

■ Are Stories of Trash Merely Didactic Proselytizing? Challenging Representations of Garbage in Children's Books

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Abstract

Garbage may be often envisioned as part of some greater ecological or environmental concern, but how children's books deal with our garbage is a representational question. How can the children's books turn issues of trash and waste into stories dramatic enough to engage young readers, stories powerful enough to establish cognitive distance from everyday experience so that the readers may adopt a critical view of them? The essay premises that the children's books on garbage mobilize a host of values in both children's literature and environmentalism, and that these books are also symptomatic examples that affect the way garbage is represented and understood for children. It first explores the common ways in which garbage is presented in children's books, and then discusses two recent examples—*Here Comes the Garbage Barge* (2010), written by Jonah Winter and illustrated by Chris Sickels, and *I'm Not a Plastic Bag* (2012) by Rachel Hope Allison—that examine garbage problems while minimizing didactic proselytizing that a conventional approach might foster. While the two books are a combination of fiction and non-fiction, similar in the depiction of human waste, they are very different in terms of content and style. The essay will read the two books along with Mary Douglas's theory of dirt as "matter out of place," and Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject, exploring the extent to which the garbage problems are imaginatively and strategically addressed in Winter's and Allison's books. It argues that the two children's books demonstrate an ecological approach which not merely uses humor or hyperbole to get their message across, but also encourages alternative

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ways of seeing the waste we have made. The essay suggests that it is pedagogically significant to offer different eco-critical perspectives or be more socially conscious about garbage as part of environmental concern in children's books.

Keywords: waste in children's literature, picture book, graphic novel, Rachel Hope Allison, Jonah Winter, environmental literature

Children's literature—even texts not considered “environmentalist”—has been grappling with the representation of waste with the rise of environmentalism since the late twentieth century. A growing preoccupation with waste, trash, and garbage can be observed in the reading materials that target toward young people. For instance, Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, first published in 1971, calls the waste “Gluppity Glup” and “Schloppity-Schlopp,” a messy and icky substance that makes the water practically unsustainable (n. pag.). Michael Foreman's *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish* was first published in 1972, and remains a classic environmental tale in which dinosaurs wake up from their slumbers to respond to human pollution of the Earth. Foreman's book acknowledges humans as one of many species living on the Earth, and attenuates humans' responsibility for the physical environment. In the hilarious but serious poem, “Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out” (1974), Shel Silverstein gives a long catalogue of the terrible garbage which “reached across the state, from New York to the Golden Gate” (71). At the end of the poem, it says, “Poor Sarah met an awful fate/ That I cannot right now relate/ Because the hour is much too late/ but children, remember Sarah Stout/ And always take the garbage out” (71). With the cautionary tale of “Poor Sarah,” Silverstein suggests the potential disaster that might happen if young people do not act responsibly toward the environment. Apart from these precursor texts, nowadays in the online bookstores are listed all sorts of books that center on waste, garbage, recycling, refusing, reducing, reusing, and upcycling. A keyword search on Amazon.com for “waste” in “children's books” brings back an astonishing number of results—approximately 1223 (The search was performed on 7 December 2016).

These children's books on garbage make visible a common part of our life that remains largely unexamined. Garbage, when used as a synonym for rubbish, trash, junk, refuse, or litter, is commonly conceived as material left over or thrown away, unwanted materials or unusable substances, say, nuclear waste. Garbage is often associated with the terms such as “useless,” “gross,” “smelly,” and “contaminating.” To throw garbage away is one of the chores many people do almost every day, and maybe among the least likely acts to register. A common cliché about garbage may be “out of sight, out of mind.” And even when it is in sight, it somehow manages to be out of mind, out of nose, and out of home. However, the truth is that *we* cannot live without producing some kind of garbage. “Garbage, the miniature version of production's destructive aftermath,” says Heather Rogers, “inevitably ends up in each person's hands” (231). If waste is any substance that is unwanted or discarded after primary use, its specific character needs to be investigated and articulated. “In a world in which material prosperity and life itself are inevitably linked to pollution and the production of waste, how can we humans—ourselves

sources of waste in terms of all that we discard—understand and cope with waste?” asks Susan Signe Morrison (1). It is only in confronting the way the odious mess is framed—considering it, reading about it, thinking about it and talking and writing about it—that a new or even refined understanding of our relation to waste is made possible.

