen topic for poems.

In her beautifully written poetry-writing guide, *A Crow Doesn't Need a Shadow*, Lorraine Ferra beckons children and young adolescents to engage their senses in the process of creating poetry inspired by nature. Her respectful tone acknowledges the reader's intelligence and capacity to be inspired by

the natural world. In a friendly and highly accessible voice, Ferra beckons the reader into the world of nature where poetic images may be found. For it is here that we may all begin to think and write like a poet:

Can you remember a summer day when you were lying on your back in cool grass, watching clouds float overhead? If they seemed more like a flock of sheep grazing in a blue meadow than clouds, you were thinking like a poet, and your thought was a poem. (12)

Basic to Ferra's pedagogy are developmentally appropriate methods familiar to teachers of writing. In the first half of the book, she prepares the emerging poet by suggesting time-honored activities meant to inspire creative writing: taking field trips, building vocabulary, keeping a journal. Central to writing about nature is immersing oneself in the environment and experiencing the sights, smells, sounds, and natural wonders. In Chapter 1, "Poetry Field Trips," the author calls upon child poets to awaken their five senses to the world of nature. In the section on "Wildflowers," she writes:

On your first poetry field trip you might search just for a flower. Look around your yard, neighborhood, or city park. . . . Once you have chosen a flower, sit beside it for a while. What does it smell like? Are its leaves and stem smooth or fuzzy? What about its color? Is it bright or dark? Are the petals thick, delicate, velvety? What do the flower's different parts remind you of? (13)

In addition to the importance of sensory experiences, Ferra also attends to the significance of literary comparisons and word choice in poetry writing. She encourages the reader to make comparisons, however "uncommon" they might seem, in order to create a lasting image. In "Weather" she suggests:

Think about how clouds, rainbows, snow, hail, fog, lightning, and other weather phenomena often look like other things; then write about them as if they are those things: . . . an animal, a tree or flower, a tool, a person, or a musical instrument. (21)

Listening and listing are offered as basic pedagogical techniques for learning and organizing nature vocabulary. "To write a different kind of poem about weather, start by making a list of action words (verbs) that you usually associate with people. Words like erases, swallows, recites . . ." (25). Ferra suggests keeping a creative nature journal, in which to develop a "nature wordscape," or list of nature vocabulary words. Field guides, public libraries, and television documentaries are just a few resources upon which the poet as researcher might gain new information and insights about nature.

Another important aspect of Ferra's approach is her thoughtful explication of nature poems written by children and adolescents. The final chapter in the book, "Other Explorations," is comprised of nine sections, each designed to teach children and young adolescents how to read poetry like a poet and to begin the poetry-writing process. Here she asks questions to encourage critical thinking about the model nature poems. About Marian Partee's "My Many Thoughts in the Mountains," Ferra writes:

In "My Many Thoughts in the Mountains" Marian offers us vivid details of what she experienced when she allowed herself to become totally absorbed in her environment. Her poem seems to be written by someone lost in a dreamy

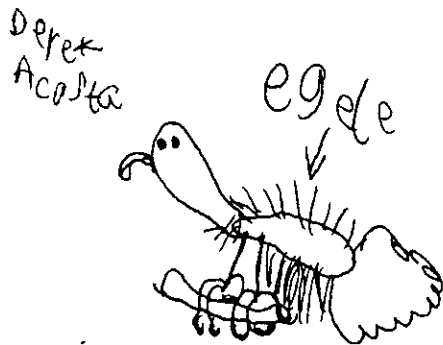
thoughtfulness of the beauty around her. . . . Besides the obvious sections that invite your sense of sight, find parts of the poem that call upon your other senses. . . . Notice how Marian portrays herself and what she is wearing at the end of the poem. Does her red dress "sprung with blue roses" make her seem as if she, too, is growing from the earth like trees? (79-80)

Ferra establishes a fresh approach to poetry-writing assignments, which inspire nature poetry that is far from cliché. Twelve-year-old Shane Stewart's poem, "I Didn't Know," begins with the thought-provoking statement, "I didn't know I loved the weeds, silent, lazily swaying in the wind," and thus inspires an assignment in which readers are encouraged to rediscover the familiar: "What is one of the most beautiful sights you experience when looking out a window at home, school, or another place you visit often?" (67).

