ANIMALS ARE PEOPLE TOO:
AN ECOCRITICAL EXPLORATION OF FANTASY IN ENVIRONMENTAL
CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

by

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B.A., University of Northern British Columbia, 2013

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
IN
ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

August 2016

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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of fantasy to promote ecological consciousness in environmental children’s literature. The theoretical foundation of my study is ecocriticism, which explores literary representations of humans’ relationship with the nonhuman. Using this theory, I analyse three novels: Richard Adams’ *Watership Down*, Diana Young’s *FernGully*, and Salman Rushdie’s *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. These three novels all contain different fantastical elements, and they all address different specific environmental issues. Despite their differences, all three texts promote an Earth-centred perspective of the world rather than the standard human-centred mindset that typically pervades Western thinking. My analysis shows that fantasy is a useful genre for authors of environmental children’s literature because its wide range of possible settings and characters offers a flexibility that allows authors to approach environmental issues in unique ways that engage readers’ intellects and imaginations.
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Introduction

Environmental Children’s Literature and Ecocriticism

This thesis examines the means by which fantasy is used in environmental children’s literature to introduce environmental messages. Following ecocritical practices, I analyse the different underlying ethical themes of the texts as they pertain to the environment and humanity’s relationship with the nonhuman. I also explore the ways in which these ethics are communicated to the audience; though disparate in their specific methods, each of the novels on which this thesis focuses invariably utilises fantastical elements to convey the ethics of its world. This thesis argues that the fantasy genre is useful to authors of environmental children’s literature because its wide range of possible settings and characters offers a flexibility that allows authors to approach ecological issues in unique ways. Fantasy is a popular genre in children’s literature because it engages both the intelligence and the imagination of its readers (Tatar 20). It is also useful as a method for introducing concepts that are unconventional in contemporary society because it “provide[s] intellectual and psychological distance and allow[s] us to critically explore that which we would not be comfortable exploring directly” (Burke and Copenhaver 207). Authors often use the freedom of world creation to comment on elements of contemporary society by exaggerating those elements parodically or introducing alternative elements in a working system, in either case advocating change. For example, environmentally oriented fantasy often encourages an ecocentric worldview either by critiquing anthropocentrism or by describing a working model of an ecocentric community. Each of the novels on which this thesis focuses employs one or both of these methods in communicating its environmental ethics to its readers.

My exploration of environmental children’s literature is by no means exhaustive, for my
focus is limited to just three novels. This narrowness of scope is necessary for my thesis because it allows for a depth of analysis that would not be possible with a wider survey. The three novels on which my thesis focuses are *Watership Down*, by Richard Adams; *FernGully*, by Diana Young; and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, by Salman Rushdie. Each of these novels has an intended audience between the ages of nine and twelve; I chose to analyse novels written for this demographic because they are able to communicate more complex ideas than can stories written for younger children, but intended readers are still young enough that their conceptions of social and cultural norms are still developing (Solmon and Lee 229). These three texts were chosen both for their similarities—all are fantasy novels written for the same age group—and for their differences—each uses its fantastical elements to encourage an ecocentric mindset in a manner distinct from the others. This difference is most manifest in the ways in which each addresses the conceptual barriers that are believed in traditional Western epistemologies to exist between humanity and the nonhuman world and in each novel’s portrayal of humanity’s attitude toward nature.

A brief historical account of environmental literature is valuable here because these three novels are a small subset of a much larger eco-literary movement. Since the 1960s, there has been a general increase in the production of English literature with environmental themes. This increase correlates with a developing understanding of ecological importance and the catastrophic potential of negligent human action. After Rachel Carson introduced the world to “A Fable for Tomorrow” in her revolutionary text, *Silent Spring*—often considered “the founding text of modern environmentalism” (Garrard 2)—the general public has been concerned about the various toxins that humanity is expelling into the environment and the effects that these toxins have on living organisms. Since that time, other environmental concerns, such as human-
induced climate change and the unsustainability of resource extraction, have also become common knowledge. As it always has, the literature of the time responds to contemporary concerns; for example, Dr. Seuss’s environmental children’s story, *The Lorax*, addresses issues such as the effects of deforestation and industrial wastes on local fauna, as brought about by consumer culture; it is responding to prominent concerns of the early 1970s, when it was published (Lebduska 173). Environmental literature often does not just describe the ecological concerns of the contemporary world but also offers prescriptive guidelines outlining how one ought to respond to this new information—*The Lorax* warns readers that the world will become devoid of trees and animals unless “someone like you / cares a whole awful lot” (44) about the environment and protects the forests from industrial corporations and their “axes that hack” (45).

Over the last forty years, most environmentally-themed literature has encouraged a rejection of anthropocentric, or human-centred perspectives in favour of a more ecocentric, or Earth-centred view. The holistic ideal of ecocentrism considers humanity not as living alongside the nonhuman, but rather as living among the nonhuman. Humanity is but a cog—albeit a large and multifaceted cog—in the all-encompassing machine that is the terrestrial ecosphere. Because humanity is such a wide-reaching and adaptive species, it affects and is affected by most of the ecological systems that make up the ecosphere; as such, it has the potential to catastrophically alter the current systems, rendering them unstable and leading to their destruction. Indeed, global evidence of climate change, desertification, and the recession of coral reefs suggest that humanity has already caused irreversible damage to the ecosphere. Environmental literature strives to instill an ecocentric perspective in its readers to prevent the further destruction of the Earth’s ecosystems and maintain an inhabitable environment.

Of course, a fully ecocentric perspective would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve,
particularly for a Western audience. This process would involve the decentring of human concerns, such that actions should be considered primarily based on whether or not they sustain the ecosystem, while human comfort and freedom become secondary concerns. It would also require the release of individual identity and adoption of a larger identity as a versatile component of an ever-changing system of organic and inorganic elements. To the average Westerner, this description would sound like the plot of some B-movie dystopic world wherein the protagonist frees the population from a bland and uncomfortable life, rescuing them from the cold, uncaring ecological machine. This view is informed by the Christian belief that humanity is distinct from the nonhuman world and is, in fact, hierarchically superior to it, as well as the democratic consumerist/capitalist belief that freedom and comfort are human rights and cannot ethically be taken from a person. Indeed, most authors of English literature are themselves Western, and have the same epistemological background; they no more want to lose their freedom than do their readers. Thus, the ecocentrism that most environmental authors promote is not the pure ideal, but rather a more conservative system whereby humans still live freely but are aware of their roles in ecological systems and actively prevent harmful alterations to the environment. This conservative system is the product of a conflict of interests in many modern, privileged environmental writers who want to save the environment without sacrificing their quality of life.

Even the conservative systems that are suggested in environmental literature will not become a reality unless the environmentally minded act toward realising them; simply becoming aware of the issues will not contribute to their solutions. One of the potential problems of advocating change in children’s literature is that it removes the onus of physical activism from the current generations by creating the possibility that future generations will achieve the
necessary change. The problem is that the next generation may think similarly about its own children, and the cycle could continue endlessly with an ecologically conscious population that is always waiting for the solution to appear tomorrow. Members of the current generation could feel as though they are a part of the solution simply because they understand environmental issues and have passed this knowledge on to their children. The transfer of knowledge alone does not provide solutions, though; those will only appear through action, through the application of environmental knowledge in creating a sustainable lifestyle. Still, this transference of environmental knowledge is an essential element of actualising an ecologically sustainable human presence because it increases the number of potential activists; people cannot solve environmental crises without knowing that they exist. Environmental literature plays a crucial role in this transfer of information, for it introduces these concepts to the general public, potentially influencing a large number of people.

Ecocritical theory is a useful resource for critics who are attempting to determine whether or not a text can be considered “environmental literature.” Not all authors of environmental literature portray the same vision of an ecocentric world, nor do they undertake this portrayal via the same methods; thus, some difficulty can arise when assessing a text. Ecocritic Lawrence Buell offers four oft-cited criteria that, if met, indicate “an environmentally oriented work” (7). The first demands that the narrative admit that the nonhuman world is not merely a passive backdrop to human life, a stage that frames human actors, but rather has a presence that actively affects human decisions (7). The second criterion requires an understanding that “The human interest is not ... the only legitimate interest”; the lives and wellbeing of nonhuman organisms should be considered as well (7). The third necessitates an ethics in the world of the text that stresses “Human accountability to the environment” (7); the characters cannot simply do what
they want but must consider the effects that their actions will have on the nonhuman world. Buell’s final condition is that the text gives “Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant,” be it the fact that the nonhuman world is alive and ever-changing or the understanding that human environments depend upon a “development from wilderness to town” (8). Because my thesis has as its focus the environmental ethics described in literature, ecocritical theory informs my approach to these texts; thus, I shall spend some time here describing its origins and evolution.

Ecocriticism is a term that was coined by William Rueckert in 1978 to describe his experimental “application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Rueckert 107). Ecocriticism has evolved far beyond Rueckert’s experimental exploration, and its definition has evolved with it. In The Ecocriticism Reader, Cheryll Glotfelty defines the literary field as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). After listing a wide range of questions that ecocritics explore, including, “What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel?” and, “How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?” she says,

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. (xix)

The Ecocriticism Reader was the first anthology to consolidate ecocritical essays and define the shared motivation that brings them all together; as such, it is fundamental to the field.
Ecocriticism has widely developed since the anthology was published in 1996, though, and its theory has stretched along with it.

In his 2004 monograph, *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard expands on Glotfelty’s definition, calling ecological criticism a “political mode of analysis” similar to feminism and Marxism because “Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a ‘green’ moral and political agenda” (3). He says that “the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the nonhuman, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (5). There have been some concerns about ecocriticism’s “close relationship with the science of ecology” because many ecocritics are not “qualified to contribute to debates about problems in ecology” (5), but Garrard explains that ecocriticism only highlights examples of human interference with the nonhuman and makes “the moral case that it *ought* not to be” (6, italics in original) without suggesting that ecocriticism can itself provide a specific solution to the ecological problem. Although it has a “close relationship with the science of ecology,” ecocriticism is at its core a “literary and cultural theor[y]” (5) and does not present itself as a scientific authority. Like Glotfelty, Garrard emphasises the fact that ecocritical pursuits are many and varied, and he describes some commonly explored tropes, including the pastoral and the wilderness.

Despite the efforts of Glotfelty and Garrard, among others, to explain (and, in a sense, create) the boundaries within which ecocritics work, the discipline, as Simon Estok says, “has had some problems in defining itself, its goals, and its reach” (61). It seems that many ecocritics have their own perception of what exactly ecocriticism strives to accomplish. As Ursula Heise says, “Because of the diversity of political and cross-disciplinary influences that went into its making ... ecocriticism has ... become a field whose complexities by now require ... book-length
introductions” (506). Estok suggests that “ecocriticism is committed to promoting the health of the biosphere of which we and other animals are a part” (63). According to Carolyn Sigler, “Both ethically and practically, ecocriticism decenters humanity’s importance in nonhuman nature and nature writing (thus rejecting anthropocentric views) and instead explores the complex interrelationships between the human and the nonhuman (a biocentric view)” (148); likewise, for Angshuman Kar, “the basic objective of ecocritics [is] to replace anthropocentrism (human-centeredness) with ecocentrism (earth-centeredness)” (66). Christine Battista, on the other hand, puts less emphasis on the decentring of humanity and more on the acknowledgement that the nonhuman is an active force in the world: “The entire movement of ecocriticism is distinctly predicated on ... the need to give agency to the nonhuman world” (158). Although there are some similarities that are present in all definitions of ecocriticism—for example, no critic disagrees that the nonhuman world is within its focus—the problem of determining “its goals, and its reach,” to go back to Estok, has not been solved. As Pippa Marland says, “How critics involved in this area choose to define themselves depends largely on their own position in relation to environmental issues and to their understanding of the implications of the individual terms” (846). Ecocriticism is like a hydra; all of its various heads appear similar, but each one is distinct and individually active.

Some clusters of the ecocritical hydra’s heads are so alike in motivation and methodology that they can be categorised as discrete sub-disciplines. For example, ecofeminism is a subset of ecocriticism that works under the fundamental assumption that “the patriarchal domination of women runs parallel to the patriarchal domination of nature” (Vance 60). Timothy Morton expands on this explanation: “Ecofeminist criticism examines the ways in which patriarchy has been responsible for sustaining a view of the natural world that oppresses women in the same
way that it oppresses animals, life in general, and even matter itself” (*Ecology* 9). It is considered “both a theoretical framework within academic feminism and a social movement” (Kruse 14) working to subvert the oppressive androcentrism of Western epistemologies. Another prominent subset of the discipline is “environmental justice ecocriticism, which considers how environmental destruction, pollution, and the oppression of specific classes and races go hand in hand” (Morton, *Ecology* 10). Joni Adamson says, by “exploring the differences that shape diverse cultural and literary representations of nature, we [environmental justice ecocritics] reveal the challenge they present to mainstream … culture, environmentalism, and literature, and uncover the rich ground they offer us in which to root new, more multicultural conceptions of nature and the environment” (xvii-xviii). These and other areas of ecocriticism have expanded the discipline and helped unite critics by providing common goals for which to strive.

The subset of ecocriticism most relevant to this thesis is, of course, that which addresses representations of the nonhuman world in children’s literature. Although “classic children’s literature has long been preoccupied with natural history, ecology, and human-animal interaction” (Dobrin and Kidd 4), ecocritical analyses of children’s literature were first anthologised in 2004 by Sidney Dobrin and Kenneth Kidd. Critics studying environmental children’s literature “acknowledge the complexities and ambivalences of our expectations about the natural world as represented in and mediated through our cultural production” (2) and understand the importance of children’s literature to the development of our perceptions of the nonhuman world. As studies in social psychology “make clear, childhood experiences in, of, and with the natural world are often deeply formative”; Dobrin and Kidd suggest that literature concerning the natural world is equally formative (5). Carolyn Burke and Joby Copenhaver agree that children’s literature can be strongly influential:
Books can have a more powerful impact on a child than is sometimes imagined, and that impact can last a lifetime. Those lessons learned earliest are the most difficult to alter. We need to stop thinking about children’s books as child’s play and acknowledge that the body of children’s literature reflects contentious issues that reside at the core of our culture. Children deal with these issues seriously through their reading and learning.

(210)

Ecocritical approaches to children’s literature work under the assumption that among the “contentious issues” that are present in children’s books are environmental concerns and human-nonhuman relations. These critics “consider how the natural environment appears in children’s literature” (Greenway 147) and provides “a consideration of physical and geographical spaces and how they inflect selfhood” (Waller 304); they also highlight “narratives of connection, community, and interdependence among humans, animals, and the natural world” that seek to “provide an antidote to the logic of domination” (Gaard 327).

Applying Burke and Copenhaver’s claim that children are exposed to serious cultural issues through their reading of environmental children’s literature, this thesis argues that children’s literature critically engages with contemporary social concerns; as such, my analyses are as thorough as they would be if I was discussing literature written for adults. My thesis shares with other ecocritics the further assumption that the environmental concerns addressed in the novels were not constructed purely from the imaginations of the authors but instead correspond to those contemporary issues with which children’s literature engages. A brief account of the historical context surrounding each novel is included in its respective chapter, explaining the novel’s relevance to the political and social concerns about the environment at the time of its publication. Each novel responds to important environmental concerns of its time; though each
uses a different strategy to approach its environmental concerns, they all depict fantastical worlds in which the processes and societies reject anthropocentrism in favour of an ecocentric worldview.

My thesis is not the first exploration of environmental children’s literature, but it adds to the current body of ecocritical children’s literature scholarship by analysing the disparate means by which different fantasy authors promote an ecocentric mindset; little attention has yet been given to the various ways in which different genres of environmental children’s literature introduce and address ecological concerns. I have decided to focus on the fantasy genre because the versatility of the genre allows for more extreme portrayals of social commentary than do most others; thus, the contrasts between the worlds of the three novels are particularly pronounced and the flexibility of the genre quickly becomes evident. The three novels on which this thesis focuses utilise a range of methods for addressing environmental issues, and each approach is notably distinct from the others; this thesis particularly emphasises the varied degrees to which the novels’ settings and characters are made fantastical and their differing attitudes toward humans’ relationship with the nonhuman. Though this disparity of method is also evident in works of other genres, it is nowhere as obvious or as extreme as in fantasy literature.

Before delving into my analysis, it is valuable here to give a definition of nature and the natural. I would note that a full discussion of the term would be too lengthy for this thesis; between Frederick Turner and Morton alone, over a dozen pages is spent navigating its many implications (Turner 40-45; Morton, *Ecology* 14-21). As Morton says, “Nature, a transcendental term in a material mask, stands at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that collapse into it” (*Ecology* 14). Neither he nor Turner is ultimately successful in his endeavour to
definitively explain the term. Thus, rather than give an account of the many ways in which other scholars have used these words, I shall simply define nature and the natural as I use them in this thesis. In this thesis, “nature” has two definitions. When used as a subject or non-adjectival object in a sentence (for example, “force of nature”), I am referring to the nonhuman world or the processes therein that have not been significantly affected by humans or synthetic materials. When used as an adjectival object (for example, “it was in her nature”), I am indicating an inherent trait of the modified object. Likewise, “natural” can refer to objects (including living organisms), states, or processes not significantly affected by humans or human products.

My thesis comprises three chapters followed by a conclusion. The first chapter contains my analysis of *Watership Down*. Adams created a society of anthropomorphic animal characters with which he critiques many aspects of human society, including our anthropocentric tendencies. The chapter is entitled “Keeping it Real: Fantasy and Naturalism in *Watership Down*” because my analysis centres on Adams’ integration of the realistic and the fantastical in the novel and the ways in which this integration informs the relationship between humans and the nonhuman. The second chapter is my analysis of *FernGully*. Young’s novel also critiques the anthropocentrism of human society; through the use of magic realism, though, she provides an alternative stable society with ecocentric values. The chapter is called “The Magic of Nature: Investigating Ecological Messages in *FernGully*” because it focuses on Young’s use of fantastical magic-infused characters who live in the natural world to explain ecological processes and concerns. The third chapter contains my analysis of *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. By creating an entirely fictional world inhabited by fantastical anthropomorphic characters, Rushdie portrays a functional ecocentric society in which many different species coexist peacefully. The chapter’s title is “Distant Reality: Exploring the Allegory in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*”
because its analysis offers an allegorical reading of the novel wherein each of the various elements explored has layers of significance, all of which address environmental concerns. Despite their diverse methods, all three of these authors use fantasy novels to encourage readers to adopt a more ecocentric perspective.
Chapter 1

Keeping It Real: Fantasy and Naturalism in *Watership Down*

Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* is one of the best examples of a children’s novel that promotes environmental awareness through the use of characters who are almost exclusively anthropomorphised animals. The story’s rabbit protagonists embody many human characteristics, thereby suggesting at first glance that Adams had written an anthropocentric account of the small mammals; the characters also retain many qualities of real rabbits, though, and these qualities challenge the common presumption that anthropomorphism is inherently anthropocentric (see Kar; Varsava). The novel originated as a story Adams told his children to distract them during a long car ride (Adams, Introduction 5); in the process of writing the story into a book, Adams decided that if his “novel could hope to possess any true dignity or authenticity,” it would need to have a foundation based on facts (5). *Watership Down* was written in the latter half of the 1960s (Pawling 230), in the political period following Carson’s publication of *Silent Spring*, during which the general Western public became aware of the devastating potential of pesticides and pollution (Pollock 50) and the possibility that humans “may spoil the world” (Adams, Introduction 6). Adams understood that his readers would be more likely to sympathise with real rabbits if they learned something about them. He set out to find “a good, informative book about the English wild rabbit” because he was aware that he did not know nearly enough about rabbits to write about them with any authority and was worried that his “rabbits would be little better than cute bunnies—as too many other rabbits have become, once trapped between the ears of authors and the covers of their books” (5). This pursuit of accuracy is evidence that Adams respected wild rabbits as living non-human beings, both alike to and incomprehensibly different from himself.
The resource that Adams relied upon most heavily when researching the true behaviour of “the English wild rabbit” (5) was Ronald Lockley’s *The Private Life of the Rabbit*, an account of Lockley’s observations of wild rabbits living on the 240-acre island where he made his home (14). This monograph turned out to be such a pivotal influence on Adams’ work, and Adams’ novel promoted the popularity of Lockley’s book to such an extent, that Adams was asked to write an introduction to the 1976 edition of *The Private Life of the Rabbit*. In this introduction, he explains the damaging misconceptions that careless or ignorant authors can cause when writing about animals. Though they are often portrayed as “childishly cute” or cowardly, rabbits can be fierce, strong, and courageous (5). Adams came to realise that wild rabbits had been “anthropomorphically maligned” by previous authors (5). He was surprised by “how little [wild rabbits’] true nature had been understood by the world in general” (5), though, of course, the world to which he is referring is a Eurocentric one. Nonetheless, Adams found the widespread misrepresentation of wild rabbits to be problematic. He set out to write a novel that helps its readers better understand rabbits, and hoped to encourage them to read Lockley’s book (6). Believing as he does that “We need to learn more fully how to understand and respect the animals, with whom we share the world” (6), Adams created animal characters that, though anthropomorphic, were not overly sentimentalised. The creation of such characters required a careful balance between giving them anthropomorphic traits and having them act as real rabbits might. Following many environmental writers in a tradition that is still in practice today (Morton, *Ecology* 1), Adams’ environmentalism is influenced by the thoughts and works of the Romantic era. This influence is evident in the novel’s “Primitivist environmentalism[, which] crave[s] a lost golden age of interconnectedness with the environment” (94), as well as his employment of the pastoral, presenting the nonhuman world “as a utopian alternative to the world of
industrialism and commerce” (Pawling 216). His integration of anthropomorphic and “real”
behaviour attempts to collapse the imagined binary between humans and the nonhuman, thereby
encouraging readers to adopt an ecocentric worldview.