In her pioneering and influential book, *Purity and Danger*, the British anthropologist Mary Douglas has theorized about purity, hygiene and notions of the dirty. “Dirt,” writes Douglas, “is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (44). She tunes into the fundamental and formative importance of waste in giving measure to our lives. If rejecting things brings order, the underlying assumption is that dirt is a bad thing to be avoided. For Douglas, however, dirt is “never a unique, isolated event” (44). To put it simply, “Where there is dirt there is system” (Douglas 44). It is also true to say that no material is waste by its intrinsic qualities. It is because of being assigned by human designs that material objects, including humans themselves, acquire all the qualities similar to those of hazardous waste. Douglas urges us to recognize in our notions of dirt or waste that “we are using a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems” (44). By pointing to the seemingly objective but malleable role dirt or waste plays in a system, Douglas makes explicit “the connections between the legibility of rubbish and our acts of refusal” (Viney n. pag.).

If Douglas has complicated the social categorization of waste as primarily arbitrary and contingent, Julia Kristeva moves in a different direction to explore the subjective value of those demarcations, exclusions, and prohibitions that establish the social organism as a “symbolic system” (66). Douglas centers on the way in which a “symbolic system” is built through excluding the other, and Kristeva turns her attention towards “the subjective dimension and/or the diachronic and synchronic implication of the speaking subject in the universal order of language” (66). For Kristeva, “one encounters abjection as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and this throughout the course of civilization” (68). She argues by saying, “abjection is coextensive with social and symbolic order, on the individual as well as on the collective level” (68). The abject does not refer to an object, but an “other,” which upsets, provokes fear, or calls into question the boundaries on which notions of self and society are founded. The abject is demarcated or excluded from boundaries that are set to stake out a realm of symbolic signification, but forms challenges to the realm of semiotic signification. Most noticeably, the abject manifests itself in phenomena such as “a piece of filth, waste, or dung” that threatens the body’s assumed cleanliness and health, and it is thus experienced spontaneously as horror, disgust, and loathing

(Kristeva 2). The abject may assume specific shapes and different signifiers according to the various “symbolic systems,” but it can be seen as a psychic strategy that a subject uses to reassert his or her identity, and to avert the effects made by the abject. As Kristeva states, “Refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death” (3, emphasis original). Like Douglas, Kristeva acknowledges ambivalence in everyday life, offering a unique perspective to the representation of the excluded others such as waste or garbage.

How children’s books deal with our garbage as part of greater or environmental concern can be seen as a representational question when trash is commonly conceptualized, in Mary Douglas’s terms, as “matter out of place” (44). One big challenge for children’s book writers is to keep their readers informed and engaged at the same time. Jonah Winter’s *Here Comes the Garbage Barge* (2010) and Rachel Hope Allison’s *I’m Not a Plastic Bag* (2012) are two recent examples that examine garbage problems while minimizing didactic proselytizing that a conventional approach might foster. Both of the books are concerned with a journey of the garbage. *Here Comes the Garbage Barge* is a picture book which takes comical liberties with the odyssey of the Mobro 4000 garbage barge, tackling its journey along the east coast of the United States in search of a final resting place for its haul of waste in an amusing mix of fact and fiction. *I’m Not a Plastic Bag* is a graphic novel that directs our attention to the huge garbage patch floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, challenging traditional ways of thinking about trash, and exploring the garbage patch in a more human, emotional way. While the two books are based on factual occurrences from recent history, they are a combination of fiction and nonfiction. While these two books are similar in the depiction of human waste, they are very different in terms of content and style. This essay will read the two books along with Mary Douglas’s theory of dirt as “matter out of place” and Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject, exploring the extent to which the garbage problems are imaginatively and strategically addressed in Winter’s and Allison’s books. It argues that the two books suggest an ecological approach which not merely uses humor or hyperbole to get their message across, but also encourages alternative ways of seeing us, the waste-makers as well as the waste we have made.