Diane Boardman's black-line illustrations enhance the overall beauty of the text, drawing attention to the delicacy of things natural: a flower, a dragonfly, an orb weaver.

Unlike the commonly held opinion that children can't be taught creative writing, *A Crow Doesn't Need a Shadow* begs the question by acknowledging the power of nature to inspire beautiful poems. It is an important resource for all teachers to have on their desks.

Mary F. Heller, Kansas State University



Special Section, "Tell Me A Story," *Orion Magazine* 12.2 (Spring 1993; 64 pages; \$4.50.)

The aims of *Orion* magazine, as printed on the inside cover of each issue, include helping readers "deepen . . . personal connection[s] with the natural world as a source of enrichment and inner renewal." This issue of *Orion* focuses on children, on their personal connections with the natural world, and on the possibility of deepening these connections through the use of story. Adults can encourage children to hold on to the "elusive moments within nature" that they may experience by sharing with them stories that stress environmental themes and subjects. These stories can then provide the foundation for an environmentally-aware, ecologically-minded adulthood.

The diverse contents of "Tell Me A Story" clearly suggest that stories are experiences and memories as well as fantasies and imaginings. The issue includes contemporary adult writers' recollections of their own formative childhood experiences with the natural world, reprinted excerpts from children's stories, drawings and poems by children, and "wordless stories"—a

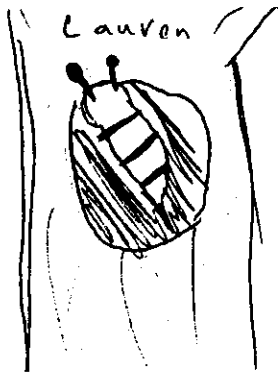
selection of beautifully detailed illustrations of animals and natural scenes from recent children's books. The writings of educators and theorists articulate and support the otherwise implicit central message of this special section: children have a natural curiosity about their outside world, and adults and educators should encourage this curiosity through stories.

As one might expect, this issue of *Orion* reflects the Orion Society's respect for the creative energy and emotional strength inspired by the natural world. This issue also, however, atypically relies on previously published material, material that is often outdated and presents simplistic or romanticized views of childhood and of the power of children's stories. (Franz E. Winkler's essay is adapted from his 1960 study, and appeared previously in a 1983 *Orion*, and James E. Higgins's essay is adapted from a 1970 study.) Together these factors create a sentimental tone that some readers might find distracting. This tone takes different forms: the issue contains various excerpts from Wordsworth's poetry, and contributors casually refer to children's "wisdom," "innate understanding" and "intuitive perception," and allude to, but do not explain, the "healing" and "nourishing" powers of stories.

This emphasis on fairly simple conceptions of childhood and children's stories helps explain the editors' inclusion of excerpts from Selma Lagerlöf's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, originally published in 1907. This selection is surprising, given *Orion's* dedication to cultivating, deepening, and sustaining human responsibilities to the natural world. Lagerlöf's stories are traditional fables in which animals use human language and are described in terms of human motivations and emotions. While Lagerlöf's stories offer some important messages (animals prefer freedom to captivity, for example), the fable form suggests to children that animals are like people, or that people can know how animals think and what they would say if they could speak our language. This tendency toward anthropomorphizing subtly encourages children to romanticize nature, rather than to develop an ethic of human responsibility toward the natural world. This discussion, then, of the role of story in children's environmental education lacks a vital voice—the voice warning of the implications of representing nature in human terms. While fables are an important contribution to ecologically-supportive children's literature, there seems room for an exploration of an alternative, more biocentric, children's literature in this issue of *Orion*.

For readers who want to find children's stories that are concerned with the environment, the Orion Society has compiled an annotated bibliography of both "recent and classic titles," which they advertise at the back of this issue. Since most readers of *Orion* are already willing to share environmentally-based children's literature with children, they may come away from this issue not only compelled to order this list, but also reassured of the long-held belief that stories are often "the most profound form of communication." While readers should not approach this issue looking for the most recent theoretical or pedagogical theories surrounding children's environmental literature, they should expect moving personal accounts of childhoods shaped by nature, accessible discussions of the importance of story, and intriguing illustrations and drawings inspired by the natural world.

Rochelle Johnson, The Claremont Graduate School



The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places.
Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble. (Boston: Beacon Press,
1994. 184 pages, \$22 cloth.)