My analysis of *Watership Down* comprises four sections. The first is an exploration of
Adams’ method of integrating anthropomorphism with naturalistic writing. The two styles of
writing are quite distinct, and the ways in which Adams interweaves them challenges not only
the tropes of fantasy literature but also the Western belief that the human and the nonhuman are
dichotomous. The second section focuses on the anthropomorphic qualities of Adams’ rabbits,
such as religion and language, which are present throughout the novel and give the readers a
familiar foundation from which they can understand and sympathise with the characters. The
third examines the rabbits’ more realistic attributes, which are also evident throughout the story
and are often accompanied by the objective tone of nature writing. These naturalist passages are
sometimes even sourced, implying to the reader that the characters are not just humans in the
shape of rabbits, but actually have some accurate rabbit attributes. One of these accuracies is the
focus of the fourth section: the acute danger that rabbits face in this human-dominated world.
The main characters of the novel encounter many different groups of rabbits, each of which is
negatively affected by human interference. Through these encounters and the expository
dialogue that accompanies them, Adams critiques the callous, apathetic manner with which
humans ignore the loss of nonhuman life for the sake of development. By highlighting both the
similarities and differences between rabbits and humans, he deconstructs the human/nonhuman
binary, “protests against the destruction of nature” (Pawling 220), and encourages his readers to
adopt a more ecocentric way of life.

Unfortunately, most scholars who have analysed *Watership Down* in the past—such as
Celia Catlett Anderson, Kathleen Rothen, and Beverly Langston—have focussed on the ways in which it compares to the *Odyssey* or *Aeneid* myths or how it critiques human culture. The natural aspects of the characters have been largely ignored, and the environmental element of the novel that Adams describes in his introduction to *The Private Life of the Rabbit* has been overlooked by most critics of the novel. To my knowledge, only Christine Battista has addressed at length the clear ecological messages interspersed within this text. Battista’s article argues that *Watership Down* should be classified under the genre of environmental fiction rather than general fiction because it “expresses incipient ecocritical concerns” (158), and her analysis of the novel’s environmental messages is a valuable resource for this chapter.

ADAMS’ INTEGRATION OF NATURALIST WRITING AND ANTHROPOMORPHISM

One of the most unique elements of Adams’ text is the interjection of naturalist writing into his fantasy story. Unlike in the other two novels on which this thesis focuses, the fantasy in *Watership Down* is limited to the anthropomorphisation of its animal characters. Literary anthropomorphism is the intentional misrepresentation of nonhuman characters such that they display distinctly human traits, such as speech. Although anthropomorphism in a more general sense includes the (possibly unintentional) projection of “human characteristics of emotion or thought to [the] appearance, behaviour, and consciousness” of nonhuman entities (Oerlemans 68), this definition is not useful in my thesis because, as many critics agree, this form of anthropomorphism is inevitable in any human discussion of the nonhuman; “there is virtually no escaping anthropomorphism” (Estok 68) because humans “constantly translate other objects into their own terms” (Morton, “Object” 207). Thus, any mention of anthropomorphism in this work refers to literary anthropomorphism, unless otherwise specified.
Anthropomorphism is a common trope in children’s literature. According to children’s literature theorist Juliet Markowsky, one of the reasons that authors of children’s stories use anthropomorphism is “to enable young readers to identify with the animals ... [that]—stripped of all their human trappings of speech and clothing—may or may not be familiar to the child” (460); this motivation clearly drove Adams, who wanted to show his readers a more accurate portrayal of the rabbits that had been misunderstood and “anthropomorphically maligned” by other authors (Adams, Introduction 5). Some ecocritics question the value of anthropomorphism as a literary device because they believe that anthropomorphism cannot help but be anthropocentric (Kar; Varsava), a strong concern because “the basic objective of ecocritics [is] to replace anthropocentrism (human-centeredness) with ecocentrism (earth-centeredness)” (Kar 66). This view of anthropomorphism is too critical of the trope, though; stories that include anthropomorphism are anthropocentric in that they are written for a human audience to sway human opinions, true, but the messages that they deliver can still promote an ecocentric point of view (Battista 159; Sigler 151). Indeed, Battista says that “The entire movement of ecocriticism is distinctly predicated on ... the need to give agency to the nonhuman world” (158), advocating the importance of anthropomorphism to ecocritical success. As will be seen, Adams’ use of anthropomorphism avoids an anthropocentric focus because it is limited; many of the rabbits’ actions are informed by the study of real rabbit behaviour.

The term “naturalist writing” also requires a precise definition. It is not to be confused with the “naturalist” style of writing, which is an anthropocentric exploration of “the underlying causes for a person’s actions or beliefs” (“Naturalism”). It is also distinct from “nature writing,” which Timothy Morton calls “ecomimesis,” a “rendering” of nature performed by poets and other writers, a simultaneous creation and exploration of the fictionally constructed nonhuman
(Ecology 54-56). Although *Watership Down* as a whole is a work of “nature writing,” the term “naturalist writing” refers only to the contents of specific passages in the novel. By “naturalist writing,” I am referring to those passages that describe the conditions or behaviour of real rabbits, as observed by people who study the small mammals. The inclusion of these passages, particularly those that cite a scientific text, is unconventional in a work of fiction because fiction is often designed to provide readers with an escapist “flight into fantasy,” a goal that the creation of “Animals that talk” can often achieve (Markowsky 461). By highlighting the nuggets of fact strewn in amongst the fiction, though, Adams breaks from the fantastical world he has created, reminding his readers of their presence in the real world. Despite preventing a true “flight into fantasy,” though, Adams manages to include the naturalist passages without causing a jarring effect.

In constructing his rabbit protagonists, Adams designed anthropomorphised animals that have a strategic combination of human and animal traits. He integrates the naturalist writing so well into the fantasy world that it is sometimes difficult to tell which of the rabbits’ actions are influenced by his understanding of natural wild rabbit behaviour and which are only plausible through anthropomorphic augmentation. He seems to agree with animal studies theorist Nik Taylor that “the boundaries between human and animal are not ‘natural’ but are constructed and policed in order to maintain the purity of the different categories” (39). Like Taylor, he sees this segregation as problematic; through his characters, he challenges these boundaries and suggests that humans and rabbits are not as different as they seem to be. Through his use of anthropomorphism and by directly comparing rabbits to humans, he elucidates the inherent value of nonhuman animals and the fact that they are as deserving of rights and respect as are humans. His unique application of anthropomorphism allows the audience to relate to the characters
through their human qualities, while their rabbit qualities provide a contrast that emphasises the fact that nonhuman animals experience the world differently than do humans. The wild rabbit’s behaviour is not entirely foreign to human experience, though, as Adams explains by comparing the rabbits more than once to what he calls “primitive” humans. The first such comparison occurs at the beginning of chapter four, when the narrator tells the audience that “Rabbits, of course, have no idea of precise time or of punctuality. In this respect they are much the same as primitive people, who often take several days over assembling for some purpose and then several more to get started” (Watership 16). Though short, this passage highlights Adams’ integration of anthropomorphism and naturalism and his association of humans with nonhuman animals; a close reading reveals three points of interest.

The first I would like to address is the “of course.” “Rabbits, of course, have no idea of precise time or punctuality.” This statement, while seemingly obvious—perhaps even unnecessary—plays a subtle yet important role in the story; it defines the limits of Adams’ fantasy world and gives the reader permission to make assumptions about the characters based on the knowledge that he or she has about the behaviour of real wild rabbits. Up until this point, the narrator gives the reader “facts” about rabbits that Adams has invented for this novel: They are able to communicate efficiently (4) in a unique language unfamiliar to humans (10), which we later learn is called Lapine (143); they can count to four (4); the Owsla bully other rabbits (5); some rabbits have premonitions of danger (7); and every warren has a leader, often called a Chief Rabbit (9). This exposition describes the “voice, reason and agency” (Battista 158) that Adams drapes upon his characters. After the “of course,” though, any rabbit traits that have not already been altered by the narration should be assumed to be present in the novel until the narrator indicates otherwise; the reader is not meant to see the characters as humans in rabbit
form, but rather as rabbits who are given some human traits that allow them to explore the world around them and comment on and critique it.

The fact about real rabbits that the narrator provides in this sentence is that they “have no idea of precise time or punctuality,” both of which are highly valued in the modern Western world. As Battista says, “Time, punctuality, precision: these are human concerns, concerns that are symptomatic of the West’s desire to maintain order, control, and dominion over both the human and nonhuman world” (160). Since time is so strictly regimented in the Western lifestyle of Adams’ target audience, his rabbits’ lack of temporal precision provides a sharp contrast between the characters and the readers, limiting the degree to which the audience can identify with the rabbits. Further, this sentence’s general discussion of rabbits is imitative of the objectivity of nature writing; it breaks from the story’s narrative and is evidence of the pedagogical undertones of the novel. By altering the tone of the story, Adams indicates the educational quality of the statement, verifying his claim in the introduction to The Private Life that Watership Down works toward “leading a wider public” to be more knowledgeable about rabbits (6). Although the first sentence of the passage indicates a limitation of the rabbits’ anthropomorphisation, though, the second sentence has the opposite effect: it emphasises the fact that the characters are not real rabbits.

The second point of interest in the passage is its claim that rabbits “often take several days over assembling for some purpose and then several more to get started”; despite the narrator’s explicit assurance that many days would have to pass before a group of wild rabbits would depart together, Hazel, the story’s protagonist, gathers together a group of ten rabbits in the relatively short time between noon and moonrise, and they all leave the warren as soon as they come together (Watership 17-21). This departure occurs in the same short chapter as the
passage above, and its swiftness emphasises how un-rabbit-like these actions are in the logic of the story. The proximity of the fact about rabbits to the characters’ dismissal of their natural limitations is a clear admission that Adams is anthropomorphically enhancing the speed at which the rabbits make decisions and act on them in order to drive the plot forward. By acknowledging this manipulation of natural behaviour, he is able to keep his adventure story action-packed and interesting while still maintaining his integrity as a legitimate source of knowledge about real wild rabbits.

The third and final point I would like to examine in this passage is the comparison of rabbits to people. This controversial suggestion that humans and animals are not so very different is stated in such a casual manner that it seems unreasonable to believe otherwise. If we continue from the passage to the rest of the paragraph, the integration of humans into the realm of the animal becomes even more evident:

Before such people can act together, a kind of telepathic feeling has to flow through them and ripen to the point when they all know that they are ready to begin. Anyone who has seen the martins and swallows in September ... the hundreds of individual birds merging and blending, in a mounting excitement ... until that moment when the greater part ... of them know that the time has come: they are off.... Anyone seeing this has seen at work the current that flows (among creatures who think of themselves primarily as part of a group and only secondarily, if at all, as individuals) to fuse them together and impel them into action without conscious thought or will: has seen at work the angel which drove the First Crusade into Antioch and drives the lemmings into the sea. (16-7)

This paragraph continues without any transition from talking about people to talking about birds, implying either that people naturally rank amongst animals, or that birds can be considered
people. In either case, humans and birds are seen to be similar enough that a change in conversation from one to the other requires no transitional indication. Adams begins this comparison by aligning rabbits with so-called “primitive” people. The Romantic notion “that native peoples lived in harmony with the environment was reinforced indirectly in the field[s] of cultural ecology ... [and] biology” in the 1960s and ’70s (Hames 179), so Adams’ reference to “primitive” people is connotatively associated with the Western idea that aboriginal peoples are somehow “closer to nature” than are Western people (Desbiens 265). This association of aboriginal people with nature implies a hierarchical inferiority to Western people; although Adams is attempting to challenge the inferiority of nonhuman species—and by association, the inferiority of less technologically advanced human cultures—he is posing this challenge from within a traditional Western epistemological paradigm, unintentionally perpetuating the very assumptions he is attempting to subvert. Adams’ inclusion of the comparison of animals to aboriginal people presents a strategic introduction to the concept that animals are similar to humans in general, though from his Western perspective, the hierarchical structure is not truly subverted until he compares the motivation “which drove the First Crusade into Antioch” to that which “drives the lemmings into the sea”; like his comparison of rabbits with “primitive” people, he makes this association without any transitional qualifiers. By comparing lemmings to Crusaders, who were not only members of Western society but enforcers of Western belief, Adams clarifies his meaning; humans and animals are driven by the same force. He describes this force as an “angel,” suggesting that animals, too, are God’s children and, as our kin, should be respected and cared for.

Although not explicitly stated, this lack of transition implies the inclusion of humans—both “primitive” and Crusader—“among [those] creatures who think of themselves primarily as
part of a group and only secondarily, if at all, as individuals.” This claim that humans can, in certain circumstances, live without a sense of individual identity, of that “consciousness of itself as a self” that Hegel thought separated humans from animals (“Georg” 537), leads to “the conclusion that men differ from other animals only in degree, not in kind” (Adler 50). The suggestion is problematic for philosophers like Mortimer J. Adler, who prefer to think “that man differs radically in kind from all other animals” (52), which he refers to as “infra-human organisms” (31). It is exactly this kind of anthropocentric mindset that Adams is trying to correct with this passage. By comparing humans so directly with nonhuman animals, he subverts the standard Western belief that they are categorically different, suggesting instead that rabbits, humans, birds, and lemmings all fit equally within the term “animal.” This insistence aligns with Taylor’s ecocritical values, which challenge the “binaristic” view of humans and animals, suggesting that it is merely a political construction designed so that humans can create “an unruly ‘Other’ in need of taming” (37), thereby reinforcing the perceived superiority of humans over other animals. Adams’ care in creating a biocentric world despite his use of anthropomorphism makes his novel a valuable resource for teaching children about animals and the environment.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM IN *WATERSHIP DOWN*

An analysis of the above passage is useful because it highlights the skill with which Adams integrates anthropomorphic and naturalist writing to create a story that is both entertaining and educational. A further exploration of the extent of his anthropomorphism is necessary for a complete understanding of his use of fantasy to promote environmental consciousness, though. The following passage provides insight into the fantastical qualities of
Adams’ rabbits:

Long ago, Frith made the world. He made all the stars too and the world is one of the
stars. He made them by scattering his droppings over the sky and this is why the grass
and the trees grow so thick on the world. Frith makes the brooks flow. They follow him
as he goes through the sky and when he leaves the sky they look for him all night. Frith
made all the animals and birds, but when he first made them they were all the same. (25)

This passage is the beginning of the first of five traditional rabbit stories told by the members of
Hazel’s group and can, therefore, be used to explore the fantastical culture of Adams’ rabbits.

When people attempt to understand a culture that is foreign to them, an important area of
analysis is the body of stories that the culture tells. Constructing and telling stories “is the way
we make sense of our lived experience” (Geia, Hayes, and Usher 15). Reading or listening to the
stories of a culture can inform the audience about the culture’s belief system and what kind of
values its people hold (Smith 145). Despite the fact that the culture currently in question is
fictional, an exploration of the rabbits’ stories is still relevant because they were designed by
Adams to highlight certain anthropomorphic qualities of his characters. Indeed, much can be
inferred about the rabbits just from the act of storytelling itself.

Since real rabbits do not have a spoken language, all of the verbal interactions between
Adams’ characters are anthropomorphic. Simple verbal communication is a necessary element of
the novel, since much of the plot is driven by dialogue, including the initial warning by Fiver that
prompts Hazel and his group to leave their home (Adams, Watership 9). That the rabbits have a
collection of traditional stories that they tell each other is significant because, unlike the ability to
speak, storytelling is more than a necessary plot device; it provides insight into the rabbits’
society. The narrator explains that the act of storytelling is important to rabbits, saying that “a
rabbit can[not] refuse to tell a story” if asked for one (90). Rabbits who are particularly skilled at telling stories are held in high regard; for example, Dandelion, from Hazel’s group, is their champion in Cowslip’s Warren, proving to the warren rabbits that the travellers are “no mere bunch of tramps” (98). This system of traditional oral stories and respected storytellers is similar to those of many indigenous peoples. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, “For many indigenous people[,] stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further” (145-46). The rabbits have a similar view of their stories: “Our stories haven’t changed in generations, you know. After all, we haven’t changed ourselves. Our lives have been the same as our fathers’ and their fathers’ before them” (Adams, Watership 99). The racist implications of Adams’ continuous alignment of his rabbits with indigenous—what he calls “primitive”—people, though unfortunate, are beyond the scope of this thesis. Despite his problematic approach to the comparison, though, it would be negligent to ignore the stories’ significance. The inclusion of an oral storytelling tradition, set alongside the scientific naturalist passages, is another means by which Adams is challenging hierarchical binaries—the “civilised” and “primitive” are intimately connected in the rabbit characters, just as are the human and animal.

Plains Cree indigenous methodologist Margaret Kovach says, “Within Indigenous epistemologies, there are two general forms of stories. There are stories that hold mythical elements, such as creation and teaching stories, and there are personal narratives of place, happenings, and experiences” (95). Both of these forms of story are present in the novel, and although the personal narratives are present to further the plot, the mythical stories provide environmental messages. The story that begins with the passage cited above is a creation story; it explains the existence of the Earth, rivers, vegetation, and animals. It describes the creator, Frith,
whom the rabbits worship; it can be inferred that Frith is the sun from Dandelion’s statement that “he goes through the sky and ... leaves the sky ... [at] night.” In literature, the sun has been perceived as an essential entity whose pervasiveness ensures commonality between the different peoples of the Earth. In Romantic writer Lord Byron’s metaphysical drama, *Manfred*, for example, the title character finds comfort in the realisation that the sun has been an object of worship and a symbol of life throughout the history of humankind; it was idolised by early humans as a god, seen as a “shadow” of the “Almighty” Christian God, and praised even by modern atheist scientists as the source of life on Earth (3.2.3-24). This connection he finally discovers between himself and the rest of humanity gives him peace and a sense of belonging in the world. *Manfred*, along with most other literature, is primarily concerned with human connections with other humans; Adams, though, strives to highlight commonalities between his human audience and the rabbits upon which his characters are based.

