

Ecological Readings of Juvenile Fiction: Where Ecofeminist Theory and Children's Literature Meet

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ABSTRACT

The urgent global environmental crisis has demanded that human beings reconsider their relationship with the natural world. Western symbolic discourses, according to ecofeminist literary critics, have distorted the subjectivity of nature, relegating it to being no more than the claims of humans. Ecofeminist literary theory attempts to formulate a new aesthetics and to experiment with a new language that will respect the nonhuman world as independent subjects. This paper attempts to apply such ecological feminist concepts to the study of the animal and natural presences in children's literature. The main purpose is to discover outstanding "green" juvenile fictions whose nature-oriented dimensions have not received due critical attention.

KEY WORDS

ecocriticism
nature writing
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myth

ecofeminism
children's literature
fantasy
animal



I. Once Upon A Time When Nature Spoke

An old short Hungarian fairy tale, called "Speaking Grapes, A Smiling Apple, and A Tinkling Apricot," goes as follows:

There was once, I don't know where, beyond seven times seven countries, a king who had three daughters. One day the king was going to the market, and thus inquired of his daughters: "What shall I bring you from the market, my dear daughters?"

The eldest said, "A golden dress, my dear royal father"; the second said, "A silver dress for me"; the third said, "Speaking grapes, a smiling apple, and a tinkling apricot for me."

"Very well, my daughters," said the king, and went. [During his journey, his royal carriage got stuck in the mud and couldn't be dragged out.] He gave up all hope, at last . . . when a dirty, filthy pig came that way, and grunted, "Grumph! grumph! grumph! King, give me your youngest daughter, and I will help you out of the mud." The king . . . over-anxious to get away, consented. . . .

[The pig went to the court to get the youngest daughter, who failed to escape after a series of struggles].

Being completely exhausted with all her trials, she slept. . . . On awakening, she looked around, and was very much astonished to find herself in a beautiful fairy-like palace . . . maids appeared, bringing her costly dresses. They accompanied her to her breakfast in a splendid hall, where a young man received her with great affection. After breakfast he led her into a beautiful garden and came to that part of the garden which was laid out as an orchard,

and the bunches of grapes began to speak, "Our beautiful queen, pluck some of us." The apples smiled at her continuously, and the apricots tinkled a silvery tune. "You see, my love," said the handsome youth, "here you have what you wished for. You may know now, that once I was a monarch but I was bewitched into a pig and I had to remain in that state till a girl wished for speaking grapes, a smiling apple, and a tinkling apricot. You are the girl and I have been delivered; and if I please you, you can be mine forever." The girl was enchanted with the handsome youth and the royal splendour, and consented. They went with great joy to carry the news to their father, and to tell him of their happiness. (Jones 225-26)

This famous Hungarian fairy tale is one of the variants of the well-known "The Beauty and the Beast" story. Compared with other versions (for instance, Madame De Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast"), in which great details are elaborated on the miracles performed by the Beast and the transforming power of love, the catching point of this Hungarian fairy tale is the enchanted garden where grapes are speaking, apples are smiling, and apricots are tinkling. However, we might ask, why didn't the youngest princess ask for a golden or silver dress, as did her other two sisters, but for a "talking" nature that moves and sings? And behind this question there is another: what is the larger significance of the enchanted nature in the story?

The dominant interpretations of "The Beauty and the Beast" story focus mostly on the themes of gender relationships, romantic love and oppressive marriage. So far in the research history of children's literature, the mainstream critical angles on fairy tales are psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives (Bettelheim; Rowe; Tartar; Warner; Zipes). This question touches a weak spot in the critical study of fairy tales: even though talking plants or animals are a necessary part of children's literature, there has been at least until very recently a relative critical indifference to their existence.

II. Ecofeminist Literary Criticism

In the field of literary studies, ecocritics argue that Western literary-critical practice is mainly the cultural production of a "human-centered" epistemology, which justifies and perpetuates humans' dominative, narcissistic, and utilitarian attitudes toward the natural world. Ecocritics propose an "earth-centered" approach that celebrates the diversity of the natural world and respects the living rights of other beings. In literary studies, critical attention focuses on the "nonhuman world" and on nature-oriented issues—such as how nature appears in literature, how the idea of "wilderness" evolves through time, and what is the relationship between science and environment, place and humans, and nature and culture (Glotfelty xv-xxxviii). Unraveling the flaws of Western "androcentric" and "anthropocentric" dualistic thinking, eco-feminist literary critics have tended to focus on the issue of gender and landscape, analyzing how female writers see and present the world differently from male writers. Margaret Homan, for example, has done a remarkable comparative analysis of William Wordsworth's romantic poetry and Dorothy Wordsworth's travel journal. Homan points out that even though he is desirous of retaining an unmediated connection with nature, William Wordsworth "hyperbolizes the scene with a melodramatic violence that is imposed by his own imagination and then interprets the natural world symbolically" (78). While Wordsworth appropriated nature to fit into his overriding ideology of romantic myth, his sister, Dorothy, who walked in the same places as her brother, faithfully recorded what nature presented before her. Dorothy is "concerned only with the trees, crags, and cataracts as they are and convinces us by her long and minute observations that the natural world has its own life quite apart from hers" (78).

Homan's critique of William Wordsworth's figurative manipulation of nature illuminates the bitter truth that our daily use of language has been "assaulted by phallogocratic Western reason" (Bigwood 106). In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol Adams describes

the fact that our common language is permeated with human hegemonic ideology that neutralizes our alienation from nature. According to Adams' analysis of the cultural discourse of carnivorousism,

meat-eating is a text in which 'meat' is the signifier and 'animal' is the absent referent. The animal is absent from the text; its being as a 'thou' is elided and dominated by the signifier *meat*, which deadens the animal's aliveness, turning her or him into an it. (40-62)

The contribution of ecofeminist theory such as this is to unveil the vice of the dominant epistemological modes that pervade the institutions of literature and literary criticism and to search for an alternative perception that will liberate nature from humans' figurative manipulation.

Josephine Donovan's "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Reading the Orange" is an outstanding example of this point. Donovan has given an impressive survey of various writers who have tried to break away from the patriarchal symbolic language and return to a "pre-symbolic" literal language that restores the reality of other species to man. Donovan's argument helps to make visible or even foreground the previously unnoticed elements—especially, the problem of nature/animal presences—in children's literature. Children's and juvenile literature, with its prevalent presences of talking animals and natural objects, has been a rich ground that fosters children's unmediated intimacy with other species. In this essay, I will study children's literature from an ecofeminist perspective, arguing that the devaluation of children's fantasy as an "unsophisticated" sub-genre for immature kids and escapist readers is also a critical prejudice produced by the anthropocentric discourse of reason.