When I was a kid in Quebec, my friend Beezers and I used to play up at Mont St. Hilaire, about three miles from our homes. We didn't often venture to the top, though the climb took only a couple of hours. Instead we hung around the quarry ponds at the foot of the mountain, building forts in the rocks and trying to catch anything that slithered, crawled, hopped, or slunk. Once we caught what we called a "double-decker" frog. I brought "it" home, put it in a bucket of water, and plunked in a big rock so it would have a perch. The next day we were surprised to find the bucket full of eggs. Eventually we put one and one together and figured out why the frogs had been stuck together. (Just recently I learned that the embrace of frogs is called amplexus. The male's tight forelimb clasp stimulates the female's release of eggs, which the male covers with milt.) After our frog-catching phase, Beezers and I learned to lift logs and rocks to find snakes, eastern garters mostly. We tried to keep them in my back yard, in a wooden crate that we rigged with a screen top, but they invariably escaped, often to be discovered later in my mother's garden, much to her distress.

When I was twelve my family moved to New Jersey, where copperheads make snake-catching a riskier proposition, so I specialized in turtles—painters and mud turtles—and took up fishing, for carp and catfish. This was at a small pond known locally as Back Lake. In winter, it was the skating rink for all the neighborhood kids until the owner decided to fill it in to make room for a nightclub. At the age of fourteen I took part in my first protest march, gathering in front of the owner's house with about a dozen of my hockey buddies, chanting "Don't Fill In Back Lake!" Unfortunately, nobody was home at the time.

I'm remembering these incidents from a childhood in nature after reading Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble's treasure of a book, *The Geography of Childhood*. It's a collection of essays, four each by Nabhan and Trimble, many of them previously published elsewhere, exploring the topic raised by the subtitle, *Why Children Need Wild Places*, and growing out of their concern about "how few children now grow up incorporating plants, animals, and places into their sense of home." The book also investigates how children relate to the natural world and what children can teach their elders about nature and our place in it.

The Geography of Childhood is a book to cherish, in part because it evokes childhood memories and helps us understand

children better. In the first chapter, "A Child's Sense of Wilderness," Nabhan shows that what children appreciate in nature is not the grand photo-op panoramas that adults seek out as the climaxes of their walks, but the small and the intimate—the stuff underfoot and close at hand, the nooks and grottoes where they construct refuges. In "The Scripture of Maps, the Names of Trees" Trimble shows that the natural world allows children to give vent to their sense of possessiveness ("Mine!") by catching and collecting things. Those tokens of the wild can be a source of, first, self-esteem, and then esteem from others as they are shared. But the acquisition of objects is soon replaced by the acquisition of knowledge, and "eventually," says Trimble, "the discovery suffices for power . . . and we leave these objects where we find them, transcending the old dead-end of human domination over nature." I can trace in my own experience that process—but perhaps it's a process that the guy who filled in Back Lake was deprived of.

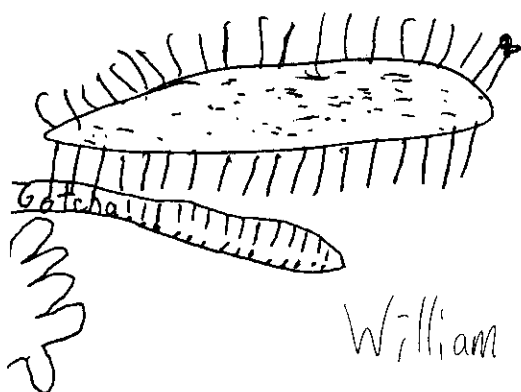
It is not just as a former child that I respond powerfully to *The Geography of Childhood*. As a scholar and writer, I admire the way Nabhan and Trimble blend the personal and the scholarly, combining childhood stories with information gathered from their research in such fields as educational and environmental psychology, anthropology, and biology. In "Children in Touch, Creatures in Story," Nabhan lays out the theoretical basis for their practice of using first-person narrative. Environmental education, he explains, once took the form of stories passed on from one generation to the next—back in the days when "Story had not yet been sequestered in books, nor had pertinent knowledge about the natural world been reduced to 'facts' ritually presented by members of a scientific priesthood." A study cited by Nabhan suggests that students who learn environmental information from narratives rather than textbooks learn more, are more interested in what they learn, and are more likely to *do* more with what they learn. In every chapter Nabhan and Trimble bring their points home with stories and anecdotes. What they do is a wonderful example of what Scott Slovic, in suggesting that ecocritics enliven their literary criticism with stories, has termed "narrative scholarship."