The common-sense view of garbage as material left over, unwanted material, or unusable substances has an important function in its representation in children’s books. For many books on trash, a frequent approach is to guide the readers to transfigure the unwanted or the unusable or to put them in place, using a style that is injunctive in nature, implicitly expecting the child readers to see themselves in the characters. Striking examples are *Where Does Our Garbage Go?* (1994), *Andrew*

Lost in the Garbage (2006), *Michael Recycle* (2008), and *What Happens to Our Trash?* (2012). In *Where Does Our Garbage Go?*, the reader is invited to a classroom to learn with the children from their teacher about how the people in the U.S. deal with the problem of too much trash via graphs, charts, and diagrams. In *What Happens to Our Trash?*, the reader is also expected to learn the factual information about trash, and share the characters' experience in recycling of waste. In *Andrew Lost in the Garbage*, the child reader shares the incredible adventure of Andrew and his friends who find themselves shrunk down and tossed out with the garbage and learn about the process of decomposition. Likewise, in *Michael Recycle* (2008), the young reader is encouraged to become an environmental helper who pays attention to trash around and learns to recycle by reading the rhyming lines along with colorful illustrations. Not only are these books made to engage children in an imaginary journey to garbage, but some other of them also include tips to show young readers how to recycle everyday materials into works of art or stylish decorations.¹

The books mentioned above and many others are instructive in prompting the young readers to look around and guide them to manage the stuff in an efficient or effective way. They often offer situational contexts and practical tips or step-by-step instructions to direct children to sort out or transfigure the trash in order to put them back in place, or create a new value in the thrown-away. Although garbage is now envisioned as part of some greater ecological or environmental concern in children's books, yet few rubbish-theme books for children are not generally perceived as preachy. Many of them share, Clare Bradford suggests, "a tendency toward overtly-expressed ideologies; the deployment of exhortatory and even homiletic discourses; and a mix of narrative, didactic, factual, and emotive modes of address" (112). When speaking of the perspectives on the natural world in children's literature, John Stephens also observes that children's books focused on the nature or the environment may be written for different purposes, but generally constitute a spectrum "falling on information or advocacy" (40). What Stephens says of the books on the environment is also true of many of the children's books on trash.

In suggesting that many children's books on garbage tend to be instructive or preachy, I do not mean to assert that they are simply didactic by lapsing into the functional dichotomy between instruction and delight, a long-time issue in children's literature. On the contrary, I want to suggest that the children's books

¹ Some examples can be seen in *Ecoart!: Earth-Friendly Art and Craft Experience for 3 to 9 Year-Olds* (Williamson, 1993) by Laurie Carlson; *Likeable Recyclables* (Learning Works, 1992) by Linda Schwartz; *Astonishing Art with Recycled Rubbish* (Koala Books, 2002) by Susan Matineau; and *Dream Bedroom: Use Recycled Materials to Make Cool Crafts (Ecocrafts)* (Kingfisher, 2007) by Rebecca Craig. See <<http://www.kabc.wa.gov.au/library/file/Schools%20%20activities/recommendedreading.pdf>>.

on garbage mobilize the host of values in *both* children's literature and environmentalism. These books are also symptomatic examples that affect the way garbage is understood and represented for children. Rather than pigeonhole them as mere pedagogical tools, I'd like to argue that children's books prompt us to consider the effective way in which children's literature dovetails with environmentalism, given that garbage is envisioned as part of some greater ecological or environmental concern. A significant question we can ask: how can children's books turn issues of trash and waste into stories dramatic enough to engage young readers, stories powerful enough to establish cognitive distance from everyday experience so that the readers may adopt an eco-critical view of them?

