

**NATURE AND GRIEF:
AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GRIEF IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

by

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B.S., The University of Georgia, 2007

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Children's Literature)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2010

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Abstract

This study explores the role of nature in three picture books that broach the topics of death, grief, depression, or loss: Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen's *Lifetimes*, Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*, and Roni Schotter and Kimberly Bulcken Root's *In the Piney Woods*. Using a close reading of both the text and the visual images, these picture books are analyzed for their use of nature in discussing the concepts of death, regeneration, life, and the life cycle. The three texts reflect two primary historical trends of ecocriticism that of nature-as-space and nature-as-knowledge as exemplified by writers in the Romantic era, the American pastoral, and the Victorian period. Through a further examination of the text and image relationship within the text, the texts are then analyzed for their effectiveness and accessibility to children within the practice of bibliotherapy.

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Acknowledgments

I offer my sincere and humble gratitude to the faculty and my fellow students at UBC, who have not only inspired me to continue my research in the area of children's literature, but have also ignited my specific interests in ecocriticism and picture books. I especially thank Judy Brown, whose probing questions led me to not only fall in love with my thesis again, but also feel proud of the work I have done.

I thank Judi Saltman for her ever-inspiring dedication to the study of and proliferation of children's literature.

Finally, I especially thank my wonderful parents who have unconditionally supported me through all of my academic and personal endeavors.

To my family.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Before beginning my Master of Arts in Children's Literature at the University of British Columbia, I worked extensively in childcare. After a stint in a daycare centre as a part-time instructor for a toddler class, I moved to Melbourne, Australia to work as a full-time live-in nanny for a young family with two small boys. This was both the hardest and most fulfilling job I have ever had. While working for this family, I had the unfortunate experience of having to broach the topic of death with one of the boys who was only two and a half years old at the time. In order to aid my task and the parents' task of explaining not only the concept of death, but also of subsequent grief, I was given the picture book *Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children* (1983). Because I was attempting to explain such difficult ideas to a very young child, I paid particular attention to the methods that were employed by the author Bryan Mellonie and illustrator Robert Ingpen in their text.

As a bibliotherapeutic picture book, *Lifetimes* uses images and textual comparisons between and among animals, plants, and people to provide children with a literal, straightforward depiction of life and death. Ingpen's realistic drawings of plants, animals, and shells further emphasize the serious and didactic intent in the text. Published in 1983, *Lifetimes* is a "well-known book that explains death from a lifecycle perspective" and that "offers a valuable metaphor and one that is appealing to children" (Berns 329). While *Lifetimes* is a gorgeous, representational portrayal of life's natural timelines, it struck me as not only odd, but also quite interesting that one of the most highly recommended bibliotherapeutic books for a very young audience relies heavily on

comparisons between humans and other life forms, nature-based examples of lifecycles, and realistic portrayals of animals and plants. It seemed notable to me in my particular circumstances that I was being instructed to explain death through the patterns of nature to a mainly suburban child who had had no first-hand interaction with nature.

While sifting through many of the other titles suggested to me in those days, it became clear that the reliance upon nature seemed a common thread in books attempting to introduce death or to enter into a conversation about trauma. The long tradition of nature-based stories and anthropomorphic literature for young children became linked in my mind with the challenges of helping a small boy to understand the death of a loved one. As I look back, the apparent need to use nature to explain death or grief seems almost unchanging or unyielding. During my current studies in the dynamic and exciting field of children's literature, I found myself questioning this one aspect that seemed static: specifically what makes this relationship between the child and nature during trauma immune to the influences of time, changes in environment, and evolutionary changes?

These questions and interests of mine as they have influenced my current studies not only raise new issues about the interaction between the child and nature, but they also point to intriguing trends in children's literature: first, the tie between nature and children, which reached its most constructed point during the Victorian era in England; second, nature as a place of escape or comfort; and third, the presentation of nature as a source of knowledge. It is from the interaction and subsequent blending of these three main ideas that my own specific theoretical analysis arises.