As a teacher, too, I find myself inspired by this book. In "Going Truant: The Initiation of Young Naturalists," Nabhan points out that only eight percent of U. S. adults see the environment as an important issue—while over ninety percent of our children do. What happens in the interim is the process of formal education. Nabhan argues that by keeping children indoors, schools teach them that nature does not matter, that it is somehow separate from the "real world" that we're supposed to learn about to become adults. Those of us who profess to educate would do well to take advantage of our students' inherent (or latent) interest in the natural world. In several places Nabhan and Trimble describe models for the kind of environmental education that would get students out into the world. One of the most intriguing: Underground Railroad reenactments at Wilder Forest in Minnesota, with staff members playing the role of Harriet Tubman in guiding students through a wilderness escape route. Trimble points out that outdoor experiences need not be that intense to offer lasting benefits. A few days, maybe a few class periods, spent outside can also

affect students' lives and help them retain their childhood sense that nature matters.

I hope that I can make such opportunities available for my students—I know that I must for my children. For it is as a parent that I am most moved by this book. The answers to Nabhan and Tremble's key question—why do children need wild places?—are sprinkled throughout the book. Trimble says in "The Scripture of Maps, the Names of Trees" that nature is a non-judgmental setting where "undervalued" children can learn from nature's diversity that "difference is the norm." It can be, and traditionally has been, says Nabhan in "Going Truant," the setting for rites of passage into adulthood and the source for metaphors by which we know ourselves. For girls, says Trimble in "A Land of One's Own," the wild offers "neutral ground for leadership" that is often denied them in the classroom, a place for them to break free of our society's restrictive assumptions about gender roles. I want my children to have all those advantages, and I want them to remind me to pay attention, as Nabhan and Trimble do so well, to the small delights of the natural world.

Ian Marshall, Penn State Altoona



Special Issue, "Ecology and the Child": *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 19.4 (Winter 1994-95; 188 pp.)

In preparing to teach Rachel Carson's powerful indictment of chemical "biocides" in her 1962 classic, *Silent Spring*, I was struck with how little that book affected the science education I received in any of my public schooling. I was seven when *Silent Spring* stirred up a public furor, but for the next eleven years of my training, "ecology," "interrelatedness," "land ethic," and other cardinal principles of environmental science (already in the lexicon before Carson wrote her book) were omitted from my studies. I recently asked my students, men and women in their twenties, if the science of ecology played any significant role in their science training. It had not. But for my two elementary-age children, learning ecological concepts has been an important part of their education since kindergarten. Over thirty years have lapsed since the publication of *Silent Spring*, but children are finally receiving a grounding in a biocentric worldview. In recognition of this shifting consciousness, the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly's* Winter 1994-95 issue has devoted its pages to "ecology and the child." Rachel

Carson, who also wrote children's books, would be pleased with the result.

As guest editor Betty Greenway points out in her incisive introduction, the best children's literature has always served a combined didactic and aesthetic purpose. As artfully as possible, children's writers attempt to initiate the young into the social world. But children's literature has also guided its readers into the natural world. Indeed, Carolyn Sigler's overview of nearly three centuries of children's writing, "Wonderland to Wasteland," argues that the shift from an anthropocentric to a biocentric pastoralism in nineteenth-century children's literature reflected society's growing concern with industrialism. The last two hundred years of children's literature, Sigler explains, express an activism that encompasses "animal rights, nuclear power, multiculturalism, feminism, and environmentalism." Complementing Sigler's article, Anne K. Phillips's examination of Gene Stratton-Porter's "Domestic Transcendentalism" maintains that this important early twentieth-century "green" writer, like other environmentalists of her day, transformed Emersonian idealism into a vital, spiritual ecology. "Compensating for industrialization," Stratton-Porter's fiction promotes the wild as a psychic balm, inculcating "the divinity and spirituality in nature and a respect for the natural world."