John Stephens has observed that three ideologically grounded perspectives can be found in children's books on the environment. The first of these is to promote "mastery over nature" whereby nature is subordinate to humanity and exists for its desires and needs; the second is to promote "an attitude of caring and wonder and understanding," whereby humans are positioned outside nature as the source of value and meaning, though "there is only a limited degree of embeddedness;" and the third is to acknowledge that humans are not attributed with any kind of privileged status, and that intrinsic value is ascribed to all living beings (40). To follow the logic behind his argument, the titles mentioned above may promote an awareness of environmental issues by offering factual information of garbage (the way in which types of trash are processed, and what children can do to recycle them), but their perspective draws on an essentially human-versus-trash position. In other words, humans portrayed in those books are seen as responsible agents, who are attributed with a kind of privileged status to put the trash into place. This position, as Stephens says, assumes "only a limited degree of embeddedness," and "humans are positioned as outside nature and as the source of value and meaning" (40). It may be impossible to entirely efface a human presence or perspective in practice, but it is epistemologically necessary to re-think the valorization or over-emphasis of individual responsibility with regard to environmentalism in children's books. Clare Echterling argues that many of the environmental books focus overwhelmingly on "*individual acts and lifestyle changes*, and unwillingness to address the relationships between environmental degradation and systemic social problems" (288, emphasis mine). Julia Mickenberg and Philip Nel also detect the normally unnoticed effects of the ecodidactic perspectives, stating that "At their most harmful, 'green' books may breed self-righteous complacency about environmental issues: Just recycle, and that's all you need to do" (456). They argue that children's books about the environment had better not merely advocate recycling and consuming less, and that those books should go one step further to explain "the true consequences of pollution, resource depletion, decreasing bio-

diversity, unrestricted development, and lost animal habitats” (457). In the case of children’s books of garbage, it is equally significant to offer different eco-critical perspectives or be more socially conscious about garbage as part of environmental concern.

When getting back to *Here Comes the Garbage Barge* and *I’m Not a Plastic Bag*, we then have the question: how are these two books different from the common books on garbage? A quick answer is what distinguishes Winter’s and Allison’s books from the titles mentioned above is the intriguing eco-critical perspective from which they look at garbage. Both of them may be instructive in nature and focus on a current environmental disaster: too much trash on earth. But they examine garbage problems by minimizing didactic proselytizing that a conventional approach might foster. Winter is explicit in declaring the pains of too much trash, and Allison directs the reader’s attention to the animating garbage at sea. Rather than look around and start to seek to sort out the trash, Winter and Allison invite the reader to turn to two different journeys garbage takes across time and space. Both of them look *away* from the here-and-now, *away* from the everyday chronotope or time-space constellation with which we are familiar to the chronotopes that exist but are remotely different. Winter looks a while *back* to the recent past when recycling was not yet popular or instituted, while Allison looks *afar* to the faraway ocean where the debris accumulate and grow as time goes by. More importantly, in doing so, both of them prompt the readers to see into the *inter-connectedness* between people and the environment. “If the root of the ecojustice problem is alienation, the separate self, and the severing of connections,” says Greta Gaard, then “ecopedagogy argues that the solutions must come in restoring these connections—between theory and practice, reading subjects and actions, narrative and print alike” (20).

“You can’t park that garbage in our harbor!”

Here Comes the Garbage Barge, like many other books, may address trash as a problem in and of itself, but it gets us closer to seeing the issue of agency and responsibility from the other end of the telescope. Rather than a scenario that demonstrates recycling and upcycling tips, the book is based on the odyssey of the Mobro 4000 garbage barge, which set out on a 162-day journey in 1987 along the east coast of the United States in search of a final resting place for its haul of waste. William Rathje and Cullen Murphy, pioneering scholars of garbology, state that Mobro 4000 is not so much “a symbol of greed, or perhaps bad luck” as a symbol of “the garbage crisis” or the fundamental garbage-disposal problems

the American society has to address (241).