All the picture books I have surveyed in the preparation of this thesis either overtly or inadvertently reference the trends mentioned above. While some very clearly use aspects of nature, such as the life cycle of a bird, to instruct how our own lives exhibit this inescapable cyclical motion, other books gently hint at the importance of nature not only in children's lives, but also in the conversations adults have with children and children have with each other about death, grief, or subsequent hope.

The array of books broaching death, loss, and grief is vast and varied. While many use specific, real-world incidents, such as the death of a pet or classmate, to speak to the larger themes of lifecycles, some work within the well-established practice of anthropomorphic stories to approach death through a slightly distanced route. As authors use the death of a pet to enter into the abstract, confusing, and weighty conversation about death and grief, others take a different step back, albeit a step back just the same, and use anthropomorphized animal characters in lieu of child characters to act out loss, grief, and acceptance. Books such as Judith Viorst's *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (1987) enter into the discourse through the death of the family cat, Barney. As the young narrator accepts his emotions, including sadness, while reflecting on the memories of his cat, he learns about nature's lifecycles through gardening with his father. Even in a text focused on the death of a cat and not a person, the role of nature seems inexplicably tied to the explanation of death. Another classic, Susan Varley's *Badger's Parting Gifts* (1984) depicts Badger entering a long, winding tunnel, a distinct metaphor for death, as he wonders how his friends will cope with their pain. Through the use of animal characters and a familiar metaphor for death, Varley is able to highlight the importance of remembering lost loved ones while skirting the specific issues of grief or death.

In choosing the three primary texts for this thesis, I naturally surveyed many celebrated and regularly recommended texts within the tradition of bibliotherapy, but also ones that may not be as instruction-based, and that also approach the necessary topics, either through a stronger narrative focus or an aesthetic appeal (see Appendix A for an extended bibliography of surveyed death-related children's books). Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree* (2001), Roni Schotter's *In the Piney Woods* (2003), and Bryan Mellonie's *Lifetimes* (1983) have emerged as the three books that approach death or grief through three varying, yet equally effective methods while still relying heavily on the nature motifs that I will focus on for my thesis.

Shaun Tan's beautiful picture book *The Red Tree* focuses on themes of depression, loneliness, and hope through the pairing of a minimal, lyrical text with intricate illustrations. While Tan's book does clearly focus on one young girl's experience, there are no particulars revealed as to the source of her anguish or her specific methods of grieving or recovery. *The Red Tree* cannot even be classified as a bibliotherapy text as it does not textually gesture towards death or the specifics of trauma. However, this text does inexplicitly focus on dark, moody themes, and it therefore became linked to the other bibliotherapeutic texts due to my own initial interpretations upon my first reading. Using utterances as "sometimes the day begins with nothing to look forward to," *The Red Tree* does not follow the standard linear storyline format; instead, Tan uses a non-linear narrative style and his imaginative and interpretive paintings to effectively convey the emotions surrounding depression and withdrawal (1).

Like *The Red Tree*, Schotter's *In the Piney Woods* focuses on one personal story, specifically about a young girl, Ella, who loses her beloved grandfather. However,

Schotter begins her narrative celebrating not only the girl's relationship with her grandfather, but also the regeneration and natural lifecycles found in the pinewoods surrounding the family's beach home. Through understanding the role of the pinecones in forest regrowth, Ella begins to accept her grandfather's death, while simultaneously celebrating the new addition to her life, her newborn nephew. All three of the selected texts—*The Red Tree*, *In the Piney Woods*, and *Lifetimes*—were chosen for two reasons: the author's and illustrator's dependence upon images of nature to deepen or direct the reader's interpretation of the meaning within the story, and the narrative's reliance upon natural elements, including but not limited to plants, animals, or insects and their respective lifecycles.