Ecology necessitates our acceptance of complexity, of processes interconnected and animate. Using Joseph W. Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* as a springboard, Millicent Lenz, in "Am I My Planet's Keeper," notes that such disparate texts as Virginia Burton's *The Little House* (1942), Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (1964), Bill Peet's *The Wump World* (1970), Raymond Briggs's *When the Wind Blows* (1982), and Chris Van Allsburg's *Just a Dream* (1990) take children through archetypal descents to "ecological hell" followed, in some texts, by an ascent and symbolic return to an ecologically harmonic world. Such stories warn children of the consequences of greed, consumption, and disconnection from the natural realm. Most importantly, these books underscore the beauty of ecological integrity and encourage children to seek connection to this complex biotic whole.

Ecological literature for children, like that for adults, has proved controversial. Some critics, like *New York Times* writer Janet Maslin, deplore the overt preaching that may frighten a child's sensibilities. Others argue that environmental children's books have yet to discover a way to explore satisfactorily the complexity of a biocentric worldview. Another difficulty, as Lisa Lebduska points out in her article "Rethinking Human Needs," is that children's literature, so tied to market forces itself, has a difficult time critiquing the consumer model that drives our economy. When Dr. Seuss published his cautionary tale, *The Lorax* (1971), he attacked the mania of consumption and defended nature against the onslaught of materialism. Though Seuss's personal favorite, *The Lorax* had disappointing sales. When televised by CBS, Seuss's tale became a watered-down critique of America's shopping obsession. CBS did not want to offend its corporate sponsors. Ironically, then, environmental children's books become part of what Lebduska calls "eco-spending": "Nature becomes a vacation, environmentalism a momentary event or a product whose purchase Saves the Planet."

Mary Harris Veeder, examining the plethora of rain forest books currently on the market, argues in "Children's Books on the Rain Forest" that environmental books for children must present nature's multiple, complex, ecological layering. Children must be left appreciating this beauty without seeking to own it. In Veeder's view, too much contemporary children's environmental literature suggests "that thinking is an easy task and reform is simple." While lauding the arrival of texts that guide children into an understanding of ecological principles, Veeder makes it clear that we need more and better environmental books for children.

Still, as this special issue of the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* makes wonderfully clear, children's books have never neglected humanity's interdependency with nature, even if our educational system, until very recently, has. Betty Greenery's selection of five articles accomplishes that most difficult task of an editor: presenting a topic expansively within a limited field of vision. The five scholars represented acquaint us with the historical, ethical, ideological, and aesthetic layerings of a vital body of literature. Humanity's future is at stake. As Lisa Lebduka's concluding note forcefully maintains, if writers do not inspire our children's imaginative connection to nature, "the dominoes of our past history [of environmental destruction] will surely spill forward into our next generations."

Susan Naramore Maher, University of Nebraska at Omaha



CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Submission Deadlines:

May

•"Livelihood & Liveability." Eighth International Conference of the Society for Human Ecology, 19-22 October, 1995 at Lake Tahoe, CA. Send three abstracts by 15 May, 1995 to: Nancy Markee, Mail Stop 199, Environmental and Resource Sciences, University of Nevada, Reno, NV 89557.

June

•Western Literature Association. 11-14 October, 1995 at Vancouver, B.C. Send a manuscript of no more than ten, typed double-spaced pages and a 125-word abstract by 15 June, 1995 to: Laurie Ricou, President, Western Literature Association, Department of English, University of British Columbia, 397-1873 East Mall, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1.

September

•Literatures, Societies, and the 21st Century." 27th CEA Conference, 4-6 April, 1996 at New Orleans. Send proposals of two pages by 15 September, 1995 to: James R. Bennett, 1996 CEA Program Chair, English Department, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701.

•"Hemingway and the Natural World." 1996 International Hemingway Conference, 21-26 July, 1996 at University of Idaho. Send completed paper or sessions proposal by September 15, 1995 to: Professor Robert Fleming, English Department, Humanities 217, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.

November

•"Working Conference IV on the Relations between the Humanities and Science." 24-28 July, 1996 at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. Send three copies of paper by 15 November, 1995 to: Dr. James D. Anderson, Associate Dean and Professor, School of Communication, Information, and Library Studies, Rutgers University, 4 Huntington St., Room 316, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1701

Events of interest:

May

•"Global Population and the Environment." Comparative Linguistics Section of the Global Awareness Society International, 19-21 May, 1995. East Texas Baptist University, Marshall, TX.