III. Where Children's Literature and Ecofeminist Literary Criticism Meet

Donovan has listed a number of writers who are pioneering in an

“epistemological awakening’ whose purpose is to sensitize dominators [humans] to the realities of the dominated [neglected objects]” (Gaard 8). There have been numerous women’s writers providing good critiques of the Western semiotic violence over nonhuman entities. For example, Sarah Orne Jewett has written, “Just tell the thing.” By this she means that the writer should remain faithful to the literal and the natural. Andrienne Rich also declared a desire to liberate the thing itself in her poetic lines: it is “the thing I came for: the wreck itself and not the story of the wreck/the thing itself and not the myth” (23). And the most prominent example is Virginia Woolf, whose “feminine” sentences manage to catch “the ‘things’ of ordinary life that allow the reality to exist in its contingent context and as a random occurrence” (Donovan 79). There are also mystical thinkers and literary critics trying to develop a non-dominative way of seeing, through which the “thing” itself is not elided but attended to. For instance, there is the concept of the I-thou relationship developed by Martin Buber and used in Patrick D. Murphy’s appropriation of Bakhtin’s dialogic theory:

yet let me approach, confided itself [the horse] to me [placing itself elementally in the relation of I and Thou with me]. Interpreting a form of spirit requires us to face the work as we face another being. We open our sense to it, to its particularities, to its total gestalt. We allow it to move us, to confront us, to speak to us. We try to perceive its special message and disclosure of reality. (qtd. in Donovan 84)

We extend the idea of the speaking “other” to non human entities such as animals, suggesting that their “language” be considered a form of dialect that must be validated and heard, not erased by “theoretical” discourses that elide their subjectivity. The point is not to speak for nature but to work to render the signification presented us by nature into a verbal depiction by means of speaking subjects. (qtd. in Donovan 87)

In these passages, both Buber and Murphy are resisting the "I-it relationship" between humans and non-human entities and proposing to replace it with the "I-thou relationship"—a dialogical one that attends to natural entities as spiritual presences that have a reality of their own to communicate.

Donovan also mentions that we should see the world with Sarah Ruddick's concept of maternal "attentive love" for children and Iris Murdoch's "reverent sympathy" that entails "a tender and respectful interest in the diversity of the world" (91). Patriarchal society has been a society of reason and knowledge, in which men are civilized to become self-centred subjects, callous and apathetic to the "disenchanted" world. Hélène Cixous, a French feminist critic, suggests that childhood is a time in which humans can contact and feel things as they are. "And it was a childhood that came running back to pick up the live orange and immediately celebrate it. . . . There was originally an intimacy between the orange and the little girl, almost a kinship" (14). Martin Buber, a theologian himself, also illustrates the dialogical I-Thou relationship with his childhood experience of touching a horse as if the horse was a living soul. Here we come to an important link between ecofeminist literary theory and children's literature. Paul Hazard, the famous German scholar of children's literature, made similar comments in *Books, Children, and Men*:

Here is a magic mirror creating an illusion by playing around the truth. How boring the world is as grownups represent it! Obstacles to dreams everywhere, sometimes truth, sometimes probability. And categories everywhere: on the highest plane, man who has crowned himself king; on a lower plane, animals, plants, and everything included in that vague substance called matter. Children, on the contrary, never discolor, limit or classify the universe. They attribute to it the same superabundance of life that is in themselves so that everything moves before their eyes, everything speaks to their attentive ears, nothing restrains their fancy. (113-14)

Hazard continues to explain that the genius of Hans Christian Andersen is that he remained a child. In his world, the “innumerable folk, that the indifferent call ‘things,’ stirs, moves, speaks and fills the air with its complaints and songs. Everything is alive” (98). While adults tend to locate what they encounter within an interpretive, signifying network, children interact with the environment fully and immediately, with a direct responsiveness. In other words, the world in the eyes of children has not yet been fully humanized or, rather, disenchanting.

In children’s literature, the common practice is to treat an animal as a “thou,” in Buber’s research, who speaks and acts like a human. If the author writes with “attentive love” about the animal itself, the touching reality about the animal’s life can be conveyed to the reader, and can thus enhance our sympathetic understanding of another being.

Take, for example, Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty: An Autobiography of a Horse*. Published in 1877, *Black Beauty*, written from the point of view of the animal itself, is reputed to be the most touching horse biography in the field of animal literature. Because horses had been her most loyal companions in her life of lameness, Sewell spent the last eight years of her life penning the only book she ever wrote to express her love and respect for horses (Springer viii). Sewell’s contribution is that in a time when people took horses as things that could be “used up” as we “use up” cars today, Sewell gave the horse its own voice, letting it speak its own experience of “a genteel upbringing in a country manor,” and then being sold to different places, leading “the harsh life of a London cab horse” (Springer x). The reader “begins to stand in Beauty’s hoofprints, see through Beauty’s large dark eyes and feel with Beauty’s heart” how he was misused by cruel and ignorant people (Springer x).

Black Beauty became tremendously popular and was used by humanitarian groups to press for reforms in the treatment of animals (Springer 195). From the perspective of ecocriticism, Sewell successfully challenged people’s self-centered misuse of animals as commodities. She is pioneering in seeing the horse with “attentive love,” as a “thou” that has a reality of its own to communicate.

Nevertheless, since *Beauty* speaks so touchingly and eloquently, the readers take Beauty almost like a human character. On many occasions, Beauty loses his "horseness" and speaks like a man. Under the spotlight of ecofeminist literary theory, Beauty's real voice of a horse is distorted and "humanized" because he has become the spokesman of the "Quaker" Sewell. Nancy Springer makes the following comment:

The book has been criticized by modern literary standards. Book reviewers have noted that the horse Black Beauty disapproves of drinking, of smoking and of strong language, though it is highly doubtful that a real horse would care about such things. Black Beauty at times does not seem fully imagined as a horse, it has been said. He does not concern himself with grass, or mares, or herd leadership, or other things a gelding might think about. In fact, his perceptions seem more like those of a refined, sensitive nineteenth-century Quaker lady than like those of a gelding. Perhaps his views are those of Anna Sewell herself. Anna Sewell made a mistake in not striving for a more realistic equine viewpoint, the critics have said. (196)

Because Sewell wrote the book out of love and understanding, her fault of "humanizing" Black Beauty seems not a problem at all. Yet her mistake reminds us of an important phenomenon in children's literature—that the writer consciously or unconsciously twists, cuts, distorts, and reshapes nonhuman entities to fit the requirement of his/her moral messages.