Since Frith is the sun in their mythology, the rabbits of this story revere the same “material God” (Byron 3.2.14) as do most humans. The fact that the rabbits worship an entity that is so recognisably important to both species allows the reader to feel the same connection with them that Manfred does with humanity. It is impossible to know whether living wild rabbits believe in a higher power, but it is reasonable to think that at least on an instinctual level, rabbits are aware of the importance of the sun in their lives. Even if the rabbits themselves do not know how crucial the sun is to their existence, readers of the novel are aware of the pivotal role it plays, not only for rabbits and humans, but for all organisms on Earth. Manfred says to the sun, “near or far, / Our inborn spirits have a tint of thee, / Even as our outward aspects” (3.2.21-3), acknowledging the fact that all people receive the benefits of its light and warmth and discovering a sense of community through this shared experience. By having his characters deify
the sun, Adams reminds us that we share this connection with animals and with the nonhuman world in general. Reading *Watership Down* inspires a Manfred-like epiphany that invokes a sense of community between humanity and the rest of the world. Just as Manfred sets himself apart from the rest of humanity until he finds this connection, so humanity has set itself apart from the rest of nature, as though the obvious similarities between humans and other animals do not exist. With Adams’ help, perhaps readers can recognise that we are a part of nature, and this knowledge will help us perform our role in our ecosystems.

The other mythical story that the rabbits tell is similarly designed to improve the audience’s environmental consciousness; rather than simply illuminate the similarities between rabbits and humans, though, it also emphasises the disparity between the two species, particularly focusing on humans’ tendency to disrupt ecological balance. The story is about the Black Rabbit of Inlé, a theriomorphic representation of death; like the sun, death is another aspect of life that humans share with rabbits. Rabbits do not hate the Black Rabbit; they know that he “serves Lord Frith and does no more than his appointed task” (Adams, *Watership* 268). In turn, the rabbits follow a simple rule in respect for the Black Rabbit; if he calls a rabbit’s name, “then that rabbit must go out to him, even though he may be young and strong [enough] to save himself from any other danger” (268). Frith has dictated that rabbits must do so, and they do not disregard this rule, as is shown by superstitious Bigwig’s attempt to follow the voice of Holly—who he thinks at the time is the Black Rabbit—after he hears his name called out (136). Even though the characters fear the Black Rabbit and what he represents, they understand that, in doing his duty, he is merely “bring[ing] about what must be” (268). “We come into the world,” Dandelion explains, “and we have to go” (268). It is the Black Rabbit’s responsibility to ensure that the rabbits are not killed in excess; in this way he is a “protector” (268) of both rabbits and
ecological balance.

The Black Rabbit’s protective role is the central theme of “The Story of El-ahrairah and the Black Rabbit of Inlé” (265-79); the lesson is that excessive killing of rabbits is not allowed, and perpetrators will be punished. El-ahrairah, the rabbits’ cultural hero, has offended a king named Darzin, who in revenge orders his soldiers to camp over the rabbit warren so they can attack any rabbit who comes above ground to eat (267). Darzin’s efficient persistence threatens to kill the entire rabbit species with starvation, which directly opposes Frith’s promise to El-ahrairah that his “people shall never be destroyed” (28). The idea that Darzin is disobeying Frith’s orders is reinforced when the Black Rabbit scares Darzin and his people away from El-ahrairah’s warren without taking anything in return (277), despite the fact that El-ahrairah expected to have to pay for his people’s freedom with his own life (268). As Dandelion explains, “we do not [die] merely to serve the turn of one enemy or another.... We [die] by the will of the Black Rabbit of Inlé and only by his will” (268). Any “enemy” that kills a rabbit when it should not is punished by the Black Rabbit: “he will revenge any rabbit who may chance to be destroyed without the consent of himself” (268). When telling this part of the story, Dandelion jumps temporarily back into their real world when he says, “Anyone who has seen a game-keeper’s gibbet knows what the Black Rabbit can bring down on [hunters] who think they will do what they will” (268). It is worth noting that those who are known to kill rabbits without permission are humans, though the Black Rabbit’s Earthly agents in this instance—the game-keepers—are also human. Thus, although humans usually do not play their role properly in their ecosystems and their chaotic, undirected actions can wreak havoc with the lives of the animals in their effective radii, they can also protect ecological sustainability, often by policing themselves. Humans usually do not see themselves as part of their ecosystem, but rather as separate from the
environment that surrounds them, and this isolation breeds misunderstanding of and a lack of respect for the nonhuman.

One of the most insurmountable reasons for the distance between humans and other animals is the fact that they cannot effectively communicate with each other. Humans’ lack of understanding of other animals’ lives and roles in their ecosystems often leads to a sense of superiority in humans and a disregard for nonhuman lives. Adams addresses this language barrier both in the rabbits’ stories and in the main narrative. During the first El-ahrairah story, Dandelion tells the others that when Frith first “made all the animals and birds ... they were all the same” (25). An aspect of this similarity is a shared language; as in many indigenous mythical stories, the various species can easily communicate with each other. Even after Frith makes each animal unique (26), El-ahrairah has no trouble speaking to hedgehogs (96), pheasants (168), or even the domesticated dog, Rowsby Woof (398). Even outside of the rabbits’ stories, the different species in Watership Down are able to speak to each other by using “a simple, limited lingua franca of the hedgerow and woodland” (143), which most other animals can use to communicate. Hazel uses this language to speak to a mouse (143), a rat (198), a cat (202), and even Kehaar, a migratory sea-bird who is certainly not from the area but still speaks a version of the language, “exotic” as it is (179). Humans alone seem unable to communicate with their fellow animals, and cannot understand the common language.

The chapter in which Hazel is saved by the girl, Lucy (452-57), is the only instance in which the narrative is written from the humans’ perspective. This chapter is uniquely bereft of any anthropomorphic elements, describing the animals only as Lucy is able to perceive them. Hazel’s status as protagonist of the novel is temporarily interrupted as his role is reduced from a subjective to an objective one. While in Lucy’s care, not only is Hazel unable to communicate
his gratitude to her, he is seemingly unable to do anything. None of Hazel’s thoughts or actions is described in this chapter; he is only a passive object of interest to the humans. This perception of the otherwise very active character is jarring; like the passages of naturalist writing, this chapter breaks from the anthropomorphic fantasy world Adams created, returning the reader to a semblance of reality. Similar to the naturalist passages, this chapter offers a wild rabbit fact; the wise Doctor Adams assures Lucy that Hazel would not survive in a hutch: “If he couldn’t get out he’d soon die” (456). The anthropocentrism of this chapter serves a greater function than simple instruction, though; by muting the animals, Adams is reminding his readers that humans cannot understand the complexities of nonhuman lives. Placed near the end of the novel, this reminder cautions readers who are about to leave the fantastical world of Watership Down against the careless nonchalance with which humans often treat animals they do not understand, encouraging a continuation of the sense of interconnectedness that the novel inspires.

Adams further explores the pointed difference between humans and other animals through his creation and use of the Lapine language, which functions both to distance the readers from the characters, and to increase their association with them. Although the narrator kindly translates most of the rabbits’ words into English, some Lapine is left throughout the novel untranslated. The definitions of these words are often either ambiguous or not explicitly explained, such as the word hrair, which variously means one thousand, five, or simply many, the explanation being that rabbits can only count to four, and anything more than that is hrair (4). Another example is the suffix rah, which indicates a figure of authority when placed behind a name, but is translated as Lord, Prince, or Chief depending on the character it applies to—Frithrah and Threarah are Lords (165, 10), El-ahrairah is called Prince (23), and Hazel-rah is the Chief Rabbit (56). Like the Anglo-Russian slang of Anthony Burgess’ A Clockwork Orange, the
presence of Lapine words seems jarring at first, a break from the smooth flow of simple English, “provid[ing] a certain distancing ... effect” (Hutchings 38). The discomfort that these alien words produce implies an insurmountable difference between the human reader and the rabbit characters, and the idea that even anthropomorphised rabbits are this difficult to understand invites the reader to consider the difficulty we face in trying to comprehend the minds and actions of real, mute rabbits. There are some aspects of rabbit life that we simply cannot fully understand in our limited capacity outside of their species. However, by the end of the novel, a perceptive reader can easily comprehend the Lapine words by constructing an understanding of their meanings through the various contexts in which they are used. Once the reader gains some mastery over the Lapine language, he or she feels a connection with the characters, as though she or he has become a part of the group, complicit in Hazel’s daring tricks. This delayed comprehension leads to an appreciation of the words and the fact that their inability to be clearly defined in English terms does not make them unapproachable, just as our inability to fully understand the thoughts and emotions that drive rabbit behaviour does not mean we should stop studying rabbits. The better we understand them, the more easily and considerately we can coexist with them.

NATURALIST WRITING IN *WATERSHIP DOWN*

Adams’ tendency to include scientific information in his novel is evidence that he intended not only to entertain his readers, but also to educate them. At many points throughout the novel, the narrator describes real rabbit behaviour; this is usually done either to admit that the actions of the characters do not match up with natural behavioural patterns—such as when the rabbits leave their warren after only a few hours, as discussed above, or when Hazel is gnawing
on the dog’s rope, fighting instincts that tell him to run (Adams, *Watership* 432)—or to explain certain actions that do not make sense in human context. An example of the latter occurs when the narrator explains the rabbits’ reluctance to cross the Enborne River by telling us, “Like all wild animals, rabbits can swim if they have to… But most rabbits avoid swimming and certainly an exhausted rabbit could not swim the Enborne” (31). Having looked into the ethology of rabbits—that is, the study of their natural behaviour—Adams grounds his novel in scientific facts. In a few instances throughout the novel, Adams either directly quotes or paraphrases *The Private Life of the Rabbit*, citing Lockley as his source of information. Citations, especially of scientific works, are unconventional in modern fictional texts, and Adams’ use of them emphasises the novel’s hybrid identity as both adventure story and naturalist book. Although the story is much more prevalent, the behavioural notes are an essential element of *Watership Down*.

Adams reinforces Lockley’s credibility as a valuable source of knowledge about rabbits by occasionally mentioning the nature writer by name. He does this when he wants scientific backing for his claims about rabbits, either to admit to his use of anthropomorphic augmentation or to explain odd rabbit behaviour. For example, “The wise Mr Lockley has told us that wild rabbits live for two or three years. He knows everything about rabbits: but all the same, Hazel lived longer than that” (470). By invoking Lockley’s direct support and openly disregarding his observations, Adams emphasises Hazel’s extraordinary longevity. Calling Lockley “wise” and saying “He knows everything about rabbits” ensures the audience of the nature writer’s credibility, just as citing Lockley makes Adams seem more credible. The fact that Adams was asked to write the introduction for a reprinting of *The Private Life* proves that he did not extensively misrepresent Lockley’s words, offering a less biased assessment that Adams’ novel is a credible source for learning some rabbit behaviour. Any time Lockley’s name is invoked, the
audience is assured that the rabbit fact mentioned is not simply a part of Adams’ fictional world, but actually applies to real wild rabbits. The audience can be certain, for example, that “wild rabbits live for two or three years.” Adams’ integration of facts about natural rabbit behaviour into this anthropomorphic world, especially when they are backed up by a scientific book on the objective observation of rabbits, reminds the reader that his characters are not just humans depicted in the form of rabbits, but rather are humanised representations of the natural beings. As Adams says in the introduction to *The Private Life of the Rabbit*, we have to remember that “an animal is an animal and not a sort of human being dressed up” (6). Further proving that he does not want his rabbits to be “anthropomorphically maligned,” his incorporation of wild rabbit behaviour into his novel is not limited to the instances when Lockley is mentioned.

Even when Lockley’s name is not present, there are context clues through which the audience can determine the factual nature of the statement. Most prominently, the narrator’s tone becomes more distant and objective when describing wild rabbit behaviour; Selma Lanes calls it an imitation of “the Olympian, nature-observer’s tone of his mentor Lockley” (197). Another indication of factual information is the narrator’s reference to rabbits generally, rather than to a specific character; general statements do not always imply fact, however, as can be seen with the claim that “Rabbits can count up to four” (Adams, *Watership* 4). The most important quality of a rabbit fact in *Watership Down*, therefore, is that it describes the animal’s behaviour; as Onno Oerlemans says, “we can actually know almost nothing” about an animal’s mental processes (68, italics in original). Often Adams’ anthropomorphism is so tightly woven in with the ethology that it can be difficult to tell when one ends and the other begins. For example, the following sentence has elements of both: “Rabbits avoid close woodland, where the ground is shady, damp and grassless and they feel menaced by the undergrowth” (Adams, *Watership* 22). The first part
of the sentence, which describes a kind of terrain that rabbits avoid, is a statement about rabbit behaviour and is presented in a tone of objective authority that implies verity. The claim that rabbits “feel menaced by the undergrowth,” though, describes the animals’ emotional state, and is therefore an anthropomorphic projection of human emotion. Thus, Adams takes liberties in the construction of his characters, even when using the objective tone.

Further evidence that Adams took liberties when creating the rabbits of *Watership Down* is the fact that some major elements of the novel that he presents without any explanation of anthropomorphism are actually inaccurate. For example, female rabbits play a much more prominent role in reality; Lanes says that “does are at the very center of any rabbit community, a decided matriarchy” (198). She goes on to say that Adams misrepresented rabbits by having Hazel and his band of bucks leave the warren to find Watership Down, for in reality, “it is always young, dissatisfied females who initiate the founding of new colonies” (198). The sexist implications of Adams’ unrealistic projection of Western androcentric values onto rabbits are beyond the scope of this thesis,¹ but this projection is still relevant here because it emphasises the inconsistent attitude with which Adams approached the design of his characters. The novel is strongly influenced by the Greek and Roman myths *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*, both of which are very androcentric; Adams’ desire to recognisably emulate these works demanded a crew of male protagonists. Although this decision is potentially problematic from a feminist perspective, the inaccuracy of the rabbits’ gender is less condemning from an ecocritical point of view; as Battista says, “*Watership Down* is a novel about environmental resilience and animal agency. Despite its overtly patriarchal overtones, it nevertheless deserves consideration as one of the field’s inaugural ecocritical texts” (167). Adams did not claim that his novel accurately

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represented rabbit ethology; he simply wanted the novel to influence his readers to become interested in real wild rabbits and, by mentioning Lockley so often, provide a direction for further research. His inaccuracies do not negate all of the accurate statements he makes about rabbits, nor do they invalidate his hope to increase public awareness about rabbits. By identifying Hazel and the others so strongly with their natural brethren, Adams gives a voice to the previously mute wild rabbits and encourages his readers to consider the very realistic dangers that the characters face.

HUMAN INDIFFERENCE IN *WATERSHIP DOWN*

All of the different rabbits Hazel and his group encounter are being either killed or oppressed by some malign force, and this force is invariably the result of intentional human action. The two most disturbing examples of human indifference to rabbit life and wellbeing are unfortunately also the most realistic. When Hazel’s group visits Cowslip’s Warren, the audience is given a horrific account of the farming of wild rabbits from a rabbit’s perspective. Although the consequences of the warren rabbits’ altered way of living are portrayed anthropomorphically in the novel, and are therefore obviously inaccurate, they force the reader to consider the real-world consequences of human interference in an ecosystem. The description of the Sandleford Warren destruction is even more appalling than is the state of Cowslip’s; it highlights the callous indifference with which humans consider the lives of nonhuman animals and makes the reader question the ethical implications of human “progress.” Together, these examples critique human interactions with nonhuman animals, especially undomesticated animals. They suggest that humans only consider the use-value of such organisms and ignore the fact that animals have lives independent of human concern and should be able to live without undue human interference. If
any use can be made of these animals, it is; if they have no use to humans, then the moment they stop being a mere annoyance and become an inconvenience, they are eradicated. By including these graphic examples of human interactions with wild rabbits in his novel, Adams encourages his readers to sympathise with real rabbits.

Cowslip’s Warren is the first rabbit community that Hazel and his group encounter after leaving Sandleford. The warren is protected by a farmer, so generations of rabbits have not seen a predator (Adams, *Watership* 74); this fact, along with the human’s tendency to leave flayrah—rabbit delicacies such as carrots and lettuce—within easy reach of the warren (83) gives the rabbits a strong incentive to remain in the area. After a sense of security—even luxury—developed in the warren, generations before the events in the novel occur, the farmer began “snarf[ing] them—not too many: as many as he wanted and not as many as would frighten them all away or destroy the warren” (113). The rabbits could not leave the warren; they had forgotten how to survive in the world of predators, had stopped fighting even amongst themselves (79), and no longer knew how to defend themselves. By the time Hazel’s group finds them, “they pretended [to each other] that all was well” (113), living in constant fear of the snares but unable to leave the situation; this constant fear is reminiscent of that of the “overtly anti-hegemonic strain of eco-disaster stories [written] during the 1960s and early 1970s” (Latham 107). By protecting and feeding the rabbits, the farmer has irredeemably altered their ecosystem and, consequently, their entire way of living. Apart from his explanation that the warren’s rabbits do not know how to defend themselves, Adams does not explore the real-world consequences of the farmer’s selfish actions. Instead, he uses anthropomorphism to show that these rabbits’ quality of life has decreased sharply.

During their stay at the warren, the protagonists find that their hosts’ lethargic sense of
leisure, constant fear bordering on paranoia, and abandonment of traditional beliefs and values create an atmosphere that Hazel and the others find uncomfortable. These rabbits have no need for “tricks and cunning” because they do not need to avoid predators or steal flayrah, so they “forgot El-ahrairah” and the stories that were traditionally passed down through the generations (Adams, *Watership* 113). Instead, “They found out other marvelous arts.... They danced in ceremonious greeting. They sang songs like the birds and made shapes on the walls” (113).

Adams’ portrayal of this warren’s culture is cleverly ironic; all of the aspects of the warren that Hazel’s group finds discomforting are symbols of status in human culture. For example, the development and appreciation of fine arts such as poetry and visual art can imply a high social standing, as can a strict adherence to formal greetings. In the rabbit world, though, these conventions of society are foreign: “formal gestures—except between mating rabbits—were unknown to Hazel and his companions. They felt mystified and slightly ill-at ease” (70). Even the descriptions of the rabbits are human-like; for example, Cowslip is portrayed as a Western gentleman. He is described as “a big fellow, sleek and handsome. His fur shone and his claws and teeth were in perfect condition. Nevertheless, he did not seem aggressive. On the contrary, there was a curious, rather unnatural gentleness about the way in which he waited for them” (61, my emphasis). In fact, the entire warren is portrayed as “unnatural”; rabbits and humans are very different species, and cannot easily adopt each other’s ways. Human culture does not belong in rabbit society, and the discomfort that arises when the two merge is palpable the entire time Hazel is in that warren. Though these cultural developments are an anthropomorphic representation of the consequences of the farmer’s actions, they still succeed in informing the reader that farming wild rabbits disrupts their lives in ways that we cannot fully understand.

Indeed, encouraging readers to consider the effects of human actions on nonhuman lives makes
this novel a valuable resource for promoting ecological consciousness in its audience.

The reason Adams’ account of Cowslip’s Warren is so important is that it offers a perspective about the human utilisation of undomesticated animals that is unconventional but essential for the development of better human-nonhuman relations. Explained in a different manner—for example, from the point of view of the farmer—this scheme to make the wild rabbit warren a part of his farm would be seen as acceptable, perhaps even commendable, behaviour. For very little cost, the farmer has access to a steady supply of rabbit meat and skins. It is not until this utilitarian system of human stewardship is described from the rabbit’s perspective that its malignant nature becomes evident. By taking up the perspective of the rabbit, Adams is able to emphasise the immorality of this situation. His description of a rabbit caught in a snare is detailed and gory: “His body was twisted and his hind-parts and back legs still lay along the ground. His eyes were open, but his face was such a fearful mask of blood, foam, vomit and earth that he looked more like some demon-creature than a rabbit” (111). This grotesque portrayal is designed to evoke a shocked and sympathetic response from the reader and bring into question the ethics of using undomesticated animals. The farmer’s inexplicable sense of entitlement over the rabbits and his selfish manipulation of their lives for his own material gain is a prime example of the kind of apathetic liberties that humans take with the rest of the world. Despite the unflattering light in which the farmer’s scheme is portrayed, though, his is not the most inconsiderate treatment of wild rabbits that is present in the novel.