•American Literature Association. 25-28 May, 1995. Baltimore. Gloria Cronin, English Department, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602.

June

•"Migrations into, out of, within Northern New England" Conference on Northern New England in the Nineteenth Century, 8-10 June, 1995. The Washburn Humanities Center in association with the University of Maine and the University of Southern Maine.

•"Wildbranch Workshop in Outdoor, Natural History and Environmental Writing." 18-24 June, 1995. David Brown, Director, Wildbranch Workshop in Outdoor, Natural History and Environmental Writing, Sterling College, Craftsbury Common, VT 05827.

•The Interdisciplinary Environmental Association Conference. 21-25 June, 1995. Dr. Demetri Kantarelis, IEA, Economics/Foreign Affairs Dept., Assumption College, 500 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01615-0005

•"Cather's Canadian and Old World Connections." Sixth International Willa Cather Seminar, 24 June-1 July, 1995. Quebec City, Canada. Robert Thatcher, Canadian Studies Program, St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY 13617.

November

•American Studies Association. 9-12 November 1995, Pittsburgh. ASA, 2102 South Campus Surge Bldg., University of Maryland, College Park, 20742.

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

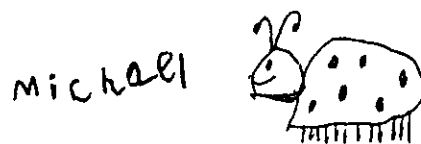
The Winter 1996 issue of *Nebraska English Journal* will be devoted exclusively to children's and adolescent literature. The issue's theme will be "Presence of Promise: The Spirituality of Place in Children's and Adolescent Literature." We encourage submission of manuscripts that define this spirituality expansively: from a theological, philosophical, ecological, multicultural, or psychological perspective. Articles of 10-15 pp. and conforming to MLA guidelines must meet an August 1, 1995 deadline. For more information, contact Susan Naramore Maher, Dept. of English, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182-0175 or email: MAHER@CWIS.UNOMAHA.EDU.

The ASLE E-Mail Network has recently been improved so that subscription is now automated. Instructions for subscribing and unsubscribing to the net have changed. To subscribe to the network/bulletin board, simply send a message to: **Majordomo@unr.edu**. Your message should read: **subscribe asle**. To unsubscribe from the network, use the **Majordomo@unr.edu** address, but send this message: **unsubscribe asle**. The address for posting a message to the network remains the same: **asle@unr.edu**. This is not a moderated list; postings to the list are automatically sent to all subscribers. Anyone interested in literature and the environment may join this listserv group. We currently have 175 subscribers. Traffic on the network averages one or two messages per day and consists of queries, book recommendations, teaching ideas, job openings, calls for papers, conference announcements, and exchange of ideas on "green" theoretical, practical, and political issues.

The Orion Society has recently published "Bringing the World Alive," an annotated bibliography of 115 children's nature stories. The aim of this bibliography is to cultivate an inspired and informed sense of place in young people, so that they will grow to be caring and committed stewards of the land. For more information, contact Jennifer Sahn: 212-744-5673. "Bringing the World Alive" is available for \$6 per copy from The Orion Society's office at 136 East 65th Street, New York, NY 10021.

The *ASLE Handbook on Graduate Study in Literature & Environment* and the *ASLE Bibliography* are currently available from ASLE Treasurer Allison Wallace (Unity College of Maine, HC 78, Box 200, Unity, ME 04988). The cost of the handbook is \$5, the bibliography \$6.50 (this just covers printing expenses).

Society and Animals: Social Scientific Studies of the Human Experience of Other Animals is a journal published by Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. *Society and Animals* publishes studies which describe and analyze our experience of nonhuman animals. For further information, contact Kenneth Shapiro, Ph.D., editor, *Society and Animals*, P.O. Box 1297, Washington Grove, MD 20880-1297; 301-963-4751 (phone/FAX).



ASLE Votes to Adopt *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* and Invites Applications for Editorship of the Journal

At the ASLE business meeting during the Western Literature Association Conference in Salt Lake City last October, we discussed the possibility that ASLE might adopt as its official journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. *ISLE* editor Patrick Murphy described the possible advantages of merging *ISLE* and ASLE, and discussion of the costs and benefits of the adoption plan followed. In late November a mail ballot was sent to the entire membership. This ballot explained that ASLE was considering adoption of the journal, briefly listed some reasons why doing so might or might not be a good idea, and asked for a simple yes or no vote. Of the 90 members who responded, 88 voted in favor of adoption and 2 voted against adoption.