We seldom give a second thought to the practice of making animal figures in human images. We take it for granted that animal characters serve two purposes: (1) a lesson told by human characters may not be as interesting for children as that told by animals. So the middle way is to have animals speaking and dressed like humans. (2) to children, animals do not look as authoritative or intimidating as adults. The trick of having a tale enacted by animals is similar to putting a sugar layer on bitter medicine. Hopefully, in this way, the didactic or moral message is more likely to be accepted by the reader. The best

example here is *Aesop's Fables*, in which the animal protagonists are used as instruments of didacticism. The anthropomorphization of animals is a dramatic device so often used in children's literature that hardly any thought is given to how it may be misused to distort our perception about the actual animal. For instance, in both "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Three Little Pigs," the wolf plays the negative role of seducer and harasser. For hundreds of years these stories have been part of our childhood reading experiences. We hardly notice that the animal character has produced irretrievable stock images about the real animal itself. Despite the fact that a parable is surely no scientific report about the real animal itself, a wolf's image as a "greedy" and "cunning" animal has been so firmly established that in reality we hunted and shot them almost to extinction. For readers that never have the chance to know wolves themselves, popular wolf tales provide a ready-made imagination of what a wolf may be like. The real voice of actual wolves is erased by the literary image we impose on them. Similarly, the wild world in adventure fantasy is often demonized as a dangerous place the hero has to conquer in order to achieve his higher self. Juxtaposed to such a literary imagination is the social reality that taming wilderness into an "orderly" spot is praised as the courageous behavior of a pioneering hero and a necessary act of industrial progress.

On the other hand, animated nature may be romanticized as a benevolent supernatural guide or as a set of faithful companions to its master. The most obvious examples are Walt Disney cartoons (e.g. *Snow White*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Mulan*, *Pocahontas*), in which animals and nature presences are necessary accessories without which the magic of fantasy will not be complete. Despite the fact that the animated world is a false illusion, both children and adults laugh wholeheartedly watching the film, feeling relaxed and liberated in this fantasized world where all things talk to each other. In our hearts we know that the rest of the world is alive, but our modern life of technology and consumption has blunted our sensitivity to this simple fact.

When William Wordsworth wrote, "My heart leaps up when I

behold/A rainbow in the sky; /So was it when my life began; /So is it now I am a man; /So be it when I shall grow old, /Or let me die! /The Child is father of the Man; /And I could wish my days to be/Bound each to each by natural piety," he touched the deep sense of loss in a grown up. In Wordsworth's terms, a grown up has lost the child's continuing responsiveness to the miracle of ordinary things. Eco-feminist literary criticism suggests that the childhood experience of contacting other things with whole-hearted receptiveness is a state of mind that a writer and reader should return to so that our unmediated, non-dominative and wholesome encounter with the world may be restored. And yet the theme of humans' intuitive interaction with other beings is seldom attended to because it is a topic often presented as "unreal," "pretended," and "illogical" fantasy—which is against adults' principles of reason and practicality. The devaluation of children's fantasy is a sign that civilized man has gone deaf to the voices of other species, and so it is part of the anthropocentric bias that privileges adults' realistic fiction over children's fantasy. The following section is an attempt to recover three juvenile fictions: *Julie of the Wolves*, *The Nargun and the Stars*, and *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?* Each honors the voice of the natural world and the ecofeminist vision of "restoring the absent referent to the text as a living being" (Donovan 76).

IV. Ecological Readings of Juvenile Fiction

Generally speaking, juvenile fictions are written to help teenagers to go through their anxieties about growing up. *The Catcher in the Rye*, for example, vividly characterizes a young hero's skepticism and rebellion against social norms. Doris Lessing's *Martha's Quest* is a story of a heroine's questioning and searching for self-identity, as she encounters the changes both in her body and mind. Most writers of juvenile literature touch on questions about how a teenager faces and adjusts his or her relationship with his or her peers and other people in order to fit into a complex social reality. But seldom do writers explore how the place and the natural environment shape the hero's personality

and help him or her to see the human world from other perspectives. The following section is meant to re-evaluate some classic juvenile fictions, which I think are outstanding in their content and form as a genre, which can be termed "ecological juvenile literature."

1. *Julie of the Wolves* (1972): The Song of the Arctic Land

From a family of naturalists, Jean Craighead George has written many fine books for young people. The consistent topic and concern of all her novels is her love for and knowledge of the natural world. A winner of 1973 Newbery Award, *Julie of the Wolves* is her most significant book. *Julie of the Wolves* is based on her close observation of the people, animals and natural environment of Alaska.¹ The setting and the behavior of the wolves are accurately described, based on scientific facts. The protagonist's survival skills in the Arctic and the portrayal of Eskimo life in the Far North are also carefully researched and realistically presented. The characters and plot are simple—about how an Eskimo girl survives on the tundra with the help of a pack of wolves. The implied critical issues are ambitiously unfolded against a spectacular landscape. The story follows the formula of a hero or heroine's coming-of-age journey—departure from home, adventure in a strange land, and the final return home with a changed consciousness. What sets this novel apart from other adventure fiction is that the heroine's achieving her spiritual maturity subverts the dominant cultural ideologies in most coming-of-age novels that privilege *Homo Sapiens* above other species. *Julie of the Wolves* is composed of three parts: Part I—Amaroq, The Wolf; Part II—Miyax, The Girl; Part III, Kapugen, The Hunter. The narrative starts not with the heroine's name but with the name of the wolf pack's leader. The opening paragraph also indicates the dominating power of nature in this novel:

Miyax pushed back the hood of her sealskin parka and looked at the Arctic sun. It was a yellow disc in a lime-green sky, the colors of six o'clock in the evening and the time when the wolves awoke. Quietly she put down her cooking pot and crept to the top of a dome-shaped frost heave, one of the many earth buckles that rise

and fall in the crackling cold of the Arctic winter. Lying on her stomach, she looked across a vast lawn of grass and moss and focused her attention on the wolves she had come upon two sleeps ago. They were wagging their tails as they awoke and saw each other.