Worse than the exploitation of the rabbits in Cowslip’s Warren is the utter destruction of Sandleford Warren. Only two rabbits survive the massacre and reach Hazel’s group at Watership Down. Like with the rabbits’ perspective on farming, their description of the event at Sandleford Warren emphasises the callous nonchalance with which humans think about wild animals. The
survivors tell Hazel and the others that humans came to the warren and plugged most of the exits (151), then put hoses into the rest of the exits and pumped in a poisonous gas (152). They shot any rabbits who escaped to the surface (152), then, after all of the rabbits they could find were dead, they took a bulldozer to the field, destroying every trace of the warren (154). Adams spends two pages describing Bluebell’s desperate escape from the burrow, his avoidance of the “poisoned air” that disorients rabbits before killing them, and the fact that he was surrounded by “the most terrible sounds—cries for help, kittens squealing for their mothers ... rabbits cursing and fighting each other” (152-54). This lengthy account is followed by a pointedly brief description of the bulldozer’s role: “this thing—how can I tell you?—it tore the field to bits. It destroyed the field” (154). The graphic descriptions and horror-esque tone of the chapter portray the humans’ actions as either appallingly malicious or criminally indifferent. The dramatic irony of the situation is that the audience knows that the humans’ eradication of the rabbits is standard practice when preparing a lot for development; Adams takes the “anti-technocratic bent” of the counterculture of his time, which questioned the processes of scientific inquiry “in the service of state and corporate power” (Latham 107), and uses it microcosmically to question the ethics of land development.

After seeing pest control from the vermin’s perspective, the regularity and normalcy of the procedure becomes disturbing. Readers are meant to find the seemingly inevitable, though unintentional, truth in the statement, “Men will never rest till they’ve spoiled the earth and destroyed the animals” (149). It is a warning that, if land development procedures do not change, the removal of important ecological elements will result in a world that is uninhabitable. As Battista says, “We blatantly conceal the living world from our conscience, which allows us to dominate, expand and develop the land at our will” (163). This willful ignorance has already led
to world-wide long-term climate change, but still many people turn a blind eye to the consequences of improperly regulated land use. Despite the widely condemning sentence quoted above, *Watership Down* only deals with one minor aspect of land development—the killing or displacement of organisms that are inconveniently located. Even so, the novel manages to bring into question a deep ethical dilemma surrounding land development. The rabbits discuss possible motives for the humans’ destruction of the warren, and Bluebell thinks that the slaughter was retribution for stealing from the humans’ gardens; the response to this statement has a shaming ring of truth that makes the reader question the moral integrity of land development and our treatment of wild animals that are in the “wrong” place. Toadflax says, “That wasn’t why they destroyed the warren. It was just because we were in their way. They killed us to suit themselves” (Adams, *Watership* 155). The element of dramatic irony only augments the sense of human apathy towards other animals; the rabbits can only speculate about human actions and intentions, but the readers know better. We humans have monopolised the land, taken it for our own, and since no other animal can speak out against this practice, often the possibility that animals have any right to land is not considered. Battista explains this lack of respect for nonhuman animals: “The humans have no regard for the animals as subjects—instead they are an obstacle, a nuisance, which hinders their progress.... [H]umans perceive rabbits as inherently ‘other’; this perception is what allows the men to justifiably exterminate all living things that are in the way of their development” (164). By exposing the callous nature of extermination, Adams encourages the development of improved human-animal relations.

Adams is not naïve in his pursuit of environmental consciousness, though; he is aware that the human tendency to objectify nonhuman animals impedes a general understanding that nonhuman animals also have inherent value and should not be killed needlessly. One of his
rabbits “spoke very well about the decency and comradeship natural to animals. ‘Animals don’t behave like men,’ he said. ‘If they have to fight, they fight; and if they have to kill, they kill. But they don’t sit down and set their wits to work to devise ways of spoiling other creatures’ lives and hurting them. They have dignity and animality’” (Adams, *Watership* 235). Just as humans define themselves through their differences from animals, this rabbit defines animals as what humans are not. Adams is acknowledging the wide conceptual gap that the Western world has imagined to exist between humans and the other animals, and from this statement it becomes obvious that this gap is the fault of humans and humans alone. We are the ones who lack the dignity—the animality—to treat our fellow earthlings with the respect and decency that they deserve. *Watership Down* highlights the anthropocentrism of current Western epistemology and suggests that this view is limited and problematic. “By giving voice, agency and reason to a group of rabbit protagonists, Adams inalterably gives agency to the earth. He urges us to identify with the nonhuman world so that we might begin to transform our anthropocentric orientation into a more ethical, ecocentric perspective” (Battista 159, italics in original). Through his integration of humanising anthropomorphism and naturalising statements of fact, Adams makes his readers reassess humans’ position in the natural world and promotes a more holistic, Earth-centred mentality.

CONCLUSION

Published a decade after Carson’s internationally acclaimed *Silent Spring* brought environmental issues to the forefront of Western thought, *Watership Down* entered a world in which ecological concerns had been introduced to the general public. Adams saw the inherent value of nonhuman life and the harm that thoughtless human activity could cause it. He
recognised the error in most humans’ tendency to set themselves apart from the other animals, and the needless destruction and exploitation of animals that follows this line of thinking. Looking to question humanity’s superior status over animals, Adams humanised the previously “anthropomorphically maligned” rabbits enough that they could critique the world around them, but made sure to represent the animals as accurately as he could within the context of the novel. He did this by limiting his anthropomorphisation of the characters, having them retain many of the rabbit qualities observed by Ronald Lockley. The anthropomorphic traits of the characters drive the plot of the novel forward and help the readers relate to them; meanwhile, the naturalist passages of the novel inform the readers about the behaviour of real rabbits and some of the many dangers they face because of human interference. In particular, Adams promotes the idea that nonhuman animals have a right to live, and critiques the quickness with which we ignore this right in order to exploit their presence or take possession of their land. By creating lovable anthropomorphic rabbits and illuminating the wrongs we humans unknowingly or uncaringly inflict upon them and other animals, Adams challenges the anthropocentric human/nonhuman binary and inspires readers toward a more ecocentric point of view.
Chapter 2

The Magic of Nature: Investigating Ecological Lessons in *FernGully*

*FernGully* contains many anthropomorphic characters, but talking animals are not the extent of the fantasy in this politically charged environmental novel. Using magic realism, it criticises deforestation practices and teaches its audience about ecosystems and the interdependence of different organisms. Diana Young wrote this novel to be both entertaining and educational; in an interview, she says that *FernGully* was her attempt to “capture the magic and the enchantment of this world, and yet, at the same time, tell a story that was relevant to what was happening in the world today” (Young and Young). *FernGully* was published in Australia by Ashton Scholastic in 1992, joining a growing body of environmentally directed children’s entertainment, including television series *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* (1990-92) and picture book *Where the Forest Meets the Sea* (1987); a film based on the novel was produced by Twentieth Century Fox the same year, as was a North American edition of the novel, published by Scholastic. The film has seen much more popularity in North America than has the novel, due largely to the limited number of copies printed and the greater availability of the animated version. The film was shown at the United Nations Earth Summit in the summer of 1992 because its message was considered to be of global importance (Smith and Parsons 27), and the United Nations presented Young with a One Earth Award for it (Henkel 14); much of its success centres on the fact that it manages to present current environmental issues in a way that is accessible to children. Despite the wider popularity and success of the *FernGully* film, I will be focussing on the novel for my analysis. I will be doing so because the novel presents all of the environmental lessons that are present in the film, often in greater detail, and also includes some other ecological messages that were not included in Twentieth Century Fox’s animated
Before I begin my analysis of *FernGully*, I will give a cursory explanation of the main characters and their roles in the novel. The protagonist, Crysta, is a rebellious young fairy who prefers having fun over being responsible. She is a student of magic, and her lessons provide the reader with an understanding of both the fictional world Young has created and many of the ecological messages present in the novel. Her instructor is Magi Lune, an ancient, knowledgeable fairy. Magi is a protective spirit of the rainforest, and she teaches Crysta how to replace her in that role before she dies. Together, Crysta and Magi Lune represent nature, symbolising its extraordinary longevity and power to survive as well as the fact that it is constantly changing and adapting. Crysta is not only a vessel for exposition and a representation of nature; she is also what Lori Campbell calls a “porter,” a character who allows a non-magical human character to enter into an otherwise inaccessible magical world (7). The human whom she brings to FernGully is an Australian named Zak. Zak represents the human potential to understand nature and learn to protect it; he works for a logging company when Crysta first meets him and is ignorant of the rainforest’s biodiversity and the innumerable organisms whose lives he is endangering by cutting down the trees. As a human who is introduced into this magical world *in medias res*, Zak is the character with whom the reader is meant to identify; the reader’s environmental knowledge is meant to develop as does Zak’s. While he is in FernGully, he learns how important the rainforest is and ultimately helps Crysta prevent its destruction. The two characters who enable Zak to stop the loggers are Pips and Batty Koda. Pips is an elf with a love for harmonious music, which represents a well-functioning ecosystem. Like the other elves and fairies of FernGully, he is a symbol for the fairylore, which dictates acceptable actions for the various species. Similar to Frith in *Watership Down*, the elves and fairies determine and
enforce the “natural laws” by which the nonhuman organisms of FernGully live. Batty Koda is a fruit bat upon whom human scientists conducted tests and implanted technology. His jaded view of humans and stories of his experiences depict human behaviour toward nonhuman animals as cruel and dangerous. The final character of note in the novel is the villain, Hexxus, an oily, smoky personification of death and destruction. Representing many human-caused environmental issues—including deforestation, pollution, and climate change—Hexxus nearly destroys FernGully before he is stopped.

A long-time environmental activist (Smith and Parsons 27), Young followed activist strategies in writing this novel. Environmental activism is founded upon efforts to halt excessive resource extraction; the “first successful global environmental campaign” was the prevention of the hunting of whales for their oil (Epstein 47). In rallying the support of the general public, activists selectively published scientific studies that helped their cause and emphasised the importance of these studies in the media, “cultivating a picture of grave threat incurred by all whale species” (56). The production of knowledge and selective presentation of that knowledge to the public is the means by which activist groups garnered political power (56). Although it is not reliant on scientific sources, Young’s novel presents an exaggeratedly negative portrayal of the forestry industry and mechanistic pollutants to the same end as the activists’ selective publications: to evoke a strong response from the audience, leading to a public outcry against resource extraction. Young’s attack on technology is not indicative of a rejection of all scientific advancement, though; indeed, science has always been important to activist movements, for it underlies the need for change (55). The science of ecology is fundamental to Young’s message. Even so, she still manages to polarise humans and technology with natural processes by presenting ecology as a magical force of nature rather than a discipline of human study. In fact,
she exaggerates humans’ lack of ecological understanding by introducing the ignorant Zak into the nonhuman world of FernGully. Only through the use of magic—the “gift of fairy sight” (Young 33)—is Zak able to understand the complex interactions that constantly surround him. His initial ignorance gives Young the opportunity to explicitly present ecological lessons, and his gradual comprehension of the importance of ecological sustainability provides a glimmer of hope that humans will stop their entitled exploitation of the Earth if they are educated, shown the error of their ways.

My analysis of *FernGully* will explore three different aspects of the story. I will begin by examining Young’s integration of fantastical characters and events into a contemporary, realistic setting. Zak’s references to elements of contemporary popular culture, such as Christmas and his Walkman, place the setting of the story on Earth in the 1980s or early ’90s, around when the story was published. Despite the realism of the setting, though, the presence of fairies and elves in the story and the magic that they use plant it firmly in the fantasy genre. Like *Watership Down*, Young’s novel also includes anthropomorphic representations of animals—and even plants—who are able to speak to one another, and who have other various human traits, which helps familiarise the audience with the various organisms, many of which are obscure to the average North American reader; she also includes anthropomorphic representations of abstract concepts that make them more easily comprehensible. The second main focus of this chapter is on the clear ecological messages dispersed throughout *FernGully*. These include the lessons that everything is interconnected, humans should not interfere in nonhuman processes, and resource extraction—in particular, deforestation—is not worth the damage that it causes to ecosystems. The third and final major point of exploration in this chapter is of the ways in which Young presents human technology and the implications that this representation has for the novel’s
audience. Most of the examples of technology present in *FernGully*—the oily spills in the rainforest, the experimentations that Batty Koda has endured, and the Leveller—are presented negatively, advocating for change in human conduct. As Sigler says, Young “use[s] fairies and elves to communicate information about natural history as well as to address ecological issues such as the destruction of the rainforest and cruelty to animals” (151). By exploring these aspects of *FernGully*, I will show that this novel has a powerfully positive environmental message.

**YOUNG’S INTEGRATION OF REALISM AND FANTASY**

The fantastical elements of *FernGully* are made evident to the reader immediately. In the opening chapter, Crysta is introduced as a fairy (Young 1). She interacts with a rainbow lorikeet, which is a species of Australian parrot, who challenges her to a race (2). Thus, in the first few pages of the novel, Young establishes the presence of magical beings such as fairies and elves, and also introduces the anthropomorphic manner in which the nonhuman characters communicate with each other by speaking English. The fact that this magical rainforest is actually on Earth is not made apparent until much later, though. Although Zak’s calling Batty Koda “Batman” (56) could be a reference to the comic-book hero, the first definite reference to our reality is when Zak identifies his stereo as a Walkman (86), over half way through the novel. This idea is reaffirmed near the end of the novel when Zak remembers a “candle-lit Christmas service he’d once gone to as a child” (110). After the rainforest’s presence on Earth is established, the reader can easily narrow its location down to Australia by recognising the fact that many of the animal species mentioned in the novel—such as the pademelon (36) and the platypus (16)—are famous for their presence on that continent, and by the inclusion of Mount Warning in the setting.
FernGully’s presence on Earth, and particularly in the Australian rainforest, is essential to the impact of the novel’s message. FernGully itself is a fictional place, but although Mount Warning sounds like a fictitious name—and not even a very creative one—it is an actual mountain in Australia. FernGully is based on the rainforests that surround it, particularly the Byron Bay forest (Kahlenberg; Smith and Parsons 27). According to Michelle Smith and Elizabeth Parsons, “FernGully was ... expressly motivated by Diana Young’s environmental activism and the fairy story in the film was followed by a real-world battle to save the rainforest near Byron Bay on the east coast of Australia where Young had set, conceived and written the book” (27). In an interview, Young explained that their motivations were not limited to the Australian rainforest: “Their driving ambition, she said, was to keep the rain forest from being destroyed—back in her home country, or up in our [American] Pacific Northwest, or in Brazil or anywhere” (Kahlenberg n. pag.). There is no doubt that the Australian rainforest is the one most strongly represented in FernGully, though; Young scratches the surface of the impressive biodiversity in the Byron Bay area by mentioning over eighty distinct species of organism in her one hundred thirty page novel. This vast assortment of organisms is largely made up of minor characters, unnecessary for the novel’s plot; thus, they, along with the descriptions that often accompany them, are present simply for educational purposes.

An example of an unnecessarily well-described minor character occurs when Potsy the potoroo is introduced: “A long-nosed potoroo slowly hopped out of his burrow, looking more like a mouse than anything else—except his nose was much longer” (Young 4). The potoroo’s presence in the novel is brief, but the physical and behavioural descriptions that accompany him make him a memorable character. To reinforce his description, the end of the chapter includes a drawn picture of a potoroo, with a caption that repeats the sentence quoted above (6). There are
eight illustrations throughout the novel, which do not, in themselves, breach the conventions of a
caracter’s novel. Unconventionally, though, the illustrations do not depict the main characters or
the setting; only minor animal characters are portrayed. No humans are shown, nor is Hexxus or
any of the fairies; even Batty Koda, the highly anthropomorphised fruit bat, is absent from the
pictures. Instead, the drawings portray peripheral characters, one of whom—Al, the lyrebird—is
only present in the novel for a single sentence (31). This focus on minor characters, evident
through both written descriptions and illustrations, is meant to increase the audience’s
knowledge base about organisms in the rainforest, thereby encouraging readers to sympathise
with them. By setting this story on Earth and describing real animals, Young is able to inform
young readers about the consequences of some of the environmental issues that are present in the
world today, such as clear-cutting and pollution.

Although *FernGully*’s terrestrial setting and descriptions of real organisms are important
for ensuring that readers realise the real-world relevance of the ecological lessons strewn
throughout the novel, its fantastical elements allow these lessons to be presented in a way that
keeps young readers engaged. As was mentioned in my introduction, Burke and Copenhaver say
that children are often aware of contemporary world issues and can think seriously about them
(210), but only if they are interested in the problems. Anthropomorphism is a useful tool for
grabbing the interest of young readers because it makes the learning process interesting and fun,
rather than boring or frightening. Young makes good use of the trope; most of the organisms
mentioned in the novel are anthropomorphised to some degree. Although the fungi, lichen, vines,
and mosses that appear throughout the novel are given no human qualities, most of the animals
that Crysta comes across speak to her. Even some of the trees of *FernGully* are able to speak
(44), and those that cannot are still able to feel pain in a way that organisms without a nervous
system should not be able to (78, 102). One particular tree—Little Hoop, the one that Crysta is
given specific instructions to take care of—is even described as being “happy” at the end of the
novel (128). Anthropomorphisation allows a young reader to more easily identify with organisms
that “may not be familiar to the child” (Markowsky 460). By giving the hundreds of animals and
trees that make up FernGully human characteristics that children can recognise, Young
encourages young readers to sympathise with them; this sympathy for the creatures of FernGully
increases reader interest, and makes the audience more susceptible to learning the ecological
lessons that Young wrote into this story.

Not all of the animals of FernGully are anthropomorphised, though; the two most notable
exceptions are the Beetle Boys’ beetles and the brush turkey. The staghorn beetles that the Beetle
Boys ride are not described as having any distinctly human qualities; they are not given any
beetle-like qualities either, though. Instead, they are depicted as a strange combination of
motorcycle and horse. The rogue elves and their mounts are introduced when “the sound of the
Beetle Boys kick-starting their noisy staghorn beetles pierced the quiet of the forest” (16); the
kick-start is a distinctive quality of motorcycles, as is the loudness. When Zak rides one of the
beetles, though, it is described as “a bad-tempered bug with a mind of its own” (87), associating
it with an unruly steed. The beetles are the most domesticated animals in FernGully, and the
healthy symbiotic relationship that the Beetle Boys have with them is an indication that even
rowdy, rambunctious people can care about animals. The brush turkey, on the other hand, is not
closely associated with any other organism in the rainforest. He is first introduced when Crysta
sees him “scratch[ing] in the soil to build a high dirt mound for his nest” (3); he toils silently and
alone. His only other appearance in the novel is when Zak sets his nest on fire, endangering his
eggs (67-68); still silent, he hurriedly “scatter[s] the glowing embers in all directions” (68)
without even a reprimand for the human. In a forest full of verbose organisms, the mute turkey’s presence stands out as a glimpse of real nature, unable to communicate its thoughts to the human.

Although FernGully contains many different organisms, both anthropomorphised and not, the novel centres on non-animal characters; both the hero and the villain of FernGully are anthropomorphic representations of abstract concepts, and their opposed worldviews and actions throughout the novel help to teach readers about ecology and the dangers of pollution. Crysta—along with Magi Lune and, to a lesser extent, the other fairies and elves of FernGully—represents the force of nature in the rainforest; that is, she and the others represent the nonphysical elements of an ecosystem, such as the interconnectedness of different organisms and the resilience of life and its ability to adapt and survive even in hostile conditions, that are so difficult for humans to understand. In the novel, they are called “the guardians of [the] forest” (110), and they protect FernGully from any danger that threatens it. One aspect of this role is the creation and enforcement of a set of laws, which are collectively known as “fairylore” (27-28). Like the rules that Frith dictates in the rabbits’ stories in Watership Down, these laws seem to have been put in place to keep the ecosystem under control; thus, the fairies enforce “natural” behaviour in the rainforest, ensuring that each species engages in appropriate activities. For example, Crysta is warned that she must “leave skylarking to the birds” (28), or else “she loses her wings” (27); clearly skylarking is not an acceptable practice for a fairy. The other major instance of fairy guardianship in FernGully is the battle against Hexxus. The fact that Crysta is the one to defeat Hexxus, rather than Zak, the human, is significant because it implies that nature is an active agent and can purge itself of the damage that humans have caused if it is given the opportunity.