The key difference that incites my own interest is the varied intended use of the three texts. Mellonie and Ingpen's *Lifetimes* was written within the tradition of bibliotherapy, while Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree* operates outside the tradition as an aesthetically pleasing piece of art with a relatively open plotline and no overtly didactic purpose. Because of the differences in these two books, there is space here for both comparison and an exploration of how two authors approaching the same topic through two very varied means can use elements of the natural world to approach death and dying—in Mellonie and Ingpen's case instructionally and in Tan's case artistically. However, Schotter's work resembles both *Lifetimes* and *The Red Tree*: while Schotter's direct and honest approach to death focused on regeneration and the lifecycles surrounding Ella seems to mirror the bibliotherapeutic tradition, the story both verbally and visually represents an artistic and personal interpretation of grief and loss. While these three books both mirror and differ from bibliotherapeutic books available to

parents, teachers, and children, I chose them for their different stances on the facts of death and their use of real child characters in lieu of anthropomorphic creatures.

While many instructional works deal more directly with death, grief, or loss, I did not want simply to provide in the body of my thesis a survey of the existing literature available to children, parents, and professionals. Instead, I wanted to explore the common thread of the recurring role of nature that seems to be widespread in issues surrounding death and life in picture books for young readers.

Simply put, I chose the bibliotherapeutic book *Lifetimes* for its connection to my past initial discovery of this tradition of bibliotherapeutic texts. It instantly became part of my thesis because not only did I come across the text in an instructional and work-related context, but also because it was the text that first sparked my curiosity about the nature-based explanation of death for children. I discovered *The Red Tree* as a student in the MACL program, but I immediately tied it to *Lifetimes* in my mind because of its seemingly dark focus on depression followed by subsequent hope, and its reliance, like that in *Lifetimes*, on nature motifs in narratives about death and dying. Shaun Tan is also my favorite author/illustrator for children and adults. With experience in illustration, he is still relatively new on the scene of children's picture books, often operating in the space between adult and child audiences. While he has a varied publication history including a graphic novel, Tan has produced six picture books such as *The Red Tree* that seamlessly pair his detailed, intricate, and sometimes eerie mixed-media images with thought-provoking and simple plotlines that somehow escape the trap of didacticism into which many picture books fall prey.

I came across Schotter's *In the Piney Woods* during my initial survey of specifically bibliotherapeutic books for children and of other picture books that broached the issues of death, loss, or grief. Out of all the other texts, it struck me as intriguing due to its beautiful interweaving of the instructive nature-based theme of regeneration in the lifecycle of the pinecone with the heartfelt storyline of Ella and her grandfather. Schotter's lyrical writing is only strengthened by Root's sweeping watercolor images.

Through a visual and textual analysis of these three books, I will examine the ways in which the authors and illustrators portray the relationship between nature and death to a child audience. Specifically, I will examine the relationship between the child and nature while questioning how relevant, accessible, and real it is to a modern, urbanized child reader in his or her exploration of the phenomenon of death and the process of grief. Reading these three books with two theoretical lenses, ecocriticism and image analysis, I intend to explore the common link of nature in the explanation of or introduction to death and grief for young children through picture books. These two theoretical modes will not only allow me to successfully approach and analyze the works at hand, but will also allow me to draw my own conclusions as to the role of nature-based images in children's grief literature.

In addition to analyzing the texts individually, I will compare and contrast the role of nature in the two genres represented: bibliotherapeutic books and aesthetic-based works. My principal questions are these: How is the motif of nature used differently or in the same manner between these selected works, specifically between those designed to instruct or teach and those designed aesthetically? How do their common approaches to death or use of nature continue to perpetuate the idea of the need for nature during times

of trauma? Do their differences point to anything other than their various purposes? How do illustrators use the motif of nature within the framework of their narratives of death, loss, or grief? Why has the basis for nature in children's lives remained so relevant when so many other aspects of childhood such as modes of instruction, the family unit, or increasingly urbanized environments are rapidly changing?