Here Comes the Garbage Barge takes comical liberties with the actual incident, tackling the garbage barge journey in an amusing mix of fact and fiction. As the jolly narrator recounts, when the city of Islip on Long Island produces 3,168 tons of garbage and has nowhere to put it, some businessman, invented as Gino Stroffolino, attempts to ship it to a Southern state. For the barge and its captain Cap'm Duffy St. Pierre, however, trouble arises when they find themselves turned away at every port they approach. The tons of garbage are not just "matter out of place," and the garbage barge can be compared to a floating landfill compelled to move adrift at sea. To unravel the absurdity of the scandal, the entire story is sarcastic in tone, featuring typographical experimentation. Different languages (colloquial English, Spanish, coined words "KUNGO") and fonts of different types and different sizes are used to dramatize the truly international scope of the barge's journey and the large trash crisis it represents. Geographical fun facts are also incorporated to highlight all the ports the barge journeys to, including North Carolina, New Orleans, Mexico, Belize, Texas, Florida, Long Island, and New York City.

In addressing trash as a national problem as well as an international issue, *Here Comes the Garbage Barge* goes one step further to exhibit its abjection, the process in which garbage is rejected and expelled. Pictorially the book centers on the direct confrontations between the garbage barge and the people who repudiate it. If Winter's story underscores humans as the instigators of this incident who set off the long journey of garbage as a by-product of an intended action, the artwork by Chris Sickels of the Red Nose Studio is made to mock or ridicule those who do nothing but expel the garbage barge, rendering them into caricature figures in a hilarious way. As Douglas says, "Our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications" (45). The cities or states toward which the barge approaches are characterized by distinguishing features, and yet each of them condemns the garbage barge that is likely to confuse or contradict the cherished classifications. The story of the expulsion of the garbage barge runs in a dreary circle. New Orleans, for instance, is verbally commended as "birthplace of jazz home of blackened redfish and streets filled with music, friendly faces, streetcars, garbage . . ." on the seventh double-page spread (n. pag.). In the corresponding picture, however, the mayor of New Orleans gazes with a sullen look toward outside the spread where the garbage barge is supposed to be making its way up to the port. When the page turns, the reader is shown that the hometown boy Captain Duffy, gnashing his teeth in anger and frustration, is driven off by the US coast guard, and forced to continue to move southward to Mexico. In a similar way, Mexico is idealized as "land of enchantment, of enchiladas and folk art, of swaying palm trees and moonlit beaches . . ."

(n. pag.). However, the accompanying picture provides a different kind of information, depicting seven big guns pointing at Captain Duffy, palely frightened with the fabulous treat which the Mexican Navy offers. In each case, the fun facts of the port are verbally presented, while the picture, which functions as an ironic counterpoint, shows with humor how the garbage barge is repeatedly cast off so that each port might sustain itself. The story of the Mobro 4000 garbage barge, as Mickenberg and Nel suggest, “exposes the ways in which political corruption and economic incentives interfere with public interest, and points to the Not in My Backyard impulse that makes waste disposal” (461).

The abjection of the garbage barge exemplifies not just a highly pollution-conscious world where “Not in My Back Yard” (NIMBY) attitudes make intense objections to the garbage barge approaching their land. By focusing on the unsympathetic rejection each port has made, the story also implicates the tons of garbage involved in forming the borderline that separates the ordered site of proper relations from those which must exist outside. The city of Islip discards tons of garbage to maintain a kind of spatial hygiene, implicitly seeking to patrol a border between objects of waste and objects they want. The tons of garbage are thus rendered as objects capable of transgressing established borders in its wandering journey. In other words, the garbage barge is what Kristeva would term “the abject,” which has encroached upon the port, and which is necessary to sustain the same border through which it is expelled. When the barge and its captain find themselves turned away at every port, from North Carolina to Mexico, from New Orleans to Belize, nobody wants the garbage, and even Islip refuses to take it back. The little tugboat may be named the Break of Dawn, but is gradually reduced into being instrumental as the story develops. The garbage barge becomes the needed feature against which the discriminatory state or country can establish its difference, its claim to being separate and special.