Hexxus, the main villain in the novel, is also an anthropomorphic manifestation of
abstract concepts that are too complex for people to easily comprehend. He is described as “the spirit of destruction” (10); his initial function in the world was “to get rid of the old to make way for the new” (10), which is an essential element of evolution and the survival of life on Earth. He was corrupted by power, though, and now seeks “to end all life” (10, italics in original). Hexxus was trapped in a tree by Magi Lune eons before, and she says “there isn’t a force in nature that could release [him]” (11). The human logging crew provides an “unnatural” force (91, italics in original), though, and Hexxus manages to escape when his tree is cut down for lumber. Once he is freed, he feeds on the exhaust and oils of the humans’ Leveller, taking shape as a poisonous cloud of smoke (122). His gaseous fossil fuel body represents pollution, and his ability to change the weather (5) is a clear indicator that he also represents the destructive potential of human-induced climate change. This depiction of pollution and climate change as a malicious, fast-acting physical being is particularly effective because it succeeds in introducing a sense of urgency in preventing the damage that they cause; both pollution and climate change cause visible damage very slowly, and an accurate representation of them would likely not instill the fear in the novel’s readers necessary for them to realise the need for change. Even now, many people doubt the reality of climate change because the changes are so gradual and, currently, so slight that they are difficult to perceive. Rob Nixon addresses the challenge environmentalists face in communicating the urgent need for such gradual processes to be stopped: “In an age when the media venerate the spectacular ... a central question is strategic and representational: how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making ... disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world?” (3). Young offers a solution to the problem; like the exaggerated effects of pollutants in Carson’s “A Fable for Tomorrow,” Hexxus provides a
condensed perspective on these real environmental issues that elucidates them, making them accessible to everyone.

The integration of fantasy and realism in Young’s novel provides the escapism that many readers seek while still addressing real-world issues. By setting the magical FernGully alongside Mount Warning of Australia and by having fairies and elves combat contemporary environmental crises such as deforestation and pollution, Young depicts an interesting and engaging world in which environmental awareness is essential for survival. The ecological lessons present in FernGully are not limited to an introduction of some of the harm that humans can cause in ecosystems; they also include a rudimentary explanation of the interdependence of organisms in an ecosystem.

ECOLOGICAL LESSONS IN FERNGULLY

Ecology is a difficult science that attempts to account for an organism’s relationships both with other organisms and with the inorganic environment (Odum and Barrett 2); its intricacies are far too complex for the children who read FernGully to fully comprehend. The basic fundamental rules that have been discovered by ecologists, however, are simple enough that they can be understood even by young readers, and Young presents many of them throughout her novel. The most explicit ecological lesson that Young provides in FernGully is the fact that “everything in creation is connected to everything else” (Young 22); this statement is almost a direct quotation from The Closing Circle, a book written by oft-cited biologist and ecologist Barry Commoner. The similarity between the statements in FernGully and an ecological text validate Young’s credibility. She approaches this lesson of interconnectivity both directly and through the use of metaphor. Another ecological message present in the novel is a
warning that human knowledge about nonhuman processes is imperfect, so most human interference of nonhuman organisms is more harmful than helpful. A third lesson also promotes the idea that nonhuman environments should be left alone; this lesson teaches readers that resource extraction is not worth the destruction of ecosystems. These ecological messages are central to the novel and are the elements that make the story memorable.

The concept that “everything is connected to everything else” is the first of what Commoner calls the “laws of ecology” (33). It “reflects the existence of the elaborate network of interconnections ... among different living organisms, and between populations, species, and individual organisms and their physico-chemical surroundings” (33). The most obvious instance of this statement in FernGully is when Magi Lune tells Crysta that “From the solar system to our own planet, right down to this forest and into a tiny seed, everything in creation is connected to everything else” (Young 22), but this statement is not the only instance of the law in the novel; some examples of complex interconnections are given throughout it to help explain to the reader what the statement means. While trying to describe this reality to Zak, for example, “Crysta gently shook the branch of a nearby walking stick palm and showed him what she meant. As the tree swayed, a baby bird flapped out of it, dropping the seed it was eating,” and she explains to him that “that’s what happens when something is disturbed. It affects something else” (79). She then gives a hyperbolical explanation of what would happen if a tree, a flowering brush box, were to die: “If that one single tree died, it would affect us all. No more seeds, no more flowers, no more pollen, no more bees, no more birds” (79). These explicit examples of organisms’ interdependence provide readers with direct evidence of the fact that everything is interconnected, allowing them to easily understand the concept.

There is a sense throughout the novel that humans have lost the knowledge of this
interconnectivity—that the other entities understand the dependence that each one has on the others, but humans need to be reminded. For example, after Crysta asks a goanna not to eat Zak, the lizard complains that he “ha[s] to eat somebody” (56, italics in original), a short statement that is deceptively substantial. The goanna’s admittance that its food consists of other living organisms acknowledges the fact that death is a part of life; animals need to consume other organisms to survive because they are a part of a cycle of organic nutrients. Even plants depend on the nutrients that enter the soil from “the decay of plant matter and animal wastes” (Commoner 24). The goanna’s use of the word “somebody” rather than “something” is significant because it implies a close relationship between the animal and its potential meal. The two organisms are aware of each other and of the role each plays in the ecosystem. This awareness is particularly enlightening in a modern Western context because it contrasts so sharply with the Western tendency to intentionally distance consumers from the origins of the products they purchase. Young readers might not even be aware that the plastic-wrapped meat they consume was once part of an animal. This distance between consumer and consumed is just one more way in which humanity has constructed an imaginary barrier between itself and other organisms, but statements like the goanna’s challenge these barriers by promoting ecological knowledge.

Young further deconstructs the argument that humans are inherently different from other organisms through Crysta’s explanations of interconnectivity to Zak. When she first tries to explain to him how she is able to feel a tree’s pain, she says, “Well, the same way I feel my own nose, or the tip of my toes. I feel it because it is a part of me” (Young 79). Zak’s response is that, since he is a human rather than a fairy, the tree is not a part of him. He is mocked by Batty Koda for this statement, and Crysta explains to him that her connection to the tree is not dependent on
the fact that she is a fairy; rather, she can feel it because “everything living [is] part of everything else” (79). Despite his skepticism, she assures him that he is “a part of everything, too” (80). Since he is the human of the story with whom the audience is supposed to identify, readers are meant to understand that they, too, are “a part of everything”; humans are active agents in their ecosystems, not just isolated entities surrounded by an indifferent environment. This concept combats what Donna Haraway calls “the culturally normal fantasy of human exceptionalism. This is the premise that humanity alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies” (11). Although Zak is not able to feel a tree’s pain until much later in the novel (Young 102), he takes this lesson to heart and begins to pay more attention to the forest inhabitants’ many interactions. To metaphorically represent his harmony with the other organisms of the rainforest, Zak makes music with them: “Zak discovered a set of bright red toadstools and decided they would make a great drum kit. He began to rap out a rhythm. He listened to the frogs croak and kept in time with them. A blue freshwater crayfish scrambled out of the creek and joined in, playing percussion with its massive front pincers” (80). Zak’s inclusion in the harmony of the forest implies that he is acknowledging his role in the ecosystem as one part of a greater whole.

The use of harmonious music produced by a variety of species working together as a metaphor for a smoothly functioning ecosystem is common throughout FernGully. For example, shortly after a few elves start playing their instruments, “Hundreds of birds had gathered around them and they were all singing and flapping along with the music” (31). Even “A crowd of frogs ... was croaking to the beat, and Al, a lyrebird, was mimicking all the sounds” (31). This raucous yet harmonious display is representative of the chaotic yet orchestral manner in which real organisms interact. The complex interrelationships that exist between all of the different
organisms of a rainforest are too complicated to be understood by most people who read *FernGully*; the music metaphor is successful because most readers will be at least conceptually familiar with orchestras, wherein dozens of different musicians play many different instruments, yet are able to produce euphonic melodies. Despite the playful simplicity of the scene, the friendliness and unity among the various species implies a harmony that exists beyond the creation of music, permeating the different organisms’ interrelationships. The fact that the musical session is led by elves, the guardians and law-makers of the rainforest, implies that this state of consonance among the species is desirable in the forest and is necessary for the continuation of a healthy ecosystem.

Perhaps the most important example of music metaphorically representing interconnectivity in the novel occurs when Zak is introduced to the fairies and elves of *FernGully*. The discovery of Zak’s Walkman and the human music that it emits causes mixed reactions from the magical crowd. When they first hear the “loud roar of music that blasted out of the headphones” (86), the initial reaction is a protesting complaint from the older generation of elves that the “noise” the Walkman is making “is not music” (86, italics in original). This statement seems to echo the sentiment that human music, which represents culture, cannot be reconciled with the music of the rainforest, which represents nature. After a few moments, though, some of the younger fairies start to dance, and eventually even those elves who had at first opposed the human’s music “tapped their toes” (86). This reconciliation of culture with nature is reminiscent of Haraway’s natureculture concept, wherein culture and nature differ only in the inclusion or exclusion of humans. Natureculture, then, is a term that describes both human and nonhuman social construction. The natureculture of *FernGully* includes relationships between many different nonhuman organisms, so the music that they make has organic origins.
Zak’s music is heavily dependent upon technology; not only was the song initially played on synthetically manufactured instruments, but the version that the fairies and elves hear is a recording, a concept that is entirely foreign to them (86). Nonetheless, the magical entities dance to the stereo’s music, thereby accepting this aspect of human natureculture into the rainforest. This acceptance is a further reassurance that humans, too, are connected to everything else, and it suggests the possibility that humans could exist in an ecosystem without disrupting it, if proper care is taken.

The interconnectivity of everything in an ecosystem is not the only ecological lesson that Young provides in her novel; another is the fact that human control over nonhuman processes is often misguided and harmful. This ecological sentiment is also shared by Commoner, who insists that “any major man-made change in a natural system is likely to be detrimental to that system,” despite the human tendency to believe that technology is superior to biology and that synthetic materials can be used as substitutes that “improve on nature” (41, italics in original). The truth of this notion is demonstrated via Crysta’s struggles while attempting to care for Little Hoop, the tree. Although Crysta is not human and in many instances in the novel is a paragon of the lessons Young is trying to teach, her intentional interference and fumbling arrogance in approaching this task are representative of human agency and our inclination toward blind confidence in our knowledge of what is proper. When Crysta first plants the seed of the hoop pine, she wants “Little Hoop to grow into the tallest tree in Sleepy Hollow,” which is the section of forest in which she plants it (Young 25). Confident in her knowledge that a tree’s worth is proportionate to its height, she uses magic to help Little Hoop grow. Seeing the tree at its full height horrifies her, however: “when she saw Little Hoop, she knew that there was something dreadfully wrong. The tree had grown very tall—it was already taller than any other tree in Sleepy Hollow—but it
was as thin as a twig. Crysta knew at a glance that it was about to topple over” (93). It is not until she sees the consequences of her actions and the danger in which she put the tree that she realises her mistake; there is more to a tree than height. As with many instances of human interference with natural processes, the miscalculation and resulting consequences are not realised until after they become visible. Unlike human errors, though, Crysta’s is able to be corrected.

Since Crysta is a magical being, Little Hoop’s condition is not permanent and she is able to try guiding it again. She apologises to the tree and says, “I don’t care how tall you grow. I just want you to be the strongest tree in the forest,” after which she hears “a sigh of relief from Little Hoop” (93, italics in original). The tree’s relief is short-lived, however; when Crysta next sees it, it “had completely changed shape. It was no longer tall, but very short, more like a squashed bush than a tree, its needles hanging in limp clusters at the top of its strong, stubby branches. It looked so sad that Crysta felt like crying” (103). Yet again, Crysta believed that she knew what was best for the tree, but yet again she was mistaken, with dire consequences. The fact that her dictation of the tree’s growth is repeatedly harmful emphasises the problems of ignorant interference with processes that are not fully understood; in the Sleepy Hollow scenes, Young “invoke[s] the radicalized biocentric [philosophy] posed by ... ecocritics that resists human domination and control” (Sigler 151). It is not until she stops telling the tree how to grow and says instead, “I don’t care what you look like. I just want you to be happy” (Young 103), that it is able to grow as it should have all along. At the end of the novel, Little Hoop is “bristling with life. It hadn’t grown into the tallest tree, and it didn’t look very strong, but it was certainly one of the happiest-looking trees in the forest” (128). Thus Young, like Commoner, promotes the idea that “nature knows best” (Commoner 41), and shows that a tree left to grow on its own will become its best, or “happiest,” self. Since human knowledge of other organisms is imperfect, it is
almost certain that any human-driven alteration to an organism’s body or environment will have an unforeseen detrimental effect. Therefore, humans should make an effort to leave ecosystems unaffected whenever possible.

The third ecological lesson in *FernGully* worthy of note is perhaps the most important environmental message in the entire novel: the gain of resources is not worth the cost of cutting down the rainforest. The dissemination of this message was the driving force behind the publication of this novel (Kahlenberg n. pag.), and the consequences of resource extraction are central to its plot. In making its way to FernGully, the humans’ cutting machine, the Leveller, kills “hundreds of forest creatures” (Young 121) and what must be thousands of trees. The humans employ a clear-cut method, so where there used to be “dense forest, all that was left was a vast plain of tree stumps stretching to the horizon” (105). Clear-cutting is the most harmful kind of logging, because rather than merely altering an area of land, as selective logging does, clear-cutting utterly destroys the ecosystem. As Crysta explains to Zak, “The trees make a lot of rain.... And the rain makes everything grow. Without the rain, there wouldn’t be a rainforest, and if there wasn’t a rainforest none of us would be here” (80-1). The removal of the trees will cause a decrease in the amount of rain in the forest, and the organisms who depend upon a high level of precipitation for survival will have to either leave the forest or perish. Soon afterward, any forms of life that depend upon these organisms will face the same fate. Eventually, the entire ecosystem will shift, and it will take a long time to settle into a new sustainable cycle. More importantly, none of the diverse characters that appear in the novel will be able to survive. By introducing the audience to eighty distinct species and giving many of them a voice, Young appeals to the audience’s emotions and wants readers to care about the rainforest and its inhabitants. Having a logging crew threaten to destroy them is meant to promote activism against deforestation.
Although the destruction of the rainforest and all of the life it comprises is a hefty price for the production of lumber, it is not the only cost present in the novel. Another costly component of the Leveller’s resource reaping, which is arguably even more devastating than the rainforest’s demise, is the release of Hexxus. Smith and Parsons express displeasure about the fact that Hexxus is the main antagonist in the novel. They argue that Hexxus’ role as the villain is “antithetical to environmentalism” because it takes the onus of the forest’s destruction away from the humans and puts it onto a “supernatural [force] of nature” (26). They suggest that even though Hexxus is “unleashed by humans greedily consuming natural resources ... the blame is still shifted away from human run corporations and governments in terms of the direct cause of environmental disaster” because “The immediate damage ensues from [the] supernatural entity” (27). Smith and Parsons’ reading neglects the allegorical interpretation of Hexxus as a representative of human-caused pollution and climate change, though. Scientists have linked deforestation to climate change since the early 1990s (Shukra, Nobre, and Sellers 1322), so Hexxus exists as a direct result of human activity; thus, his presence in the novel does not absolve the humans, or the logging company that employs them, of guilt. By clear-cutting the rainforest, the humans are responsible for propagating the effects of climate change.

Since human action is largely to blame for recent alterations in global climatic patterns, human self-regulation is required to prevent further changes to the ecosphere—in other words, to prevent Hexxus from spreading and growing. Young assures the audience that humans need to play their part to help defeat climate change; during Hexxus’ final assault against the fairies of FernGully, Zak manages to turn the Leveller off, and Hexxus begins to panic because “his fuel supply had evaporated” (122). After he can no longer replenish his excreted toxins from the Leveller’s exhaust, he has to “inhale[e] his own angry billowing fumes” (122) to continue
growing. His efforts are futile, though, and Crysta is able to defeat him by trapping him inside a tree (123-4). The allegorical implications of this battle are worthy of an explicit restatement: once the Leveller (deforestation and humanity’s use of fossil fuels) is shut off by Zak (humanity), Crysta (nature) is able to stop Hexxus (pollution and human-induced climate change) on her own by trapping his body (excess carbon dioxide) in a tree (which absorbs carbon dioxide and excretes oxygen). Even though it was Crysta who dealt Hexxus the final blow, the elves and fairies of FernGully agree that “without Zak they wouldn’t have had a chance” at defeating him (126). With this statement, Young is informing her young readers that if we do not reduce our use of fossil fuels and other harmful substances, the whole world is in danger. It is not too late to fix the problem, though; if we stop using pollution-dependent technology, natural processes will be able to disperse the toxins already in the ecosystem, and in time the world will stabilise again. This message echoes Commoner’s insistence that humanity has a “need for social changes” (293) because “the way in which we now live on the earth is driving its thin, life-supporting skin, and ourselves with it, to destruction” (14), but that changing this environmentally damaging lifestyle will prevent the ecological crisis from making the Earth uninhabitable for humans (217). Like Commoner, Young puts most of the blame for FernGully’s crisis on the humans’ use of technology.

TECHNOLOGY IN FERNGULLY

Human technology in FernGully is almost always perceived by the characters to be harmful. Its presence in the novel as a malign force is a blatant critique of human uses of technology in reality. Although Hexxus is also a source of suffering and death in the text, he is an allegorical representation of the dangers of pollution, and does not have a real-world
counterpart; the human technologies that Crysta and the others encounter, however, are familiar enough that they are easily recognisable as depictions of actual human technology. Indeed, the “waste” materials with which the humans pollute the rainforest are realistic residues of human presence. The antennae that are attached to Batty Koda’s head and the scientific experiments that he says were performed on him are unrealistic, but are clearly an exaggerated representation of the tests to which many animals are subject in the human pursuit of knowledge. Similarly, the Leveller is a hyperbolic amalgamation of all of the various machines required by a logging outfit. Each of these examples of technology is displayed in a negative light, giving a sense that the presence of human technology is never beneficial for the nonhuman world.

In *FernGully*, Young demonstrates the fact that materials humans consider waste, those that have lost their value to humans and can therefore be discarded, can be harmful to nonhuman organisms when they are disposed of improperly. This sentiment is another that Commoner touches on; he explains how the introduction of foreign substances into an ecosystem can have unforeseen devastating effects. He describes the movement of discarded household mercury to show how it can be harmful to animals, and even to humans (40). Although not as scientifically descriptive, Young also addresses the effects that harmful substances can have on an otherwise stable ecosystem. The first indication that humans have allowed oil to spill in the rainforest is when Pips, a FernGully elf, sees “little rainbows glistening on the water” of a creek (Young 77). He thinks that “It looked as though someone had shredded a rainbow and scattered it about” (77). Although the fact that this chromatic effect is caused by oil is not mentioned at this point in the novel, it is easily recognisable by readers familiar with spilled oil; for readers less experienced, the oil’s presence is described later and the connection can be made. By describing the oil spill as a shredded rainbow, Young appeals to young readers’ emotions by metaphorically destroying a
wondrous natural phenomenon, and implying a threat to other, more tangible aspects of nature. Later, the human, Zak, sees “many dead fish floating downstream,” and knows that their deaths were caused by oil (106); the deaths are an example of the destruction threatened by the rainbow imagery.

The inhabitants of FernGully are not oblivious to the fact that the introduction of foreign materials into the ecosystem could disrupt the balanced ecological cycle; when Zak drops a piece of plastic that had been wrapped around a sandwich, Crysta “pick[s] up the plastic and examin[es] it closely” (Young 81). After deciding that it does not belong on the forest floor, “She stuff[s] it into her pouch for safekeeping” (81). Only the humans seem to be either unaware or uncaring of the effects that foreign substances can have on the rainforest. Zak’s discarding of the wrapper onto the forest floor is so casual, so thoughtless, that the action is not even mentioned in the novel; only the fact that Crysta picks it up indicates that he drops it. The elves are also concerned when they discover Zak’s Walkman lying in the forest; they recognise that it does not belong and bring it back to FernGully to figure out what to do with it (77). The humans, though, cannot help but be aware of the “thick, black oil ... [that] spilled from the machine [they] were using to cut down the trees” (64), but they are either unaware of the harm they are causing or do not care that they are endangering the organisms that live in the rainforest. This nonchalant attitude toward the introduction of foreign elements into an ecosystem, thereby upsetting its balance, is problematic and is indicative of a general lack of concern for nonhuman organisms.