Her hands trembled and her heartbeat quickened, for she was frightened, not so much of the wolves, who were shy and many harpoon-shots away, but because of her desperate predicament. Miyax was lost. She had been lost without food for many sleeps on the North Slope of Alaska. The barren slope stretches for three hundred miles from the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean, and for more than eight hundred miles from the Chukchi to the Beaufort Sea. No roads cross it; ponds and lakes freckle its immensity. Winds scream across it, and the view in every direction is exactly the same. Somewhere in this cosmos was Miyax; and the very life in her body, its spark and warmth, depended upon these wolves for survival. And she was not so sure they would help. (5-6)

The opening scene is a natural description of the typical Arctic landscape in which wolves are native inhabitants. That the human protagonist humbly crawls out into sight symbolizes humans' fragility and insignificance in this disinterested natural world. It also shows the hard fact that man's survival depends on how he interacts with the natural world. During the winter season on the North Slope no wildflowers and no other plants and animals are available for food. The only living beings that Miyax can ask for help on this permafrost region is the pack of wolves. George does not use the method of personifying or humanizing other species as many children's writers have done in animal stories. Drawing from her scientific knowledge of how humans make contact with wolves, George chooses a 13-year-old Eskimo girl to demonstrate the touching experience of man's befriending the wild wolves. Miyax does not have the misinformation that other children may get from fictional stories, in which wolves are portrayed as evil and harmful. The Eskimo's true understanding of the wolves builds

Miyax's confidence in the wolves. Miyax knows from her father's hunting experience that "wolves do not eat people" (15). Instead, "wolves are gentle brothers" (15) and can be talked to with body language:

She [Miyax] had been watching the wolves for two days, trying to discern which of their sounds and movements expressed goodwill and friendship. Most animals had such signals. The little Arctic ground squirrels flicked their tails sideways to notify others of their kind that they were friendly. By imitating this signal with her forefinger, Miyax had lured many a squirrel to her hand. If she could discover such a gesture for the wolves she would be able to make friends with them and share their food, like a bird or a fox. (6-7)

As she dipped her pot in, she thought about Amaroq [the leader of the pack]. Why had he bared his teeth at her? Because she was young and he knew she couldn't hurt him? No, she said to herself, it was because he was speaking to her! He had told her to lie down. She had even understood and obeyed him. He had talked to her not with his voice, but with his ears, eyes, and lips; and he had even commanded her with a wag of his tail. (14-15)

George describes vividly and in great detail how Miyax tries hard by every means to communicate with the wolf pack, and is finally recognized as a member. To survive on the tundra, Miyax has to observe the natural environment and make all her necessities from plants and other animals. Following the steps of Miyax, the reader is informed about Arctic ecology and the facts about wild animals. They also learn what Miyax learns on this journey—wisdom about nature and man's interaction with other species. Miyax's merging into the wolf pack is so complete that the wolves have treated her as a member of their family. She feels thankful about Amaroq's love for her and she carves a totem of Amaroq, dancing and singing a song for him. In her song, which laments the disappearance of the old Eskimo ways of living in harmony with nature, Miyax even regards Amaroq as her

adopted father and herself as the daughter of the wolves.

Another achievement of *Julie of the Wolves* is that Miyax's initiation into the power of nature parallels the initiation of Kapu, one of the pups, into an understanding of humans' destructive power over the natural world. This novel is not only about Miyax's coming of age, it is also about Kapu's growing into responsible adulthood (wolfhood). With the help of the wolves, Miyax finally survives the winter season, crossing the tundra and reaching man's territory. As she is exhilarated by seeing signs of human civilization (the oil drum), she witnesses the violence of pilots shooting wolves just for fun. Miyax is disillusioned about her trip to San Francisco because she knows that the American way is interrelated with machine-clearing of the wild and disregarding the existence of other animals. After the death of Amaroq, Miyax nurses Kapu back to health. Kapu, now the pack leader, has to face his responsibility with courage and determination. Miyax knows that Kapu has to grow up and so must she.

In the end, Miyax learns that her father is in the village of Kangik and goes to find him. She discovers that the murderer of Amaroq is her beloved father, Kapugen, who has now adopted many American ways. And she too must decide between the old way and the new way.

Julie of the Wolves ends with the death of Tornait, the wild bird which came to live inside her parka when she first met the wolf pack. After the burial of Tornait, Miyax sings to the spirit of Amaroq in her best English:

The seals are scarce and the whales are almost gone.
The spirits of the animals are passing away.
Amaroq, Amaroq, you are my adopted father.
My feet dance because of you.
My eyes see because of you.
My mind thinks because of you. And it thinks, on
this thundering night,
That the hour of the wolf and the Eskimo is over. (170)

The song laments the disappearance of the old world when

animals were inspiring guides and nurturing forces for humans. But the very last sentence of this novel is, "Julie pointed her boots toward Kapugen," which implies an open ending. The open ending may point to an interesting question: Will Miyax live with Charlie (Kapugen) and settle on her life as Julie? If this is so, how much Miyax will be left in Julie? Does the title—*Julie of the Wolves*—mean that in every teenage Julie, there is the potentiality in her to become the daughter of the wolves if she were given the chance?

From an ecofeminist perspective, Julie is constructed as a subject by the way she changes throughout the story in response to forces outside of herself—for instance, her Eskimo life with her father and her schooling life with Aunt Martha represent the two civilizing forces, Eskimo and American. But by including nonhuman nature as an aspect of the shaping forces, Julie avoids a human solipsism that refuses to acknowledge the power of any force outside human discourse. Julie's interaction with the wolf pack and wild nature illustrate what Patrick D. Murphy identifies as the "ecological process of interanimation" (Murphy, 1991: 109). Miyax's several months of living with the wolves demonstrates that "humans and other entities [may be able to] develop, change, and learn through mutually influencing each other, day to day, age to age" (Murphy, 1991: 109).

Another important theme of this novel is the aboriginals' up-hill battle of holding to their tradition against the tide of modern civilization and the tourist industry. Miyax's personal history is recounted in Part II. Miyax lives with her father at a seal camp till she is nine. After her father is sent to war and lost at sea, she goes to live with her Aunt Martha, where she attended an American school and is given a new name, Julie. When she is 13, Julie is sent to Barrows where she marries an Eskimo boy in an arrangement made years ago by her father. Julie then discovers that the boy is retarded; her father is an alcoholic and her mother often presses her to sew more mukluks and Eskimo clothes for the tourist industry. In desperation, she decides to run away, thinking naively of going to San Francisco, where her pen pal Amy lives. Miyax's ambivalent feeling about her change from Miyax to Julie and the sad reality that the Eskimos are losing their traditional

way of life are all part of the coming-of-age experience Miyax has to cope with:

The Eskimos from Mekoryuk spoke English almost all the time. They called her father Charlie Edwards and Miyax was Julie, for they all had two names, Eskimo and English. Her mother also called her Julie, so she did not mind her summer name until one day when Kapugen [Miyax's father] called her that. She stomped her foot and told him her name was Miyax. "I am Eskimo, not a gussak!" she had said, and he had tossed her into the air and hugged her to him. (80-81)

When she was nine, Kapugen sent her to live with Aunt Martha who sent her to school according to the official law. That year, Kapugen was lost at sea and never returned. With that Miyax became Julie:

Gradually Julie pushed Kapugen out of her heart and accepted the people of Mekoryuk. The many years in seal camp alone with Kapugen had been dear and wonderful, but she realized now that she had lived a strange life. The girls her age could speak and write English and they knew the names of presidents, astronauts, and radio and movie personalities, who lived below the top of the world. (84-85)

In her marriage, Julie understands that "the old ways" are not always the best. But her experience of surviving on the tundra with the help of the wolf pack brings back the Eskimos' wisdom Kapugen has taught her about the earth. In the end, Miyax realizes the true value of the Eskimos' old way of living, regretting that the Eskimo children are giving up the old ways of living in harmony with the land.