The story highlights and ridicules the scenarios when the humans place themselves in direct opposition to the garbage they produce, implicating the potentially negative consequence of the human-versus-trash assumption. Interestingly, however, the garbage barge itself is paradoxically presented in a fascinating way. In *Here Comes the Garbage Barge*, as in many other books, the trash is treated as a problem that must be handled. The garbage barge, though a silent character in the book, evokes Oscar the Grouch-style affection for trash. Chris Sickels makes the scenarios of the story out of the toys, junk, and found objects available. He puts the book jacket to good use by detailing inside how he creates the illustrations for this book. Rather than prioritize or preach how to reuse or recycle the bits and pieces into artwork, the behind-the-scene story of the making of the illustrations is presented on the inside of the book jacket. The endpapers also exemplify both

the terrible situation of and the best wish for the sea. The front endpaper is covered with images of knick-knacks and junk littered everywhere on the sea, while the back endpaper is a double-page spread with an image of clean water where a buoy marks the moral “Don’t make so much garbage!!!” (n. pag.). The seemingly clichéd phrase is simultaneously given a new twist when pieces of junk are transformed into works of art.

Sickels makes art in the book mostly out of garbage, and each spread looks like images drawn from a suspended animated film. The verbal story is presented in juxtaposition with photographs of hand-sculpted three-dimensional (3-D) figures and props assembled from found objects. The human characters are made from polymer clay, wire, wood scraps, and a clay model Statue of Liberty in front of a searchlight moon holds her nose. The ocean is created using light blue plastic bags from the local dry cleaner. The sea-worn tugboat inside the book is made out of old belts, broken toy trucks, pieces of metal screen and old windshield wipers, and “scraps left over from plastic model kits” (n. pag.). The barge is built from “odd pieces of cardboard and wood,” and painted with “leftover house paint” (n. pag.). Most of the garbage on the barge is, Sickels says, “picked up off the street,” and added with “rotten banana peels” as well as shredded plastics bags “coated with shellac to get that gooey, slimy look” (n. pag.). It can be argued that the art design of the book demonstrates the possible connection humans can make with the trash, though its story underscores the abjection of the garbage.

“I’m not a plastic bag.”

If *Here Comes the Garbage Barge* looks a while *back* to the recent past to inform us of the landfill made to go adrift at sea, *I’m Not a Plastic Bag* directs our attention to the huge garbage patch drifting in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a perennial problem often glossed over. Plastic is often treated as a non-biodegradable substance, or a problematic material demanding human management. But the six-chapter graphic novel focuses on how the formation of the garbage patch reveals the relational exchanges across humans, synthetic materials and the sea. Allison’s story of the garbage patch is embedded in the factual pieces of information about the human impact on the ocean. The text that precedes is a foreword by Jeff Corwin, and the texts that follow are photographs of the frequently found ocean debris, of threatened marine wildlife along with the practical tips on what humans can do to reduce marine debris. Archaia Entertainment, publisher of this book, also claims that it will align with other nonprofit conservation organizations to “plant two trees for each tree used in the manufacturing of the book” on the copy-

right page. Different from the informational texts that precede and follow, the graphic story presents a dreamlike journey of the plastic waste. In Allison's story, a variety of everyday items, such as a plastic bag, a used tire, a windblown umbrella, and a littered rubber duck, make their way into the ocean, intermingling and growing as a creaturely mass and floating out there. The patch is, as Allison describes, "like a new version of an ugly doll," or "Frankenstein's monster—made of all this forgotten stuff, reviled and abandoned by its creators" ("Interview"). Her portrayal of the garbage patch offers an allegorical model of environmental concern, envisaging a huge trash pack *creature* which is constantly being shaped and developed by the accumulation of wind-dispersed debris. Allison's story, as Jeff Corwin states in the foreword to the book, "transforms the convoluted process of global waste into a magical and spellbinding journey" (n. pag.).