This indifference toward the nonhuman is exemplified most strongly in the novel by the experiments that humans have conducted upon Batty Koda. When Crysta first meets him, he has “two antennae, one sticking out of either side of his bald head,” which, when they connect, cause him to “speak in such a garbled way that no-one understood a word he said” (Young 34).
Although the implications of experimentation that the antennae provide are horrendous in themselves, this unfortunate headgear is only the most visible result of the scientists’ tampering, not the most damaging. Batty describes the trials that he has had to endure at the hands of humans:

I’m a freak from a labora-tree[…]

I’ve been brain-fried, electro-wired,
Infected and injected and terrified.
I’ve been flatlined and disconnected,
Mummified and resurrected.[…]
I’ve been bent out of whack and immunised,
Polarised and sterilised…
Hypnotised and humanised… (35-6)

Although the physical effects of the experimentation seem to be limited to a tendency to fly into trees and an occasional spark from his antennae, it is clear from his dialogue that his mental state has also been affected. He addresses issues such as creationism and evolution (35), a concept that seems from the other inhabitants’ confusion to be foreign in the rainforest. Other scientific turns of phrase in his speech, such as “Sonic interference” (40) and “I’d rather gargle plutonium” (56), appear throughout the novel; it is obvious that his experience in the laboratory has caused permanent damage to both his body and his mind. As he tells Crysta when warning her to stay away from humans, “I wasn’t born with this stuff sticking out of my head. Nature didn’t do this to me” (40). He rightfully blames humans for what was done to him, and is prejudiced against all of them, including Zak; on first seeing the boy, he tries to convince Crysta to “Kill it” (53), significantly using the gender-neutral pronoun to objectify Zak just as he was objectified by the
Even a young reader might recognise that Batty is a representative of the myriad nonhuman animals on which human scientists conduct experiments to research the effects that certain products or conditions can have on living beings. Animal testing is still a very controversial issue, and Young seems to be one of many voices calling for the abolishment of the practice. Although people have been working to prevent animal cruelty for a long time and the first SPCA was founded almost two centuries ago (Vint 89), the first “Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes” was not created until 1969 (Australia 1). Even though there are currently “over 7,000 organizations [advocating for the humane treatment of animals] in the U.S. alone” (Silberman 163), research on animals has not yet been abolished, and the laws that have been passed to create standardised humane practices in research laboratories are not always strictly enforced (166). Thus, Batty Koda serves as more than simple comic relief; he is also a lovable character who has been mistreated in the past by human scientists, and the descriptions of his hardships are an emotional appeal to readers that attempts to convince them that animal testing is inhumane and should be abolished.

The final example of human technology in *FernGully* worthy of note is, of course, the devastating Leveller. The Leveller is a potent machine that is so destructively efficient that it is considered an “unnatural force” (5) strong enough to rival Magi Lune. The Leveller is not a real machine; it is an exaggerated example of resource extraction technology. Young explains its presence in the novel by having it described as a prototype that is “being tested out in the rainforest” (116). According to Zak,

> The Leveller was an extremely efficient machine. It could level whole sections of the forest in less time than it took dozens of [other] machines to do the same job.... It was
built to chop, cut, saw and stack timber as it crawled along on its wide caterpillar tyres.

And it could travel through any terrain at a surprisingly fast speed for its gigantic size....

Everyone who’d worked with it agreed that its performance was faultless. (116)

Although the Leveller has hyperbolically destructive capabilities, it is not anthropomorphised. It is not a malicious entity intentionally destroying the forest; it is simply a machine that requires a human operator to function. When Crysta first encounters it and sees it moving seemingly under its own power, though, she thinks that it is alive, and this thought terrifies her. Even though she spends time with many different animals—including a golden orb weaver (13), an angle-headed dragon (42), and a bat (54)—that could be considered frightening, she speaks to them civilly and does not panic in their presence. When she encounters the Leveller, though, she is instantly frightened of it and calls it a “monster” (51). “Monster” is an interesting word choice for Crysta because it implies that the machine is an unnatural entity. Although it turns out to be true, she uses the word when she still thinks the Leveller is alive; the oddity is that she comes from the world of FernGully, where every organism has a purpose and is essential to the ecosystem, yet she rejects the Leveller’s existence as a natural being without knowing anything about it.

Receiving the first description of the machine in the novel from Crysta’s perspective encourages the audience to see it as she does—as dangerous and unnatural.

Crysta’s perception of the Leveller as monstrous is not the only way in which the machine is depicted negatively in FernGully. Not only is the Leveller hyperbolically destructive and efficient, it is also hyperbolically oily and leaky. It is said to “spill” oil as it cut down trees (64); even though large machines such as the Leveller could have oil leaks, a machine that was continuously spilling oil at a rate fast enough to contaminate creeks (102) and kill fish (106) would not be able to continue running as long or as efficiently as the Leveller does. Even the cab
is covered in oil, from the windshield to the control panel (119). This excessive quantity of oil is indicative of the either ignorant or uncaring manner in which humans introduce harmful foreign substances into the rainforest ecosystem. It, along with the image of the “vast plain of tree stumps” (105) and Crysta’s realisation that the stumps do not have “any life in [them]” and cannot be healed (104), displays the Leveller, or rather the humans who drive it, as heartless fiends who will do anything to take the trees, regardless of the consequences. These images are a strong critique against the reaping of resources from the land, and although Mount Warning is now protected as part of a national park (“Wollumbin”) and clear-cutting is not practiced nearly as often in the forestry industry now, anyone who has seen the effects of open-pit mining knows that we still are willing to utterly destroy ecosystems for the sake of what we consider to be valuable resources. The environmental lessons strewn throughout Young’s novel are still relevant to this day.

CONCLUSION

Responding to the threat of deforestation to the rainforests near her home, Young wrote *FernGully* to raise awareness about the ecosystem’s importance and the devastating effects of logging. Following the strategies of environmental activists of the time, Young polarises humans—and in particular our use of technology—and the untechnological nonhuman world, displaying humans and technology as evil and the nonhuman as good. She offers hope for humanity, though, by stripping the ignorant Zak of his technological trappings and introducing him to the magical wonder of the nonhuman world. By presenting the novel in this way, Young is able to give practical examples for many ecological lessons: she shows the interconnectivity of everything with everything else, she explains the dangers of ignorantly trying to force nature
towards what is thought to be a “better” path, and she makes it abundantly clear that the gain of resources is not worth the cost of cutting down the rainforest. She also describes some of the effects that human technology can have on the nonhuman world, including the dangers of introducing foreign substances into an ecosystem, the effects that product testing and experimentation can have on research animals, and the devastating impact that machines can have on an environment due to the discharge of pollutants and the demolition of terrain. By exaggerating human ignorance and the destructive potential of technology, Young encourages readers to reject anthropocentric arguments for resource extraction and adopt a more ecocentric worldview.
Chapter 3

Distant Reality: Exploring the Allegory in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Like *Watership Down* and *Ferngully*, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is a great example of a children’s novel with serious underlying themes. *Haroun* addresses many current social concerns, including “the restrictions on freedom of speech by fundamentalist regimes” (Teverson 454) and gender equality in the workplace (Rushdie 107-08). Another current issue that Rushdie discusses in this novel is, of course, the environmental crisis, which will be the focus of this chapter—specifically his exploration of human indifference to the environment and the pollution of the ocean, as well as his attention to the fact that all forms of life are important to the health of an ecosystem. Unfortunately, though understandably, most critics of this novel focus on the ways in which it reflects Rushdie’s life at the time it was written, and therefore on the related issues of censorship and freedom of expression (see Bharat; Coppola), rather than on its ecological messages. Salman Rushdie wrote *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* for his son, Zafar, who asked his novelist father to write a story for children (Coppola 229). The novel was first published in 1990, two years after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, the backlash against which forced him to spend a long time away from his son (229). *Haroun’s* focus on the father-son relationship and on censorship and enforced silencing seem to indicate a correlation between those aspects of the novel and Rushdie’s own life. Environmentalism, however, is not something for which the author is known, so this aspect of *Haroun* has been neglected by previous critics.

As in the previous chapter, because of the variety of fantastical elements present in the novel, a brief account of the important characters and locations will precede my analysis. The initial setting of the novel is a fictional country, Alifbay, on an alternate Earth on which almost none of the elements described exist in reality; for example, there are factories in which “sadness
was actually manufactured” (Rushdie 15). Calling the planet “Earth” offers a pseudo-familiarity that is not reinforced by any of the objects, animals, or settings thereon, resulting in only the slightest foundation of reality for reference. The protagonist of the novel, Haroun, is a human boy who lives with his parents in this fictional country; he is an everychild with whom young readers are meant to identify. His father, Rashid, is a famous storyteller who depends upon the waters of the Sea of Stories to practice his craft. It is Rashid’s accidental cancellation of his subscription to receive these waters that sends Haroun on his adventure to the Sea of Stories. Haroun’s mother, Soraya, is not present for most of the novel, but her counterpart on the allegorical Kahani is the Sea of Stories itself; Soraya represents Mother Nature. Kahani is a completely fictional world, a second satellite that orbits the Earth, on which many fantastical beings reside. Many of the elements of Earth that Haroun encounters also exist on Kahani, though often in an exaggerated or anthropomorphised state; further, Kahani is an allegorical land on which each element is a metaphorical signifier for an aspect of reality. The most important feature of this second moon is the Sea of Stories that covers most of it. A tangible incarnation of the innumerable interweaving stories that make up our body of literature, the Sea is being polluted, to the detriment of the species that live in and around it. Also central to the plot of the novel is the fact that the sun is fixed in Kahani’s sky; one side of the moon is always day, and the other perpetually night.

Like Crysta in *FernGully*, who acts as a porter for Zak, bringing him into her magical world, Haroun has two porters who transport him to Kahani. The first is Iff, a Water Genie who agrees to help Haroun reinstate his father’s subscription. His humanoid figure is at once familiar and strange, allowing the reader an opportunity to mentally prepare for the less familiar-seeming entities that Haroun meets on Kahani. The second functions as both portal and porter; it is the
tool that Iff uses to get himself and Haroun to the satellite, Butt the Hoopoe. Butt is a mechanical bird that Haroun and Iff ride to Kahani; it also serves as their main mode of transportation while there. Although it is a machine, Butt has an artificial intelligence—as well as an artificial set of emotions and sense of humour—to rival that of a human. Butt’s status as a living entity is never questioned; although it is a machine, it is as much a part of the ecosystem as any organically born organism. The first organism Haroun encounters on Kahani is Mali, a Floating Gardener. Mali is entirely made up of vegetation. His description as Gardener is accurate, and as such he is a voice for human stewardship for and maintenance of the nonhuman world. Next are the Plentimaw Fishes, Bagha and Goopy; they are fish with plenty of mouths, and the ways in which the pollution of the Sea of Stories affects them represents the effects of real pollution on wildlife. Each of these characters is a Guppee—that is, they are from the day-side of Kahani. The two final important figures in the novel are Chupwalas, from the night-side. The first is Mudra’s Shadow. Mudra is a renegade Chupwala who helps the Guppees defeat the Army of Chup. Mudra is not as important to my analysis as is his Shadow, though; living in perpetual darkness as they do, the Chupwalas’ shadows became animate and have lives of their own. The Shadow represents evolution and organisms that have very different ecological needs than do humans. The last character of note in the novel is the villain, Khattam-Shud. He is a humourless clerical Chupwala who represents the emotionless relentlessness of corporate interactions with the nonhuman world. He deliberately pollutes the Sea of Stories to further his own agenda, with no consideration of the harm that the contamination is having, not only on the organisms who live in it, but on the entire ecosphere.

Throughout *Haroun*, Rushdie dissolves many of the boundaries that conventionally define identity and separate into oppositional categories the disparate elements of the Earth. For
example, although humanity, the nonhuman, and technology are generally considered distinct concepts, many of the novel’s characters and settings have qualities typically associated with two or three of these categories, all melded together. Another aspect of reality that Rushdie removes is the boundaries that humans have invented to separate themselves into different nations. The dissolving of political borders emphasises the fact that the environmental crisis is a global concern that can be neither blamed on nor solved by any single nation. To stress the importance of international environmental efforts, the central ecological concern in the novel is the pollution of the ocean, a harmful practice that could detrimentally affect the entire terrestrial ecosphere.

Rushdie was writing this novel around the same time that Young was writing *FernGully*, a time of burgeoning environmental activism responding to “issues of forests and toxic wastes,” as well as the realisation that human activity was causing catastrophic alterations to the global climate (Shiva 204); like Young, Rushdie uses the novel to promote reader activism. The dissolution of boundaries in *Haroun* is presented in a fantastical manner— unlike the collapsed binaries of *Watership Down*, which are presented matter-of-factly—and is thus not meant to be taken seriously as an alternative worldview insofar as the boundaries still exist outside the world of the novel. Nonetheless, their removal allows for an imaginative exploration of ecological concerns freed from the constraints of reality. This freedom manifests itself most clearly on Kahani, the setting of the novel’s allegory, wherein each of the category-dodging elements has layers of environmental significance.

My analysis of *Haroun* will focus on three major aspects of the novel. The first is the distancing strategy Rushdie uses to defamiliarise the events of the story from reality, thereby allowing for a more abstract—and therefore purer—critique of contemporary social issues. By setting the novel on another world and including a cast of obviously extraterrestrial characters,
Rushdie is able to address environmental concerns without focusing on any particular nation, thereby encouraging a global environmental effort. Second is the means by which Rushdie expounds the real-world importance of these concerns to his audience. Like *Watership Down*, *Haroun* prevents readers from experiencing a full escapist “flight into fantasy”; rather than following Adams’ example and including scientific passages in his novel, though, Rushdie uses a technique that Morton calls “medial writing,” bringing attention to the story as such. The interruption of this “flight” serves to inform readers that, although the characters and setting of the story are unfamiliar, the issues addressed are real and require consideration. The third focus of this chapter is on the specific environmental messages that are present in *Haroun*. Although the pollution of the ocean is the most explicit issue in the novel, it is not the only environmental concern Rushdie raises; another is an exploration of the negative effects that can occur when an ecosystem is changed. He also promotes responsible land management practices and compares them to the problematic human desire for absolute control over the nonhuman world. By distancing the events of the novel from reality and thereby presenting environmental issues in a neutral manner, unaligned with any organisation or nation, Rushdie is able to convey these issues to his readers across the globe and promote thinking about an international environmental movement.

**RUSHDIE’S DISTANCING STRATEGY**

Rushdie’s method for promoting environmental consciousness differs greatly from those of Adams and Young. Although Rushdie’s dissolution of boundaries—particularly the boundary between humans and the nonhuman—is similar to Adams’ human/animal binary collapse, their removal is meant to be seen as temporary in *Haroun*; indeed, Rushdie acknowledges that the
boundaries still exist outside the world of the novel. For example, *Haroun* offers strong advocacy for stewardship over the land, thereby upholding the human/nonhuman binary despite the existence of characters that challenge it. This dichotomy is not exaggerated as it is in *FernGully*, though; despite his youth, Haroun is not entirely ignorant of the importance of ecological balance, and he volunteers to help save the Sea without any need for lessons from fairies. Rather than skewing contemporary human attitudes toward the nonhuman, then, Rushdie shifts the entire environmental paradigm by creating an unfamiliar and unrealistic environment. Readers are introduced to this new environment without having made any presumptions about it, unlike the worlds of *Watership Down* and *FernGully*. Although both Adams and Young encourage their readers to adopt a generally ecocentric mindset, they do so by introducing very specific ecological settings; Adams informs readers of the plights of wild rabbits on the downs of England, and Young brings awareness to the threat of logging in the Australian rainforests surrounding Mount Warning. Both of their novels are therefore politically charged, advocating for the reformation of a specific nation’s protocols and practices. Though effective in securing sympathy for their specific causes, this approach risks provoking only a national, rather than a global, response. By removing any political affiliation from his settings—both Alifbay and Kahani are fictional and unassociated with any real location—Rushdie emphasises the global importance of environmental concerns.

The displacement between reality and the events of the novel are evident from its very beginning. On the first page, the narrator makes evident the fantastical nature of *Haroun*’s Earth, describing the “glumfish, which were so miserable to eat that they made people belch with melancholy even though the skies were blue,” and the “mighty factories in which ... sadness was actually manufactured, packaged, and sent all over the world, which never seemed to get enough
of it” (Rushdie 15). The narrator also describes the state of the fictional country, Alifbay; some of the cities in this country have forgotten their names (15), but most others “were named after the letters of the Alphabet. This led to much confusion, because there were only a limited number of letters and an almost unlimited number of places in need of names. As a result many places were obliged to share a single name” (24). The ridiculous nature of this country’s geographical identifiers serves both to introduce a humorous tone to the narrative, which is consistently present throughout the novel, and, more importantly, to emphasise the arbitrary manner in which humans divide and label the land. By rendering the cities’ names irrelevant, Rushdie highlights the insignificance of political boundaries in relation to global concerns such as oceanic pollution. A further dissolution of boundaries is apparent in the fictional country; while he is in the Valley of K, Haroun recognises the emotional Moody Land from his father’s stories. He reacts to the Dull Lake’s tendency to alter its properties according to its visitors’ emotions—producing waves, fog, or wind depending on the visitors’ dispositions at the time—by calling the body of water “positively Temperamental” (47), an accusation that would be considered personification if applied to a real lake but is a simple statement of fact in the world of Haroun. The emotional lake challenges the human/nonhuman binary; according to Cartesian modes of thought, it is the capacity for feeling and emotions that sets humanity apart from the nonhuman (Peggs 88). Cartesian binaries face even greater disruption on Kahani; the fictional moon and its inhabitants are further orders of magnitude removed from reality.

These layers of displacement serve to open the reader’s mind to the lessons hidden within the novel; as Colin Manlove says, “The theme of displacement ... ‘is a means always of shaking loose the self from settled assumptions, of undercutting human appropriations of reality’” (qtd. in DuPlessis 123). Although Haroun’s Earth has many fictional oddities, its physical laws and
mundane elements are assumed to be similar to those found in reality; even the Dull Lake only produces waves, fog, and wind, which are all recognisable properties of lakes. On the fantastical and entirely unfamiliar Kahani, though, the reader’s knowledge about this new environment is limited to Haroun’s experiences, and all of the fantastical events that occur undermine many of the reader’s assumptions about how the world should work. For example, the Sea of Stories is actually made up of “a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents, each one a different colour, weaving in and out of one another like a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity ... these were the Streams of Story, [and] each coloured strand represented and contained a single tale” (72). The fact that stories have a corporeal presence on Kahani informs the reader that even assumptions about the tangibility or abstractness of concepts can be put into question, disassociating the moon from even the most fundamental physical attributes of reality. Each of the billion and one stories that make up the Sea of Stories is an independent current, though they are fluid and therefore “retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories” (72); thus, the stories exist both independently and as a part of an ever-changing whole. In their complexity and interconnection, they provide an ecosystem for the inhabitants of the moon.