With the vote now in, we need to proceed with the first step toward adoption: the selection of an editor and institutional home for the journal. We are now inviting applications, which will be considered by an ad-hoc committee comprised of senior members of the ASLE Advisory Board. Anyone may apply, though we strongly encourage applicants to investigate the level of institutional support available to them before doing so. We will also hold an informational meeting concerning the *ISLE* adoption at the ASLE Conference in Fort Collins, Colorado (check your conference program for the time and location of this meeting). If you wish to discuss the matter further or if you have any questions, please contact ASLE Co-President (and *ISLE* Associate Editor) Cheryll Glotfelty at: Cheryll Glotfelty, Department of English, University of Nevada-Reno, Reno, NV 89557; 702-784-6223 (phone); 702-784-6266 (FAX); glotfelt@unr.edu (e-mail).

To apply for editorship of *ISLE*, please submit seven copies of your application to Cheryll (at the above address) by June 30, 1995. Applications will be distributed to the members of the ad-hoc committee by July 15, and applicants will be notified of the committee's decision by September 15. Thanks again to all of those who voted; we look forward to discussing your questions and concerns as the *ISLE* adoption process continues.

The application for editorship should include the following materials: 1) A letter of application, including discussion of relevant editorial experience and explaining your hopes/vision/ideas for the journal; 2) A current curriculum vitae; 3) A specific description of the institutional support that would be available to you as editor of the journal. This description might include (or have appended to it) items such as: institutional financial commitment to the journal; release time; clerical or graduate student support; dedicated office space and/or equipment; statements of support or commitment from relevant administrators; a list of faculty in your department, institution, or geographical area interested in working with the journal; opportunities for linking the journal to an institute, program, or center; opportunities for grants or other longterm financial support for the journal.

MEMBER INFORMATION AND CHECKLIST

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Name _____

Affiliation (if not listed below) _____

Mailing Address _____

Telephone Number(s) _____ (o); _____ (h)

FAX Number _____

E-mail Address _____

Research/writing interests _____

(This information will be published in the annual ASLE Directory. Please indicate if you do not want any of the information to appear in the Directory.)

Amount Enclosed

ASLE Membership (\$15/ students \$10) _____

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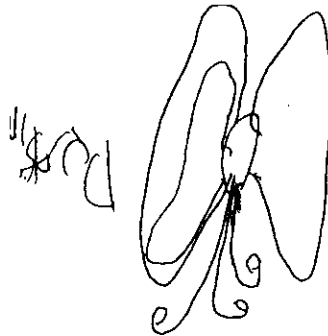
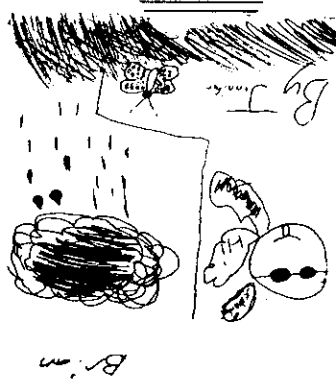
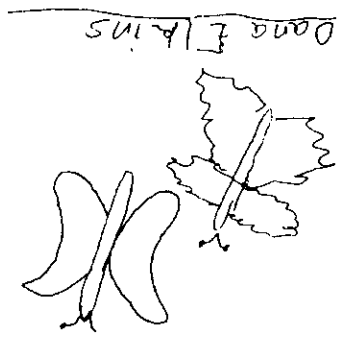
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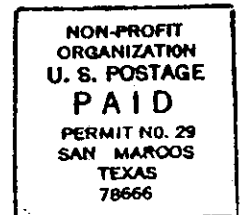
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Please make checks payable to ASLE and return dues and fees with this form to:

David Teague,
Secretary, ASLE
University of Delaware Parallel Program
333 Shipley Street
Wilmington, DE 19801



ASLE
c/o Scott Slovic
Department of English
Southwest Texas State University
San Marcos, TX 78666-4616



Insert

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We apologize for not updating the list in the actual newsletter. Thanks very much for your generous support of ASLE.