If Winter's story takes us to reflect upon the human-centered approach with a satire of a notorious episode, *I'm Not a Plastic Bag* then subverts the long-standing view of the non-human stuff. In Allison's book, the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest; instead, it is the intimate interdependence between humanity and the non-human living world that matters. "Instead of just being another exposé of why consumer waste was bad and consumers were guilty," Allison says in an interview, she wants it to be a story, to "explore the patch in a more human, emotional way" ("Interview"). But what makes her book eco-critically intriguing is that it challenges traditional ways of thinking about garbage, and that it problematizes the binary opposition between the lively world of human sociality and the dumped, or dumb thing. The title of the book inverts the literal meaning of "I'm not a plastic bag," and transforms it into a *sentient* accumulation of debris. It may be a human creation, symbolizing threats and dangers to the environment, obstacles and challenges that humans must overcome. But the garbage patch begins to have a life of its own. Over time it takes on a shape, with a tire as one eye, an umbrella the other, and arms that stretch into the water. Meanwhile, more debris arrives from sea and sky, including the carcass of an albatross, after she ingests plastic. The formation of the trash creature blurs the culture/nature, clean/dirty, or particularly trash/nature binary oppositions that inform the common assumptions about garbage. When compared with the abject garbage expelled from the cities, the garbage patch seems to be jarringly "naturalized" as part of the oceanic current.

However, the moving trash creature is not so much "matter out of place" as "matter *without* a place," adrift at sea day in and day out. Rather than demonize it, Allison demystifies the garbage patch as a growing organism that develops on the sea, transforming itself into a lonely, floating creature that interacts with the animals around such as birds and fish. Unlike the garbage barge which remains

the most unpleasant *object*, the Pacific Garbage Patch, the star of the book, may be a non-human being, but grows to become human-like and “want” to greet the creatures around him with great gentleness. It comes from the human world, but is always moving, accumulating, and transforming somewhere in the faraway ocean. Extensions from the edges of the garbage patch appear as overgrown hands, sometimes reaching down to a giant squid and other times pointing to the various messages. The minimizing of background highlights the mechanics of movement and enhances the expressive role of the garbage patch. Allison uses collaged photos of trash to show the texture that can be felt. By giving snapshots of specific aspects of the garbage patch in action, the book presents the vitality and complexity of the garbage patch. The fascinating but puzzling ending even has the entire mass of trash rising skyward, followed by the creature’s face shining in the night sky.

Rather than employ a range of varied interactions between words and images, *I’m Not a Plastic Bag* is mostly a wordless graphic novel. With most graphic novels, words are used to anchor, or amplify or run parallel to pictorial images, experienced as a necessary clarification of, or an additive or an alternative to the pictorial images (McCloud 153-155). In Allison’s book, however, speech balloons or narrative boxes are not used, as if the verbal text is dispensable, a kind of constraint on the graphic to be loosened and diminished. By eliminating captions and dialogues, Allison concentrates on the free-flowing movement of the garbage patch, requiring the reader to look at it from different perspectives. The images themselves are engaging, providing multiple perspectives from above, below, and on the surface of the floating mass of trash. In the narrative of wordless comics, the growth of the garbage is rendered as a silent movie, which is atmospherically evocative. With the lack of words the story turns into a pantomime which focuses on the expressive movement of the garbage patch alone. Meanwhile, an unsaturated blue color is adopted to suggest a kind of free space (or a dream world) in which the garbage patch moves or floats, where verbal language, the instrument of reason, dissolves. The very muteness of the garbage patch not only keeps it from being didactic and preachy, but also has its pathetic aspect; its inability to communicate in a normal, direct way gives us a figure marked by fate for drifting and wandering at sea.

Despite the muteness of the garbage patch, however, Allison creates a lonely, floating creature that communicates in words from restaurant signs and name tags. She cleverly communicates an array of emotions for the creature with an umbrella and a tire for eyes. Shifts in the floating morass appear as an open “mouth” that reveals calligrams such as “Come in” or “Hello,” addressing the viewers directly and demanding our attention. Some functional expressions such as “Nice Day,” “Thank you,” “Attention” are scattered and integrated as part of the pictorial images, soliciting

our empathetic understanding of the garbage patch. What is supplied is not so much a commentary as a kind of verbal paraphrase, which paradoxically addresses human beings or the readers who cry for an explanatory note. Allison gives a unique version of the formation of the Pacific Garbage Patch, a creature derived from the human world and growing in the remote ocean, a creature that has inherited a problem that it hasn't created, but has to live with it.