Haroun’s environmental theme pervades the novel, addressing many different ecological issues. Most of these issues are only briefly glimpsed, brought to light through the specific actions or qualities of certain Kahanian characters. The diversity of the characters Haroun meets on Kahani is too great to be coincidental, and each one has distinct traits that address an ecological concern. The first such character is Butt the Hoopoe. Butt’s uniqueness lies in its transcendence of categorical certainty. It is a machine, but it is also “passionate” and “temperamental” (71); Butt challenges the idea that “Machines [are] supposed to be ultra-
rational” (71) by showing itself to have a “sense of self-esteem” (66) and even a sense of humour (80). Further avoiding classification, it is shaped like a bird, but its feathers “have a distinctly hairy feel” that, combined with its “loud, booming voice,” reminds Haroun of a man he meets on Earth (66). Its intelligence and quickness of wit are also decidedly human qualities. In short, Butt the Hoopoe is a mechanical being in the shape of a bird with hair-like feathers, with the sentient and emotional mind of a human; it collapses the boundaries between each of these three categories. It is an example of organismic diversity as described by Haraway, wherein “the clean lines between traditional and modern, organic and technological, human and nonhuman give way to the infoldings of the flesh that powerful figures such as the cyborgs ... both signify and enact” (8). Defined by Lesley Sharp as “an amalgamation of human, animal, and technological parts” (311), “cyborg”—a portmanteau word abbreviating the expression “cybernetic organism”—is undoubtedly the best term to use when describing Butt. An entity that reconciles the organic and the technological, Butt, like other cyborgs in literature, “permit[s] us to reconsider our relationship with the worlds of the natural and the mechanical” (Lock 578) by suggesting that the two concepts need not be mutually exclusive. Machines and technology are often seen as directly opposed to nature, as with Young’s depiction of the Leveller, but Butt challenges this dichotomy by exemplifying a harmonious integration of the two. Further, it subverts the Cartesian human/animal binary; although Butt is a “mechanistic” bird, it is not “incapable of thinking and hence incapable of feeling pain,” as Descartes claimed animals to be (Peggs 88). Its sentience and emotions are distinctly human qualities by Cartesian standards, and their presence in the synthetic mind of a mechanical bird challenges this dualistic worldview.

The second Kahanian of ecological significance is the Floating Gardener, Mali, whose Earthly counterpart is the Floating Garden that Haroun sees on the Dull Lake (Rushdie 43). It is
not Mali’s vegetable composition that is ecologically suggestive, though, but rather his status as a gardener. Often assuming a humanoid form, Mali further dissolves the boundary between human and nonhuman; a sentient cluster of plants, his most distinctly human trait is his gardening, exercising his role as steward over the land by maintaining it (140-41). A widely practiced example of human stewardship over the land, gardening is a point of contention amongst ecocritics, who disagree about the necessity or depravity of land maintenance. Some, such as Turner, suggest that interfering with natural phenomena is a human responsibility. He suggests in “Cultivating the American Garden” that “We are, whether we like it or not, the lords of creation” and, as such, must act towards “the greater glory and beauty of the world we have been given to look after” (50). Turner’s statement encapsulates human self-entitlement in its most literal sense. Though I am inclined toward Commoner’s claim that “any major man-made change in a natural system is likely to be detrimental to that system” (41, italics in original), Rushdie’s portrayal of Mali suggests that the novelist is in Turner’s camp. His advocacy for stewardship implies a belief that responsible human control is superior to unguided nature. Thus, the hierarchy between humans and the nonhuman is reinstated; although Mali is vegetable, his mental processes are human, so he is capable of responsible land management. Rushdie assures his readers that the binary still exists outside the world of the novel.

Following the pattern established by Butt and Mali, Bagha and Goopy also traverse the boundary between human and nonhuman. They are monogamous, “faithful partners for life” (85); further, they are quite verbose and speak only in rhyming couplets. Their Earthly equivalent is more complicated than is Mali’s; the fact that Bagha and Goopy are both Plentimaw Fish and Angel fish (85) recalls a conversation between Rashid and his employer, wherein Buttoo learns that Rashid’s wife recently left him. He tells Rashid that “there are plenty more fish in the sea,”
to which Rashid replies, “Ah, but you must go a long, long way to find an Angel Fish” (43).

Bagha and Goopy’s allegorical role and corresponding environmental message are more straightforward; dependent upon the Sea of Stories for survival, this talkative pair of fish is representative of real organisms living in the Earth’s oceans. Through his depiction of them, Rushdie shows the effects that the pollution of the ocean can have on sea life. On first meeting Haroun, they tell him of the bad taste caused by all the “dirt” in the Sea, exclaiming, “Swimming in the Ocean starts to hurt!” (85). Later, when they approach the source of the pollution, they find that they are unable to continue any further due to the unbearable pain the acidic contaminants are causing them (140). Because they are given a voice and are able to explain how the pollution affects them, the reader is more easily able to sympathise with them than with the mute animals of reality. As Estok says, “it is less easy to tolerate the suffering of nonhuman animals when their emotions, intelligence, behaviour, and feelings seem to resemble our own” (68). The Plentimaw Fishes’ voices do more than just express the pain of poisoned wildlife, though; they also represent the outcry against environmental destruction. “Normally, each mouth [on the Plentimaw Fish] says something different” (85), creating a hullabaloo of conversations that collectively express the Fishes’ thoughts, much like how the collective stories create the Story Sea; while Haroun knows them, though, the pollution of the Sea of Stories forces all of their mouths to harmonise a single statement at a time. Although the Plentimaw Fishes’ multifarious voices, unaffected by the pollution, are not actually depicted in the novel, they represent the various people of the world all discussing different concepts and concerns. These voices are harmonised because of the pollution of the ocean; Rushdie is calling for a coordinated international outcry against this and other global environmental issues.

The final anthropomorphic being Haroun encounters on Kahani is the animate Shadow of
the Champion Warrior of Chup, Mudra (Rushdie 131). Although of all the anthropomorphic entities, the Shadow spends the least amount of time with Haroun, it gives a comprehensive account of its place in the Land of Chup:

[I]n the Land of Chup, Shadows are considered the equals of the people to whom they are joined.... Chupwalas live in the dark ... and in the dark a Shadow doesn’t have to be one single shape all the time. Some Shadows—such as my goodself—learn how to change ourselves, simply by wishing to do so.... If a Shadow doesn’t care for the clothes sense or hairstyle of the person to whom it’s attached, it can simply choose a style for itself! A Chupwala’s Shadow can be graceful as a dancer even if its owner is clumsy as an oaf.... What’s more: in the Land of Chup, a Shadow very often has a stronger personality than the Person, or Self, or Substance to whom or to which it is joined! So often the Shadow leads, and it is the Person or Self or Substance that follows.... Peace with the Chupwalas means Peace with their Shadows too. (132-33)

This explanation of the Shadows’ role in Chupwala society, of their function in that ecosystem, is more necessary than it was for the Floating Gardeners or the Plentimaw Fishes because the lives and actions of gardeners, plants, and fish are already familiar to most readers; the story only requires a basic description of the discrepancies between the characters and their real counterparts. The Shadows, however, do not have a clear Earthly equivalent, so this detailed account is required in order for the reader to understand how they live. Haroun explains the reason for the Shadow’s animation: “its life in a land of darkness, of being a shadow concealed in shadows, had given it powers undreamt of by the shadows of a conventionally lit world” (124). In adapting to the environment surrounding them, these Shadows evolved to an animate state. Turner calls evolution “a natural process so paradigmatic that it could almost be said to be
synonymous with nature itself” (42). Thus, in Rushdie’s imagined world, the Shadows can be considered natural beings, despite the fact that the intentional alteration of their environment—that is, the intentional halting of Kahani’s rotation, freezing the sun in the sky—made their evolution possible. Like city pigeons (Jerolmack 89), the Shadows have adapted to the artificial environment and are now dependent upon it for survival. Their status as equal citizens in Chup challenges the idea that interdependent relationships must be hierarchical.

Through these five characters—Butt, Mali, Bagha, Goopy, and Mudra’s Shadow—Rushdie introduces a wide variety of life-forms whose diversity allows him to explore many environmental concerns. Each of them is anthropomorphic, with thoughts, emotions, and the power of language, thereby challenging what Bruno Latour calls “the fiction of ‘two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other’” (qtd. in Jerolmack 74). Through the collapse of this dichotomy, Rushdie emphasises the importance of the various forms of life to the health of the ecosystem. Mali’s land stewardship assures readers that the dichotomy still exists outside the world of the novel, though, and the nonhuman world requires a responsible guiding hand or it will fall into disrepair. Each of these disparate species has its own voice and its own concerns, but, like the many voices of the Plentimaw Fishes, the pollution of the Sea of Stories causes them to all shout out in harmony: “Save the Ocean!” (Rushdie 91).

INTERUPTING ESCAPISM IN HAROON AND THE SEA OF STORIES

As has been shown, Haroun is a highly fantastical story that depends on unrealistic portrayals of life and land to effectively convey its messages. Despite the text’s obvious abandonment of reality, though, certain aspects of the novel prevent the reader from fully
indulging in an escapist release from the real world. Adams created a similar effect in *Watership Down* by including and citing naturalist passages in his novel—that is, by admitting the existence of an exterior body of texts that informed the author’s decisions in character design but do not directly relate to the world of the novel. Unlike Adams, Rushdie does not obstruct the reader’s “flight into fantasy” by introducing external texts; instead, he achieves this mental interference by portraying the novel as such, by admitting that the story is a story. The story’s critical self-awareness and self-reflexivity provokes a corresponding self-awareness in the reader, who is forced to acknowledge that he or she has not assumed the identity of the omniscient observer or of the protagonist, but is instead a witness passively watching the events unfold. The novel’s self-awareness is subtle and therefore does not significantly alter the tone of the story; it simply serves to encourage a more conscious reading of the text, thereby promoting a critical assessment of its contents and a realisation that the issues addressed in the novel are real-world concerns. This realisation inspires a shift from the passive act of reading to the understanding that real practices must change for the sake of the future, promoting environmental activism. Greta Gaard discusses the need for “praxis—the necessary unity of theory and practice” (326)—in ecological writing, and *Haroun* fulfills this requirement by goading self-aware readers into action, convincing them that the pollution of the ocean is ecologically catastrophic and must not be allowed to continue.

One aspect of the novel that provokes this self-awareness in readers is the use of words and dialogue as allegorical elements. I will take a moment here to define allegory, though according to Krista Phair, allegory “cannot be defined precisely based on a limited set of specific formal characteristics” (106). Etymologically, it means “other speech,” and it “can be seen as any form of symbolic representation” (106). Angus Fletcher gives a comprehensive definition of
the trope that is sufficient for the purposes of this analysis: “allegory is a method of double meanings that organizes any utterance (in any medium) according to its expression of analogical parallels between different networks of iconic likeness” (qtd. in Phair 107). In this way, allegory itself challenges a dualistic worldview; it is not read either as superficial story or symbolic code, but rather as both simultaneously. Fletcher’s definition is restricted “to works that are encoded to achieve a specific aim” (Phair 107), but this restriction does not remove Haroun from consideration. As has been shown above, each of the elements of Kahani has a complexly layered identity; not only does each have a superficial function on Kahani and correspond to an “Earthly” equivalent in the world of the novel, but each has a deeper metaphorical existence as a symbol for a greater real-world concern. The “specific aim” of the allegory in Haroun is to promote ecological awareness and environmental activism in readers, encouraging them to take responsibility for the damage that humanity has done to the ecosphere and work towards correcting it. On Kahani, even the characters’ differing speech patterns have symbolic significance.

Aside from physical form, the quality that most distinguishes each of the various species of Kahanian from the others is its method of communication. Butt, like the other mechanical beings of Kahani, communicates telepathically, and it talks and sounds exactly the same as the Earthly mail coach driver by the same name (Rushdie 66)—that is, its voice is booming and quick (32). Mali speaks in the short, choppy sentences and simple rhyming poems of a Floating Gardener. Haroun notices that “His voice was soft as flower petals ... but his manner was somewhat abrupt” (82). Bagha and Goopy, as with the other Plentimaw Fishes, are always paired up and always speak in rhyming couplets, alternating lines between each other, their many mouths all conversing simultaneously. Like the physical person to whom it is joined, Mudra’s
Shadow does not speak in the conventional verbal sense. It and the other Shadows are still able to communicate, however, by using a form of sign language called Abhinaya, the “Gesture Language” (130). Like the forms of these characters, their speech patterns are too widely varied for this deviance to be coincidental, and the fact that it is intentional implies that this variance has a function in the novel. Indeed, the characters’ differing speech patterns work within the allegory of Kahani to represent the vast differences that exist between different species in reality.

Like Young’s use of music in *FernGully* to represent ecological balance, Rushdie’s use of speech to represent the dissimilarities in the behaviour and environmental requirements of various species allows him to explain a complex concept in a very simple manner. Through his observation of a variety of communication methods, Haroun learns that each of the different forms of life on Kahani speaks in a unique way and that each method of communication is an inherent quality of the species. After Iff tells him that only speaking one sentence at a time “is like silence” to the Plentimaw Fishes, he remembers that “for a Floating Gardener a few short sentences are called talkativeness” (85). He learns to respect the various species despite their differences and not to discriminate against even those whom he has difficulty understanding; he is a little put off by Mudra’s Shadow’s lack of audible language at first, but eventually finds “that silence had its own grace and beauty (just as speech could be graceless and ugly)” (125). Overcoming his prejudice against silence, Haroun is able to respect the Shadow, even if he cannot understand it. Through this allegorical means, Rushdie is able to explain the concept that not all species have the same requirements for survival. In his essay, Turner gives the example of “the first living inhabitants of [Earth]” (43), which had anaerobic metabolisms and were unable to survive in an oxygen-rich environment. This example elucidates the fact that environments that humans consider to be inhabitable are not so for every organism and also that environments
that are often considered uninhabitable by humans are necessary for the continued existence of some organisms. Just as Plentimaw Fishes are used to speaking many sentences at once while Floating Gardeners are practically monosyllabic, some species require very different ecosystems than do humans, and humans should respect those ecological requirements and preserve them when possible.

The fact that communication methods are aspects of the life forms that are unique to each species is fitting on Kahani, a place where the Sea, the natural ecosystem for many organisms living on the moon, is literally made up of stories. To emphasise the ecological role that words and stories perform in the Kahanian ecosystem, when Haroun accuses Butt of exaggerating details and “telling stories again,” the Hoopoe replies, “Naturally I’m telling stories” (Rushdie 80). Through the use of the word “naturally,” Butt offers a layered explanation to his tendency to embellish the truth. At the surface, this statement implies a tone of condescending redundancy, as though Butt’s exaggerations are an obvious aspect of his character that is unworthy of note. Considering the importance of the Sea of Stories to the mechanical bird’s ecosystem, though, the word could be taken more literally; telling stories is both a part of Butt’s nature, in the sense of the Hoopoe’s inherent inclinations, and a physical element of its natural environment, thereby affecting its behaviour. Either reading of the word implies that the tendency to exaggerate the truth is not confined to Butt, but rather applies to all organisms who depend upon the Sea of Stories for survival. Thus, despite the fact that the various Kahanian species differ greatly in form and speech, they are all shaped by the environment that they share and with this influence have developed similarities through which they can relate to each other.

Another means through which the novel displays self-awareness is the discussion of stories within the text. Stories are a subject central to its plot, so Haroun describes some of their
qualities; since the novel is itself a story, the reader is aware that any statement about them could apply to this novel as well. This strategy is most evident when the narrator introduces the “Princess Rescue Story” subgenre. When Haroun is made to drink a story, it teleports him in his mind to a scenario in which he is meant to rescue a princess. The narrator refers to the story as “Princess Rescue Story Number S/1001/ZHT/420/41(r)xi” and compares this story to “Princess Rescue Story G/1001/RIM/777/M(w)i, better known as ‘Rapunzel’” (73). The exploration of the damsel in distress trope is particularly noteworthy because Haroun is itself a Princess Rescue Story; indeed, the novel has two “damsels” in need of rescue. The first is actually a princess; Batcheat is rescued by her one true love (190), the dashing but foolish Prince Bolo (89). The second is an allegorical damsel, Mother Nature, who is represented by the Sea of Stories; “she” is the Kahanian counterpart to Haroun’s mother Soraya and is rescued by Haroun. Bolo makes this parallel in the novel: “Just as my great passion, my Amour, leads me to Batcheat, always towards Batcheat, so this boy’s destiny is to rescue what he loves: that is, the Ocean of Stories” (138, italics in original). Interestingly, Haroun is a Princess Rescue Story even in the world of the novel, for Rashid tells the tale of Haroun and the Sea of Stories in the final chapter (205); it is even present as a Stream in the Sea of Stories, since “all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still in the process of being invented could be found [there]” (72). The slight interruptions of reader immersion caused by this self-awareness emphasise the existence of reality outside of the novel.

It is valuable at this point to introduce Morton’s discussion of medial writing in Ecology without Nature. He describes medial writing as that which makes obvious the medium through which the communication is occurring. “Medial writing, for instance, highlights the page on which the words were written, or the graphics out of which they were composed” (37, italics in
“Medial statements,” he says, “pertain to [reader] perception” (37) because they alter the manner in which the audience receives the information by emphasising the means of reception. As he says, “When the medium of communication becomes impeded or thickened, we become aware of it, just as snow makes us painfully aware of walking” (37). This awareness disturbs the transfer of information: “to point out the medium in which communication is taking place is to interrupt that communication” (37). As in the case of readers of Haroun, “This [interruption] undermines the normal distinction we make between medium as atmosphere or environment—as a background or ‘field’—and medium as material thing—something in the foreground” (38). Morton describes medial writing as a common aspect of what he calls “ecomimesis,” which is ecocentric writing: “When ecomimesis points out the environment, it performs a medial function” (37). The corresponding audience awareness brings not only the environment of the communication—that is, the medium—into focus; it also brings into focus the larger physical environment about which the author is writing. In a similar way, the medial writing in Haroun fosters an awareness not only of the act of reading but also of the real-world issues addressed in the novel’s allegory.

The most disrupting aspect of the novel’s self-awareness is its exploration of the question, “What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?” (Rushdie 20). This question is raised by Mr. Sengupta and Khatam-Shud, who are both villains—they are, in fact, counterpart to each other, one present on Earth and the other on Kahani—and are threatening Haroun’s mother and the Sea of Stories, respectively. It is also asked by Haroun himself when he is angered by his storytelling father. By having the protagonist wonder about the importance of characters such as himself, Rushdie creates a sense of existential crisis that threatens to undermine the impact of the novel: If the story itself is questioning its raison d’être, perhaps it is not worth the effort of
reading. The sense that fictional stories have no use is quickly challenged, though, and the novel instead explores the ways in which fiction is useful. For example, Rashid uses stories to promote various “politicos” and “help them win the people’s votes” (20). Later in the novel, Batcheet is discovered to have “had all the greatest stories in the world rewritten as if her Bolo was the hero” in order to profess her love for him (106, italics in original), creating such works as “Bolo and Juliet” and “Bolo in Wonderland” (99).

Having established various uses for fictional stories throughout the novel, Rushdie adds a layer of depth to the question that encourages the reader to reflect upon the novel’s messages. In the final chapter, Haroun and his father learn that “Kahani” means “story” (209). Taking this fact into consideration, the question, “What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?” is now asking the reader, “What’s the use of Kahani? What was the purpose of the fictional moon’s creation?” The obvious answer is that Kahani serves as a literary setting for an allegorical exploration of real-world issues. By posing this question, Rushdie encourages readers to consider the allegorical aspect of Kahani and the application of its lessons in reality. The events in the novel represent aspects of the world outside of the novel and direct attention to those aspects, critiquing practices and suggesting alternative behaviour. In this way the answer to the question shifts; sometimes stories that are not true are, in fact, true, in some way—perhaps not literally, but fictional accounts of real-world issues are just as important to the public’s understanding of those concerns as are news articles and nonfiction texts, just as the characters’ symbolic meaning is just as important as their literal function in an allegory. As Clara Claiborne Park says, “even fantasy is grounded in reality” (464). The reality of some of the environmental issues introduced in Haroun is even darker than is presented in the novel, and through his writing, Rushdie sheds some light on them.
ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN *HAROUN AND THE SEA OF STORIES*

The most explicit environmental concerns addressed in *Haroun* are the harmful and inconsiderate implementation of technology that leads to the detriment of the ecosystem and the pollution of the ocean. Unlike the relatively minor concerns previously addressed in this chapter, these two are central to the plot of the novel, driving the characters to action. The first is communicated in the novel through the existence of the “immense super-computers and gigantic gyroscopes” (Rushdie 172) that control the rotation of Kahani such that “the Land of Gup is bathed in Endless Sunshine, while over in Chup it’s always the middle of the night” (80); the binaries caused by these machines are particularly noticeable in a world that tends to disregard such dualistic structures. The effect of this ecospherical disruption has been augmented by the construction of Chattergy’s Wall, “an unbreakable (and also invisible) Wall of Force” that was built in the Twilight Strip between the two lands (80). The pollution of the ocean is represented explicitly; the Cultmaster, Khattam-Shud, is actively concocting anti-stories with which to poison the Sea of Stories, intending to kill it (160). By juxtaposing Haroun and Khattam-Shud, Rushdie explains that human stewardship over the land does not imply that humanity can do whatever it likes with the world to suit its own purposes, but rather demands responsible action. Although both of these issues are related to the use of technology, Rushdie does not suggest, as Young does, that nature and technology have a dichotomous relationship and cannot coexist peacefully; Butt’s instrumental role in defeating Khattam-Shud assures the audience that only technology that is harmful to the ecosystem is problematic.