Julie of the Wolves has touched a great number of readers and become a textbook for teaching young readers about the truth of wolves and the Arctic tundra. Its literary contribution, from the feminist ecological perspective, is that George has successfully created an

ecological vision that a human being can interact and exist in inter-being with other species without distorting each other's real subjectivity. Furthermore, the possibility is demonstrated that a wholesome relationship and interaction between humans and nature is an important force that can shape a teenager's personality.

2. *The Nargun and the Stars* (1973): The Hills Are Alive

Patricia Wrightson is acknowledged as one of today's foremost writers for children. Born in a Scottish immigrant family, she grew up in New South Wales, Australia, and was educated at various State Schools, which gave lessons by post to children living in remote places. Though lacking no reading books in her growing up years, Wrightson and her peers noticed something strange: of all the fine books they knew, "none of them were written by an Australian, or about Australia" (qtd. in "*Contemporary Authors Online*" 4). This is why she embarked on her writing career for children. Deliberately breaking away from European traditions, Wrightson focused on the country life she knew and took it as her obligation to develop a literary vision that is purely Australian. Wrightson's works strongly display the fact that "there is an interaction between people's inner and outer realities that come into play as we live in a place for an extended time" (98). As she declares in *The Ice Is Coming* (1977):

This is a story of today and of Australia. It is my own story, grown out of my thinking. Its human characters are my invention, but its spirit characters are not. They are the folk-spirits of the Australian Aborigines—not the ritual figures of the creative myths but the gnomes and heroes and monsters of Australia.

I might have written a story about more familiar spirits, the elves and fairies and dragons and monsters of Europe. Then everyone would have known that the story was mine and the spirits borrowed from an older convention. But for that story I would have to invent a foreign setting, an Earthsea or a Middle Earth; and powerfully magical as those countries are I know one as powerful and as magic. It is the only one I know and the one I want to write

about.

So every spirit appearing in this and my two previous stories, *The Nargun and the Stars* and *An Older Kind of Magic*, belongs originally to Australia and its Aborigines. Many of them are beliefs still living; some are remembered from only a generation ago; a few have outlived the people who believed in them. They claim their place in an old convention, these even older and perhaps purer spirits of Aborigines' domestic life. And I claim a writer's leave to employ them in my own stories in my own way.

(7)

Wrightson introduces into her fiction the Aborigine's dreamtime vision of reality, a vision that is still alive in the local Aborigine's minds. In Wrightson's literary world, the earth spirits known to the Aborigines are part of the land power that is felt by both immigrants and Aborigines. They are the real protagonists of her novels. Adopting the folk-spirits and seeing through their eyes, Wrightson invents an earth-centered vision that restores the connection between the past and the modern, between the Aborigines and the immigrants, and between humans and the land.

Take *The Nargun and the Stars* (1973) for instance. It is a winner of a number of awards, one of which is the Annual Selection of Best Science Fiction and Fantasy Titles for Young Adults in 1988. This novel is Wrightson's successful experiment of creating a fantasy story in which the elfish spirits are derived from the Aboriginal beliefs. Another outstanding achievement of this novel is what Wrightson has proudly declared—it is a fantasy based on life experience, “not the escape from life that some people see as fantasy, nor the symbolism of life that is in some fantasy, but that strangeness and fullness of life that spills out of the bucket of reality—the human experience of fantasy” (“Contemporary Authors Online” 5)

For Wrightson, her personal experience of fantasy is the daily contact with the magic of the land. Through her collection of Aboriginal folklore, she gains a wider and truer vision of the strange old land and finds that the elfish spirits in the Aboriginal worldview

“seemed to fit very naturally into Australian rock and forest” (“Contemporary Authors Online” 5). Seeing them as part of the land, Wrightson develops a singularly Australian earth-centered perspective—a paradoxical combination of mythical imagination and realistic nature writing.

Breaking away from the human-centered point of view of her earlier children’s adventure stories, *The Nargun and the Stars*, as the title indicates, focuses on the Nargun, an ancient stone spirit, and other earth creatures. The opening chapter is an imitation of the Aborigine’s Dreamtime story telling of the Nargun’s movement. It is a realistic geographical delineation of the Land, and written from an “earth-spirit’s” point of view:

It was night when the Nargun began to leave. Deep down below the plunging walls of a gorge it stirred uneasily. It dragged its slow weight to the mouth of its den; its long, wandering journey had begun.

Two hundred feet above, on the broad uplands, moonlight whitened the gum-trees where eagles were building. It spilt into the gorge to touch the tallest heads of coaching-wood and nettle-tree, but it never reached the black damp rocks of the bottom. Only where water slid over the great slab of cliff at the head of a gorge a glint of silver light was carried down.

At the bottom the water fell . . . Behind this pool . . . was the archway of a cave. This was the ancient den of the Nargun. Here it had lain . . . while stars exploded and planets wheeled and the earth settled. . . .

In time it opened slow eyes and saw light. Little by little it dragged itself from earth and moved. There came a night when it had a voice and cried down the gorge. There came a day when, crouching in shadows, it grasped at something warm and found food to mumble on. After that it ate when it could; sometimes once in ten years, sometimes in fifty. (9-10)

The plot is the moving action of the “black bulk of the Nargun,”

of how it looms inside the earth, crawling over rocks, ranges, and gorges, all the way from Victoria province in 1880, through Bambala County in 1901, the Goulburn area in 1920s, and then the Blue Mountains, where it stayed for thirty years and killed four times. Then in the 1960s, the Nargun reached a round mountain in Wongadilla where it stayed. The author never gives us a concrete image of the Nargun's height, size, or other features. Visually unclear, the Nargun's haunting, mysterious, hidden presence—its slow stirring movement, its restless crushing breath, its cry, sometimes hushed, sometimes in rage—dominates the whole novel. After the Nargun's entrance, the author introduces the local spirits, animals, trees and plants of Wongadilla; and then a vivid mapping of the geographical features of Wongadilla. Introduced at last are the immigrant settlers, Charlie and Edie, who grew up in the local area. These two inhabitants, however, are totally unaware of the existence of the ancient Nargun.