Coda

As William Rathje and Cullen Murphy have suggested, garbage “lacks the tidiness of being merely itself, representing as it does the back end of our lifestyles,” but it “has an undeniably large symbolic presence” (245). In the field of children's literature, how children's books deal with our garbage, as we have discussed, is a representational question when trash is commonly conceptualized, in Mary Douglas's terms, as “matter out of place” (44). From the material to the trope in the children's books, garbage has functioned as a significant issue for artists who intend to enable young readers to engage ecocriticism in an alternative or socially conscious way.

With Allison and Winter, we are invited to learn about stories of trash, and compare our preconceptions of how a story of trash should go. With different types of humor, Allison and Winter recapitulate the trash troubles as they see them, rather than as we have been taught to know them. *Here Comes the Garbage Barge* and *I'm Not a Plastic Bag* are synecdoches of the current environmental books for children, exemplifying the changing perspectives on garbage. While the two books are based on factual occurrences from recent history, they are a combination of fiction and non-fiction. Reading the two books around the issues of trash and exclusion leads to ecocriticism, to the representation of trash in children's books, and in this essay in particular the infamous case of Mobro 4000 and the Pacific Garbage Patch. The former takes us to reflect upon the human-centered approach by spotlighting the social and cultural scenarios in which garbage is repeatedly expelled, whereas the latter is meant to encapsulate the journey of the garbage patch from the land to the sea. The former turns to a critical vantage point from which to view the American society as a whole, whereas the latter turns the table on the non-human stuff by revealing ambivalence toward the garbage patch, suggesting the view of “trash as nature/ nature as trash” (Yaeger 332).

Furthermore, Allison's and Winter's books on trash utilize or valorize what is often regarded as useless. Both of them employ, in Kerry Mallan's term, “the hybrid potential of trash to function as both alternative aesthetics and social critique”

(29). Winter's book asks the reader to attend a burlesque show caused by the garbage problem in the mirror of the past. Allison's book prompts the reader to understand connections between everyday consumption, production, disposal, and seemingly distant environments. They raise awareness about the garbage that tends to be excluded but always stays put here and there, the garbage that seems to go nowhere but travels far and wide, staying alive. Both of them bring the garbage problem to the reader's attention in engaging and informative ways. Both of them also exemplify the fact that children's books are often inevitably complicit in the evolution of an environmental concern into a real environmental issue.

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有關垃圾的故事都只是在說教？ 挑戰童書中關於垃圾再現的議題

摘要

雖然垃圾經常被視為生態或環保問題的一部份，但是童書如何呈現垃圾卻是一個再現的問題。本文認為描寫垃圾的童書涉及牽動兒童文學和環保主義兩個不同場域的論述與價值觀，表現成人如何再現垃圾並引導兒童認識垃圾。文章首先觀察童書中經常再現垃圾的方式，接著探討喬納·溫特撰述，克里斯·斯科繪圖的《垃圾船來了！》（2010）以及瑞秋·艾利森所著的《我不是塑膠袋》（2012），審視這兩本書在呈現垃圾問題時如何減少說教。文章參佐瑪麗·道格拉斯有關「污垢」的理論以及克莉斯蒂娃對於「卑賤」的理念，探討溫特與艾利森如何精采地呈現垃圾問題。本文主張，兩人作品所展示的生態環保視角，不僅用幽默或誇張的方式傳達旨意，而且鼓勵另類的方式看待人們製造的垃圾。文章也指出，在童書中提供不同的生態批評觀點，包括採取更具社會意識的方式處理垃圾問題，具有重要的教育意義。

關鍵字：兒童文學中的廢品、圖畫書、圖文書、瑞秋·艾利森、喬納·溫特、環保文學