Between Chattergy’s Wall and the Machines that halt Kahani’s rotation, the Kahanian ecosphere has been irreversibly altered. The Machines create a dichotomous world; the Land of Gup is always light and warm and full of sound, while the Land of Chup is dark, cold, and silent.
The Wall forced the two countries to become segregated from each other for countless generations, during which animosity grew between them. Although the only downside to the Guppees’ eternal daylight seems to be the fact that they require heavy curtains to sleep (109), the Chupwalas certainly suffer due to the endless night. The Land of Chup is so cold that the Chupwalas are forced to wear nose-warmers to prevent icicles from hanging off their noses (179). The constant cold allows Khattam-Shud to convince the Chupwalas to follow the “Mystery of Bezaban’, a Cult of Dumbness or Muteness,” which requires its participants to worship “a gigantic idol ... carved out of black ice” (101). As can be seen at the end of the novel, brief exposure to direct sunlight is all it takes to melt the ice and destroy the idol (190), so the eternal darkness is an enabling factor for Bezaban’s existence. The darkness itself was undoubtedly also a great inconvenience for the Chupwalas when Kahani’s rotation was first halted; like the Guppees that storm Chup City to rescue Batcheat (179), the first Chupwalas to live in the darkness would have found it impossible to see properly. In the generations since the Machines were invented, though, the Chupwalas have adapted to their midnight environment and their eyes have evolved from those of their ancestors: “Instead of whites, they had blacks; and the irises were grey as twilight, and the pupils were white as milk” (125, italics in original). Haroun correctly assumes that “They must be blind as bats in the sunlight” (125) after seeing Mudra.

Haroun considers the Chupwalas’ unconventional eyes to be a fault, thinking to himself, “their eyes are the wrong way round” (125, my emphasis); he also compares the animate Shadows of Chup with what he calls the “conventional” shadows of Earth (124). Further evidence of his discrimination against aspects of Kahani that he does not understand occurs after he destroys the rotation machines to stop the pollution of the Sea of Stories; he thinks to himself
that “Kahani will be a sensible Moon [now] ... with sensible days and nights” (176), implying that
the moon’s previous state was nonsensical. Although he seems to accept the existence of
Water Genies, mechanical birds, and Plentimaw Fishes with relative ease, the Chupwalas’
reversed eyes, the animate Shadows, and the sun frozen in the sky confuse him. This confusion is
due to the fact that the Water Genies and other fantastical creatures are so vastly different from
anything he experienced on Earth that he has no basis of comparison for them. Eyes, shadows,
and the sun, though, he has seen before, and he finds the discrepancies between those he comes
across on Kahani and those he is familiar with to be particularly disconcerting. Using words such
as “wrong” to describe what he finds on Kahani, and “conventional” and “sensible” to describe
their Earthly versions, Haroun shows prejudice against those elements of Kahani that are familiar
enough to elicit an uncanny impression upon him. For something to have an uncanny effect on
someone, it must be at once quite familiar to that person, and yet altered or portrayed in such a
way that it becomes unfamiliar, causing “intellectual uncertainty” (Freud 831). Sigmund Freud’s
explanation that someone who is experiencing an uncanny feeling “doubts whether an apparently
animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact
animate” (828) fits particularly well with Haroun’s impression of Mudra’s Shadow. It is not a
coincidence that Haroun’s method of stopping the pollution of the Sea of Stories also returns two
of Kahani’s uncanny elements to their familiar states: the sun moves across the sky, and the
Shadows are reduced to mere shadows.

Haroun’s destruction of the Machines is the most ecologically problematic aspect of the
novel, though it is an exaggerated version of the land stewardship enacted by Mali. Haroun’s
primary motivation for altering the ecosystem is to stop the pollution of the Sea of Stories, and
this process also returns the land to a state that he considers familiar and therefore acceptable;
thus, he does not consider the impact of his actions on those who depend upon the binary ecosystem for survival. Despite the respect that Haroun has for the Shadow when he meets it and Mudra and his understanding that the Shadow’s agency is a result of the eternal darkness of the Land of Chup, he callously destroys the machines that direct the rotation of Kahani without a thought about the effects that doing so might have on the Shadows of Chup. In fact, there is no mention of the Shadows at all after the sequence of “sensible days and nights” is restored on the moon, though Mudra is present (191, 199). This problematic situation is the result of an ethical dilemma brought about by the pollution of the ocean; the only way to prevent it was to return Kahani to its natural, non-binary state. Unfortunately, the moon’s “natural” state is no longer a survivable ecosystem for all parties; in the long interval during which the Machines have controlled Kahani’s rotation, the inhabitants of Chup have adapted to the conditions of the eternal darkness, and would now be strongly disadvantaged by the return of sunlight.

The Chupwalas themselves have physically adapted to living without light. Their eyes are so sensitive to the light that they can only see perfectly in absolute darkness; even when wearing their “really rather fashionable wrap-around dark glasses” (159), they have trouble seeing in the “dim twilight” of the Old Zone (163-64). With this intolerance of even the smallest amounts of light, the effect of the midday sun would be no less than crippling. Indeed, after the sun rises over Chup City, the “servants of the Cultmaster, the members of the Union of the Zipped Lips, were running blindly hither and yon, smashing into walls ... and shrieking dreadfully” (189). Because the Union of the Zipped Lips is seen as an evil organisation in the novel, its members’ torturous circumstances are presented in a comedic manner; it follows logically, however, that the innocent civilians of Chup suffer just as acutely due to the sun’s rising. The effects of Chup’s daily exposure to sunlight are not described in the novel, though; as soon as Princess Batcheat is
rescued, the narration returns to Gup for the remainder of Haroun’s time on Kahani. If this negligence in accounting for the rotational effects on the citizens of Chup is intentional, then Rushdie’s silence is significant because it implies guilt, an admittance that Haroun’s actions, though necessary, were not entirely “good.” Haroun’s inability to return Kahani to its initial state despite removing the variable that had altered it is reminiscent of the prolonged effects of colonialism in so called postcolonial areas. As Martin Sökefeld says, “systems of colonization inscribe their marks so deeply upon the societies of both the colonized and the colonizers that they cannot simply be eradicated by the political act of declaring independence” (939); any organic state that has been altered for an extended period of time cannot return to its initial conditions because the organic elements—be they organisms or societies—have adapted to exist in the new state.

Despite Rushdie’s silence on the matter, it is difficult to ignore the consequences of Haroun’s actions, particularly as they pertain to the animate Shadows of Chup, for the boy has subjected their species to mass imprisonment, if not extinction. Since it is the state “of being ... shadow[s] concealed in shadows” that provides them with freedom of thought and of form (124), it follows that exposure to direct sunlight would inhibit this freedom, confining them to the “conventional” position of inanimate shadows. Losing liberty of movement probably also prevents the Shadows from having independent thoughts, since the two attributes seem to be interrelated; certainly, it would prevent them from communicating their thoughts, for their only means of communication is through the Gesture Language, Abhinaya, and its use requires freedom of movement (130). These restrictions would undoubtedly reduce the status of equality that the Shadows had obtained with the Chupwalas. Again, the novel only portrays the gruesome effects of sunlight on those Shadows considered to be evil (173). Still, it is safe to assume that
the “good” Shadows would face similar consequences, since “no shadow could survive without someone or something to be attached to, to be the shadow of” (173, italics in original). The implication of this statement is that, in a world regularly lit, the Shadows will again become the shadows of the Chupwalas; that is, they will become again the “conventional” shadows with which Haroun compares them earlier (124). Mudra’s Shadow insists that “Peace with the Chupwalas means Peace with their Shadows, too” (132), but after the sun rises and “Peace [breaks] out” between the Guppees and the Chupwalas (191), there is never any mention of the Shadows throughout the rest of the novel. Mudra’s presence makes his Shadow’s absence obvious, yet Rushdie leaves unspoken the devastating consequences of the Machines’ destruction.

Although he does not explicitly address the issue, Rushdie’s silence forces readers to think about the Chupwalas and their Shadows and realise that sometimes land stewardship means making difficult decisions. The implementation of the Machines was irreversible not because they could not be destroyed, but because even after they are, the world does not revert back to its original state. Much like a colonised society, it is impossible to faithfully recreate an ecosystem after it has been altered (“Developments” 1594) because nature is not static; it is constantly changing, adapting to new environmental stimuli. Haroun alters an ecosphere from a state that he considers to be “wrong” to its original—or “natural”—state, yet this state is now unsustainable because the inhabitants of Chup evolved “naturally” to survive in total darkness. His actions are considered commendable in the novel because he takes the initiative and actively prevents the further contamination of the ocean. Considering the consequences, though, Haroun’s destruction of the moon’s rotation machines explains to the audience the difficulties of land management.

Although the moon’s artificial rotation has been synthesised by sentient beings and could
therefore be considered “unnatural,” the fact that there are some species that are now dependent upon it for their freedom—and perhaps their lives—should arguably have made the existence of the machines and the continuation of the dualistic state a higher priority than returning “natural” order to the moon. Halting the pollution of the ocean is the highest priority, though, and the inhabitants of Chup are unfortunate but necessary casualties.

Rushdie juxtaposes Haroun’s joyously celebrated land management practices with the dark and sinister Khattam-Shud’s desire to control the world. Like a James Bond villain, Khattam-Shud divulges all of his secrets after he has captured Haroun. He describes the means by which he synthesised anti-stories, and their industrial descriptions are reminiscent of factories and corporate management, the creators of real-world pollution. Further, he admits his desire to silence the Sea of Stories by killing every story of which it is made up (160). He also explains his motivation for this malicious act: “The world is for Controlling,” Khattam-Shud explains. “Your world, my world, all worlds.... They are all there to be Ruled. And inside every single story, inside every Stream in the Ocean, there lies a world, a story-world, that I cannot Rule at all. And that is the reason why” (161). The poisoning of the Sea of Stories is Rushdie’s critique of the thoughtless pollution of Earthly oceans, which was a global environmental concern at the time he was writing Haroun (Sonnenfeld and Mol 1323); Khattam-Shud’s motivation, though, critiques the human desire to contain and exercise absolute control over the nonhuman world. Although Rushdie is an advocate for land management, he explains through Khattam-Shud that proper stewardship is not a matter of unconditional power over the world, but is rather a responsibility to ensure that damage to ecosystems is minimised.

The fact that Haroun challenges Khattam-Shud sends a second positive environmental message; Haroun, the young human with whom readers are meant to identify, volunteers to save
the Sea of Stories (136). His volition and desire to stop the pollution is significant because it is unique in the story; no other character is driven to do the same. There is a tendency in the novel for the adult characters to be distracted from saving the ecosystem of the Sea of Stories, upon which many organisms depend for survival, by love (91), loyalty (136), or power (161)—the aspects of life that modern stories portray as essential for living well, diverting attention away from the state of the environment. Rushdie proposes a new modern narrative: Haroun’s actions inspire the reader to act out against environmental wrongs even when surrounded by people who do not understand the importance of the matter. In a world fraught with ecological crises, Rushdie encourages readers to share Haroun’s realisation that a healthy environment is the highest priority for living well, since love, loyalty, and power are irrelevant on a dead Earth. Thus, Rushdie emphasises the importance of ecological consciousness and environmental activism to the maintenance of a sustainable ecosphere, suggesting a shift from our current modern narrative of depleting resources and creating toxic wastes to one of ecological sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Through the dissolution of various conventional conceptual barriers, such as those between humans, nonhumans, and machines, Rushdie explores many current environmental concerns. This dissolution is most evident on the allegorical Kahani, a fantastical land inhabited by diverse anthropomorphic species. Each element of the moon functions simultaneously as an active agent in the novel and a metaphorical signifier; the central theme of the allegory is the environmental crisis and the importance of ecological sustainability. He explores two environmental issues in greater depth; rather than suggest them implicitly via the allegory, he
addresses them explicitly in the plot of the novel. These issues are, respectively, the importance of responsible land maintenance and the pollution of the ocean. Mali’s gardening and Haroun’s decision to destroy the Machines that halt the moon’s rotation are portrayed as positive examples of stewardship, and are juxtaposed against the obsessive Khattam-Shud’s desire to rule the world, an aspiration that drives him to poison the Sea of Stories. The effects of pollution on wildlife are displayed primarily through the suffering of Bagha and Goopy, who are ill for most of the novel. Haroun’s decision to challenge Khattam-Shud and prevent the further pollution of the ocean is designed to inspire readers to realise that the primary motivators in life, the love, loyalty, and power for which people are told to strive, are secondary concerns when compared to the prevention of environmental catastrophe. Rushdie encourages a rewriting of these priorities such that an ecocentric mindset and environmental activism become the general public’s primary concern.
Conclusion
Rewriting the Anthropocentric Cultural Narrative

The philosophical breadth of these three novels regarding humanity’s relationship with the nonhuman suggests that authors of environmental literature need not agree about every detail of environmental theory to help integrate environmental consciousness into contemporary popular culture; despite the disparity of their views, all three authors promote an ecocentric worldview by creating a fantastical alternative society eschewing the traditional anthropocentrism of Western culture. Their differing attitudes toward land stewardship, for example, do not negate the fact that each advocates for better human-nonhuman relationships; although Rushdie supports responsible human management of ecological processes while Adams and Young both portray human alterations of the nonhuman world negatively, all three authors share the goal of changing human perceptions of the nonhuman world from resource to be exploited to complex system of interdependent organisms in which humans are included. Thus, the fact that ecocritics, ecologists, and philosophers are all still debating humanity’s appropriate role in the ecosphere and the exact limitations of ecologically allowable human conduct does not mean that environmental literature should not be written for fear of inspiring problematic behaviour. Instead, the writing of environmental literature should be encouraged because it is currently more important to rewrite the predominantly anthropocentric narrative of Western culture than to understand the specific details of an appropriate human coexistence with the nonhuman, and this rewriting requires the introduction of more ecocentric literature to the general population. As this thesis has shown, children’s fantasy can promote ecocentrism as earnestly as can literature meant for adults; thus, it can also reinforce anthropocentric thought, so authors of environmental literature must be aware of the ethical systems they portray to the
impressionable younger generation and strive to influence children toward an ecocentric mindset.

Significantly, the importance of environmental literature is evident within each of the texts. The rabbits of *Watership Down* have an ecocentric creation mythology that they keep alive through oral storytelling; further, Lockley’s ethological monograph is cited throughout the novel, introducing a presence of environmental science. The environmental literature in *FernGully* involves a combination of those techniques found in Adams’ text—the ecological lessons that Magi Lune teaches Crysta, which she then passes on to Zak, are all communicated orally.

Environmental literature exists in a more literal sense in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, wherein the literature in the Sea of Stories forms the environment on which the inhabitants of Kahani depend for survival. In each novel, the environmental literature in the world of the story inspires a more ecocentric perspective in the protagonists; this portrayal of ecocentric motivation is a hopeful prediction of success, for each author includes an environmental ethics in his or her novel that is intended to inspire ecocentric thought in its readers. These examples of protagonists learning to be more ecologically conscious provokes a sympathetic response from readers, who are made to understand the importance of Frith’s laws to ecological sustainability, the fact that everything in the FernGully rainforest is connected to everything else, and the necessity of the Kahanian ocean’s health to the continuation of life on the moon. Through their observations of minds converted to ecocentrism, readers are able to realise their own potential for change.

Replacing the anthropocentrism of mainstream Western epistemology with an ecocentric perspective is crucial in today’s ecologically fragile world, and these authors play a necessary role in changing people’s perspectives by introducing ecocentric concepts into popular culture. The only hope for replacing the standard Western anthropocentric narrative is to offer a preferable alternative to the masses. Of course, the acceptance of ecocentrism into Western
thought does not automatically solve the environmental crises plaguing the Earth; these will remain until unified action is taken against them. Environmentalists produce literature portraying the importance and fragility of ecological sustainability and condemning the exploitation and destruction of the nonhuman world in order to convince the public that the current standard attitude toward the environment is problematic—both ethically and practically—and must be changed, or life as we know it will cease to exist. Unless environmentally minded people engage in the praxis that Gaard demands (326), though, and actually act according to the environmental ethics in which they believe, environmental conditions will not improve. This need for action applies not only to those who adopt ecocentrism because of their reading but also to environmental writers themselves; although environmental writing can itself be perceived as a form of activism, the sharing of knowledge alone will not improve the state of the physical world. Authors of ecological literature must take Young’s example and engage in the activism they encourage in others if they truly wish to change the world. Otherwise, they are simply passing the onus of protecting the environment on to others without also taking the responsibility upon themselves, informing their audiences of the problems without working toward a solution.

Literature that rejects anthropocentrism in favour of ecocentrism is particularly important in media meant for children because young readers have not yet fully formed their conceptions of social and cultural norms and are thus more open to the possibility of adopting an environmentally conscious perspective than are people who have already accepted the validity of anthropocentrism. It is much better for the environmental movement for people to adopt an environmental ethics while young because, as Burke and Copenhaver say, “Those lessons learned earliest are the most difficult to alter” (210); thus, it will be more difficult to convince someone who grows up with the standard anthropocentric ethics that anthropocentrism is a
problematic system of thought. Someone who grows up with an ecocentric ethics, though, will more easily reject the flawed logic of anthropocentrism and will hypothetically try to lead an environmentally ethical life. The substantial increase in the presence of environmental themes in children’s literature suggests that the next generations of businessmen and political leaders will be more conscious of environmental issues than have past generations. Of course, environmental awareness does not necessarily correlate with environmental practices; although those who are currently children will eventually become world leaders and are therefore potential agents of change, there is no guarantee that they will work toward the balance of the ecosphere. For this reason, it is essential that today’s writers of environmental children’s literature both inform readers of current environmental crises and set an example of action by working to solve those crises. Once ecocentric thought and practice have become standard elements of Western culture, the particular ethics portrayed in the literature will become more important, as some practices depicted will be considered problematic while others will be considered acceptable. Until that time, though, all environmental literature is valuable because it gives voice to the nonhuman world and elicits the sympathy and respect for it that is necessary for the public to adopt an environmental ethics.

This thesis is by no means the first exploration of environmental children’s literature, but it does offer some insight into the various methods employed by fantasy authors to encourage the development of an ecocentric worldview. Future studies could expand on this concept by exploring the use of fantasy to promote ecocentrism in literature meant for different age groups such as P. K. Page’s *The Sky Tree* or J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Another possibility is the examination of genres other than fantasy; for example, Ernest Callenbach uses science fiction to create a technologically advanced yet ecologically sustainable society in
Ecotopia, and Alissa York proves that it is possible to live eco-consciously right now with the realism of her Fauna. A third possible area of exploration is the use of tropes in the genres of other media; for example, the TBS television series Captain Planet and the Planeteers uses fantastical elements while the Pixar film WALL-E is a post-apocalyptic science fiction story. Studies in the fields of psychology or sociology could examine the effectiveness of these methods by comparing a child’s exposure to environmental literature with his or her attitude toward the nonhuman world and understanding of its processes. By exploring the means by which environmental writers approach the task of promoting ecocentrism, we can further our understanding of cultural knowledge of and attitudes toward the nonhuman.
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