Deriving from the ancient Aboriginal animistic perspective, the opening chapter presents a striking ecological vision. Human characters are no longer presented as the dominating and primary agent. Instead, they are presented as latecomers and even as invaders into the old South land. The child protagonist, Simon Brent, makes his entrance in the second chapter. Simon, a city boy just orphaned, came to the hill country to live with his uncle and aunt. Expecting a bored country life, Simon is surprised by the noises of wallaby thumping, fox whining, and kookaburra laughing, and later he is awakened at midnight by possums dancing on the iron roof. Simon senses that the natural harmony and magic of the forest paradise is disrupted by human invasion, which is symbolized by the harsh "Thunk! Thunk! Thunk!" of the working bulldozer and grader. As Simon ventures further in the forest, he finds a wonderland where some mysterious beings, hidden secretly, are spying on and laughing at him. One day, when he is again in the swamp area, he meets face to face the swamp creature, Potkoorok.

The Potkoorok rose up slowly, waiting, sliding off its green skin while it watched the boy. It stood about two feet tall with its

webbed feet hidden in the swamp and its legs bent at the knee, and its froglike face was sad for the dead frog. Because it was the face of a joker it looked comical with the wide mouth turned down. . . . It [Potkoorok] spoke to him [Simon] with a sound like slapping water.

"The yellow machine will follow where the water runs after the storm. The yellow machine is too much trouble."

It turned its head on its squat neck, looking at the boy from one old eye and then the other. While the boy still stood unable to move, the round green body of the Potkoorok slipped back into the water.

It had gone. Simon couldn't move. He had not expected anything so froglike or so human. He had not expected the swamp creature at all—not standing there in broad daylight, only as a green shadow turning in the water. And he had never even thought of it speaking. . . . (41-42)

The Potkoorok is an ancient elfish trickster, taken from the legends of local Australian Aborigines. It "had played its tricks on fishermen, men and boys, when the tribes were young; and in earlier times that the tribes had forgotten" (42). Potkoorok is one of Wrightson's most impressive creations of a trickster figure, comparable to some hobgoblin fairies in European children's literature. By introducing indigenous sprites in her novels, Wrightson discovers a new means to convey the hidden voice of the natural kingdom. In contrast to those supernatural or dreamlike elfish figures or the anthropomorphous animal characters that are used merely as foils to human dramas in European fairy tales, Potkoorok is a real thing, an integral part of the earth. One night Simon watches some shadows dancing in the trees, carrying the grader away during the night. He discovers that they are Turongs, the local tree creatures. The Turongs and Potkoorok, together with other earth spirits, serve as Simon's guides to the innermost secret of the Earth. They help Simon to find the bulldozer pinched by the rock spirit, Nylos. And with Potkoorok and Turong's help, Simon and his aunt and uncle start the plan of driving

the Nargun away from Wangadilla.

The story comes to a symbolic climax when the boy and his uncle and aunt decide to use the Bulldozer machine to stir the Nargun away from its place, which symbolizes the fearful, unpredictable, destructive power of the earth. Their battle with the Nargun is presented as a battle between the shouting thunder of the bulldozer and the fearful silence of the Nargun. The battle ends with the bulldozer destroyed in a blaze, and the Nargun walled in a deep cave.

The story begins with the Nargun and ends with the Nargun. The last scene of *The Nargun and the Stars* is its restless fumbling in the mountain:

All day the ancient Nargun had crawled and lurched through the mountain, searching for a way out. All day the Nyols followed it in wonder. . . .

"Old one . . ." "Brother Stone . . ." "You stay . . ."

. . .

They brought it small lizards, and their eyes flickered in the cavern like the first stars.

The Nargun never moved. In this place of nothing—no light, no wind, no heat, no cold, no sound—it waited. It felt the old, slow pulse, deep and enduring, and remembered the earth swinging on its moth-flight round the sun. Its dark, vacant eyes waited: for the mountain to crumble; for a river to break through; for time to wear away.

SIMON, it said. But the lichen had withered, and the name was only a whisper in the dark. (159–160)

The Nargun and the Stars was well received by Australian readers, who all said the same thing: the Nargun "identified something for them, gave them the country as they had known and felt it in an unspoken way" ("Contemporary Authors Online" 6). The uncontrollable and fearful power of the immense Australian continent finds its voice in the cry of the ancient Nargun and the mischievous behaviors of the earth spirits. *The Nargun and the Stars* interweaves

fiction and myth, and it avoids the separatism or dualism of human/animal and fantasy/reality. The humans, the little earth spirits and the Ancient Nargun are all parts of the land, on which the humans are at the mercy of some hidden earthy power—its mystery is not yet fully known.

3. *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come out Tonight?: Coming into Animal Presences*

Another distinguished writer who deliberately breaks away from an anthropocentric mode of writing is Ursula K. Le Guin. Le Guin makes clear in the preface to her book, *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*, that her primary purpose is to write about animals and other nonhuman living things in ways that belie the cultural myth that “animals are dumb, have no words of their own” (11). “Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?” is a novella more than an animated story in which animals talk and play with people. Drawing from Native American creation mythologies, Le Guin elaborates this seemingly children's story into an apocalyptic ecological myth in which intersubjectivity between humans and other species is made possible.

The story is about a little girl, Myra, who is injured in a plane crash somewhere in a desert landscape in the American West and is saved by a she-coyote. The coyote brings Myra back to her village, where Myra meets people similar to her kind, but whose grown ups are as short as children, “broad-bodied, fat, with fine, delicate hands” (23). And there are other characters that are predominantly human but with animal features. For instance, there is the she-coyote named directly with its animal name, “Coyote.” She “slept at night and waked in the day like humans, instead of the other way round like coyotes” (31); and she wears jeans and cooks like a man, but eats and copulates like coyotes. Other animal and human characters all take animal names, such as “Horse,” “Great Owl,” “Chickadee,” and “Hawk.” Coyote's community is a mystical world of animal/people, both familiar and strange. Some characters can be clearly identified as ordinary animals, while some of them are combinations of different species. For instance, Doe “could be identified as a deer simply by her walk—‘a severely

elegant walk, small steps, like a woman in high heels, quick, precise, very light” (Armbruster 107). And Blue Jay, who has supernatural power to replace Myra’s damaged eye with a new eye made out of pine pitch, is an extraordinary creature (as Susan Seddon Boulet’s illustration shows) with yellow eyes, claw hands and pointed ears. And Young Owl, who can be identified as an Indian chief, is “broad and tall,” has a deep voice, and impressive bulk, “with powerful hands, a big head, a short neck” (23–24). These animal/people sing and dance together in a dance to endow Myra’s new eye with magic power. In the way they share everything with each other, Coyote’s village can be recognized as a symbol of the good old days when all beings lived as one.

The Coyote character, who calls Myra “Gal” and whom Myra respects as her own “Mom,” first appears before Myra as a coyote with “black feathers sticking to the black lips and narrow jaw,” then as a “tawny-skinned” woman with yellow and grey hair and bare, hard-soled feet (20). Coyote is a caring mother figure, careless about housekeeping, loose in her sex life, and reckless and boastful in action and words. But she also possesses magic power to nurse Myra’s ill body back to health and make Myra’s new eye work well. Apparently, Coyote is taken from the Navajo conception of Coyote, as Barre Toelken describes it:

There is no possible distinction between Ma’i, the *animal* we recognize as coyote in the fields, and Ma’i, the *personification* of Coyote power in all coyotes, and Ma’i, the *character* (trickster, creator, and buffoon) in legends and tales, and Ma’i, the symbolic character of *disorder* in the myths. Ma’i is not a composite but a complex; a Navajo would see no reason to distinguish separate aspects. (qtd. in Armbruster 107)

The Coyote community, who call themselves “First People,” is also taken from Native American legend, “whom the anthropological linguist William Bright describes as ‘members of a race of mythic prototypes who lived before humans existed’” (Armbruster 107). If this

story is read as part of Myra's coming-of-age experience, what Myra learns from her experience with the First People is that all beings are participants in one great dance of life—symbolized by the big dance all members join together in singing to bless her new eye. Myra is given an enduring gift by the First People—a new eye that represents Le Guin's optimism for our reconnection with the nonhuman world. Myra, the human child, now looks with two eyes—the old and the new one: "What she saw was confused, hazy, yellowish. She began to discover, as everybody came crowding around peering at her, smiling, stroking and patting her arms and shoulders, that if she shut the hurting eye and looked with the other, everything was clear and flat; if she used them both, things were blurry and yellowish, but deep" (28). As she gets used to her new eye, she gradually grows and loves to live in the "generosity of big families." She calls Coyote "Mom," and Coyote treats her as her own daughter. When Coyote sings "one of the endless tuneless songs that wove the roots of trees and bushes and ferns and grass in the web that held the stream in the streambed and the rock in the rock's place and the earth together," Myra tells Coyote, "I love you" (48).

Coyote in the story is the combination of a demi-deity mother and the irreverent trickster who makes trenchant criticisms of humans' civilization:

"I don't understand why you all look like people," she [Myra] said.

"We are people."

"I mean, people like me, humans."

"Resemblance is in the eye," Coyote said. "How is that lousy eye, by the way?"

"It's fine. But—like you wear clothes—and live in houses—with fires and stuff—"

"That's what you think . . . If that loudmouth Jay hadn't horned in, I could have done a really good job."

The child was quite used to Coyote's disinclination to stick to any one subject, and to her boasting. Coyote was like a lot of

kids she knew, in some respects. Not in others. . . .

"Yecch!" the child said. "So?"

"So, to me you're basically grayish yellow and run on four legs. To that lot—" she waved disdainfully at the warren of little houses next down the hill—"you hop around twitching your nose all the time. To Hawk, you're an egg, or maybe getting pinfeathers. See? It just depends on how you look at things. There are only two kinds of people."

"Humans and animals?"

"No. The kind of people who say, 'There are two kinds of people' and the kind of people who don't." Coyote cracked up, pounding her thigh and yelling with delight at her joke. The child didn't get it, and waited. (32)

The above dialogue is a scorching critique of the dominant Western dualistic ideologies—Self/Other, Human/Animal, God/Man, Man/Woman, Culture/Nature, and so forth. The first and the new people represent those who dwell on dualism and the violence of opposition, and those who seek inter-connection within differences. Coyote and Horse's sayings indicate that the present separation between the first and new people is not the primal state but is culturally constructed by the human kind:

"OK," Coyote said. "There's the first people, and then the others. That's the two kinds."

"The first people are—"

"Us, the animals . . . and things. All the old ones. You know. And you pups, kids, fledglings. All first people."

"And the—others?"

"Them," Coyote said. "You know. The others. The new people. The ones who came." Her fine, hard face had gone serious. . . . "We were here," she said. "We were always here. We are always here. Where we are is here. But it's their country now. They're running it. . . . Shit, even I did better!" (32)

"Do you ever go . . . where the other people [the new people]

are?" she [Myra] asked in a low voice.

. . . Then he [Horse] said, "You mean the metal places, the glass places? The holes? I go around them. There are all walls now. There didn't used to be so many. Grandmother said there didn't used to be any walls. Do you know Grandmother?" he asked naively . . .

"Well, yes—Grandmother—You know. Who makes the web . . ." (37)

It is from Coyote and other First People that Myra starts to question the humans' self-proclaimed superiority to other beings. Myra says to Coyote that she did not want to grow up, otherwise she would become the other kind. Myra's fear touches the fact that a child's natural openness to the natural world may not last long in the civilized world; and that Myra, aware of her difference from other species, has to go back to her people after all.

The climax of the story is that Myra finally finds where the new people's territory is. But there are walls and signs like "Fox. Private. No Trespassing." When Coyote naively thinks that she can cross the fence set up by the New People, she ends up being poisoned and losing her life. Despite that, Coyote "wasn't afraid. She went between the two kinds of people, she crossed over" (35). Her act is crazy because "there isn't anybody else like me [her] here [in the world of new people]" (35). After burying Coyote, Myra, in great despair, goes back to the First People. There, she is brought to see the spider-weaver Grandmother, the mythical figure in Native American legends that weaves all life in her web. The Spider Grandmother tells Myra/Gal that "you got outside your people's time, into our place" (which echoes the first sentence of the story, "You fell out of the sky") and that Coyote is not really dead (50-51). Grandmother persuades Myra to go back to her people. The story ends with Myra's embarking on her journey home—which also symbolizes a new beginning of humans' relationships with other beings:

"Go on, little one, Granddaughter," Spider said. "Don't be

afraid. You can live well there [in the New People's place]. I'll be there too, you know. In your dreams, in your ideas, in dark corners in the basement. Don't kill me, or I'll make it rain . . ."

"I'll come around," Chickadee said. "Make gardens for me."

The child held her breath and clenched her hands until her sobs stopped and let her speak.

"Will I ever see Coyote?"

"I don't know," the Grandmother replied.

The child accepted this. She said, after another silence, "Can I keep my eye?"

"Yes. You can keep your eye."

"Thank you, Grandmother," the child said. She turned away then and started up the night slope towards the next day. Ahead of her in the air of dawn for a long way a little bird flew, black-capped, light-winged. (51)

Coyote's death in the world of new people represents the cruel reality of modern people's blindness to their biological and spiritual interconnection with the rest of the world. But this pessimistic fact is mitigated by Myra's mythical experience of living as one with the first people. Linking the present social reality with the ancient beliefs of American Indians, this mythical tale presents a vision that to regain our connection with other beings will be not an anachronistic fantasy. As Grandmother tells Myra, she is always there in the dark corners of our collective memory, waiting for our call. The reader's reading experience of *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?* is a renewal of this memory, a process of planting a secret garden in Myra's deep consciousness—and also in the consciousness of readers.

V. Conclusion

Julie of the Wolves, *The Nargun and the Stars*, and *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?* have several points in common:

1. The traditional formula of children's coming-of-age adventures;

2. The hero's/heroine's interaction with animals/the land/the natural world as the major action;
3. The force of nature, in different forms of subjectivity, participating in the transformation of the protagonist's consciousness about him/herself and the other world.

In an ecological sense, these three works are "alternative" coming-of-age stories that explore the importance of natural forces in shaping a young adult's wholesome vision of himself or herself, and of the world he or she lives in.

Ecocritics have pointed out that in the mainstream Western literary imagination images of nature oscillate between two extremes: one is the nineteenth-century romanticism which sees nature as an innocent, carefree place where humans can take refuge; the other is the social Darwinist's concept of evolution, in which nature is devalued as a low-scale, underdeveloped, unreasonable existence. The former is the expression of humans' desire to be one with the Other; the latter is the projection of humans' fear of the unknown and the justification of humans' superiority over the wild. In children's literature, talking animals and natural objects also appear in the forms of these two stereotypes. Even if Nature is treated as a place of sentient beings that have voices of their own, the human is usually taken as their basic model. In this case, anthropomorphised nature is seldom conceived as a place of active agents in themselves who have their own will, wisdom, and power that humans have to respect and rely on. In *Julie of the Wolves*, the author Jean George may have romanticized the relationship between the girl and the wolf pack. But she conveys the truth of the actual wolves, who are presented as dignified beings that are an integral part of the Arctic natural environment. Besides, her thorough research into and sympathy with the declining Eskimo culture reminds us of the fact that humans were once a member of the community of all life.

Like what Jean George has achieved in *Julie of the Wolves*, Patricia Wrightson subverts the false ideology of anthropocentrism in *The Nargun and the Stars*. Inspired by Australian indigenes' folklore, Wrightson composes "land-centered" stories which portray the hidden

presences of earth spirits. Her novel is a "situated realism," which presents a "consensual reality"—developed and shared by the Aborigines for thousands of years (Murphy, 2000: 31–32). The diverse earth spirits represent the feelings people have about the Australian land—one is a mystical and frightening power, represented by Nargun; and the other is a mischievous and benign power, represented by tree and rock creatures. Showing Simon's adventure with the earth spirits as a realistic "fantasy," Wrightson is affirming and participating in the Aborigine's particular land vision—Simon knows that to keep their life going, man has to cooperate with other spirits of the land.

In these three stories, the choice of the protagonist is beyond gender essentialism. In *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come out Tonight?*, even though Myra is a girl and Coyote is a she, Le Guin does not imply that female gender provides Myra with a better, inborn gift of befriending Coyote and the first people. The key point is that Miyax, Simon, and Myra are all young children who are not totally blinded by the gender and racial prejudices of the adult world. All these writers apparently see childhood as a proto-condition in which humans are still soft and open to the more-than-human world. If given the chance, "humans and other entities [can] develop, change, and learn through mutually influencing each other day to day, age to age" (Murphy, 1991: 149).

In the "Introduction" to *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*, Ursula K. Le Guin makes a scathing comment on the place of children and animals in human civilization:

... for the people Civilization calls "primitive," "savage," or "undeveloped," including young children, the continuity, interdependence, and community of all life, all forms of being on earth, is a lived fact, made conscious in narrative (myth, ritual, fiction). This continuity of existence, neither benevolent nor cruel itself, is fundamental to whatever morality may be built upon it. Only Civilization builds its morality by denying its foundation.

By climbing up into his head and shutting out every voice but his own, "Civilized Man" has gone deaf. He can't hear the wolf

calling him brother—not Master, but brother. He can't hear the earth calling him child—not Father, but son. He hears only his own words making up the world. He can't hear the animals, they have nothing to say. Children babble, and have to be taught how to climb up into their heads and shut the doors of perception. No use teaching women at all, they talk all the time, of course, but never say anything. This is the myth of Civilization, embodied in the monotheisms which assign soul to Man alone. (11)

Going beyond Wordsworth's saying that "The Child is the Father of the Man," Le Guin writes: "In literature as in 'real life,' [. . .], children, and animals are the obscure matter upon which Civilization erects itself, phallogically. That they are Other is (vide Lacan *et al.*) the foundation of language, the Father Tongue" (10). There has been set up an opposition in the adult mind between animal and human, reason and emotion, reality and illusion. The drama of the boundary-crossing between human and non-human has been pushed to the sub-genre of children's fantasy—an "extravagant and unrestricted imaginative activity" (qtd. in Aquino 2) which a civilized human has to outgrow. Ecofeminist literary theory brings to our attention the potential significance of "talking animals"; it also illuminates the danger of misunderstanding anthromorphization in children's tales. Hopefully, through the application of the critical insights of ecofeminist literary theory to the study of children's literature, more works with ecological visions can be discovered. These close analyses of *Julie of the Wolves*, *The Nargun and the Stars*, and *Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come out Tonight?* may serve to enhance readers' appreciation of "green" literature for young readers.

NOTES

¹ George has traveled extensively in Alaska where her son is a biologist. She has even camped on Arctic ice when the temperature was below 35°. George once said: "After reading about wolves, I was off to the Arctic Research Lab at Barrows, Alaska, to visit the scientists who were studying

socialized wolves there. . . . I spoke to a wolf and she spoke back. I used voice, gestures and eye contact . . ." (qtd. in Beech 4).

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