In the next chapter, I will trace the history of the study of ecocriticism, examining the roots within literary criticism while also outlining its more recent place within the study of children's literature. In my literature review, I will also briefly examine and highlight useful tenets within the traditions of picture book theory and bibliotherapy. In the Methodology section, I will outline the key principles of ecocriticism, picture book theory, and bibliotherapy that I actively use in my analysis of my three primary texts. Following the Literature Review and Methodology chapters, I will use the next three chapters to explore in depth the three primary texts—*Lifetimes*, *The Red Tree*, and *In the Piney Woods*—questioning the role of nature in the construction of an understanding or explanation of death for a young child. In my conclusion, I will make general comparisons between and among the three works, discussing their similarities despite their varied approaches to the same topic of death.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the three theories that I rely on within this thesis: ecocriticism, picture book theory, and bibliotherapy. Because of my focus on the ties between children and nature and nature and death, I focus upon the history and tenets of ecocriticism in this literature review. However, because I am analyzing picture books and approach the field of bibliotherapy, I also discuss the primary principles of these theoretical fields as well.

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism has been defined as “the study of literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty xix). While the roots of ecocriticism are found in socio-political theory, theorists and critics alike use its approach of close literary analysis to examine a social, political, psychological, philosophical, and ultimately human need for interaction with the environment.

From its inception, ecocriticism has evolved with several different theoretical focuses. In his 2005 introduction to the area of study, *Ecocriticism*, Greg Gerrard follows the historical trends in the movement through the changing attentions of the pastoral, from a structured working relationship between humans and the land, to the more recent focus on the wilderness. While ecocriticism encompasses many disciplines and traverses many aspects of research, ecocritics “generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a ‘green’ moral and political agenda” (Gerrard 3). The principles of ecocriticism, naturally,

are often instilled in areas of political discourse, environmental justice, ecofeminism, and social ecology and geography.

In the literary world, ecocriticism, as a discipline, first established resonance in the Romantic period with the sonnets of Wordsworth and Shelley, who “established a particular myth of man in nature ... see[ing] in Nature the revelation of divine nature as well as the subject of the most primitive and pure of arts” (Lundin 214). As Anne Lundin notes in her essay “In a Different Place: Feminist Aesthetics and the Picture Book,” the tradition of “romanticism is based on freedom to explore, to move beyond the community, to encounter Nature in its rough-and-ready form, to commune with this Nature for personal revelation” (214). The Romantics celebrated the rawness of nature while simultaneously upholding the belief that nature represented a pure and tangible ideal. Not only did the Romantics bring attention to the role of nature in the lives of men and women, but they also established literary and social traditions that continued to appear in children’s literature throughout the Victorian period and beyond.

The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), an American professional organization that organizes lectures, conferences, and discussions in the area of literature and the environment, notes that its earliest interest was primarily in Romantic poetry, within the British tradition, among other initial areas of ecocriticism including the wilderness narrative. While there were of course traditions of nature writing prior to the Romantic period, researchers from the literary world and specifically the ASLE note this era as the first to be studied through a specifically ecocritical lens (Gerrard 4).

In William Cronon's "Introduction: In Search of Nature," the opening to the anthology *Uncommon Ground* (1995), he notes a facet of the idealistic view of nature similar to that within the Romantic tradition. As Cronon discusses the almost religious status that nature has come to hold within the Western world, he states that "[n]ature as Eden encourages us to celebrate a particular landscape as the ultimate garden of the world" (37). While Cronon traces the celebrated and idealized physical landscapes through time, he points to a larger issue within his exploration, that of nature holding onto the same innocence, purity, and truth as Eden.

While Gerrard quotes Glotfelty's own simple definition of ecocriticism, he also offers his own, very broad one in which ecocriticism becomes defined as "the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (5). Without approaching theories of space, Gerrard seems to indicate that the most fascinating and crucial aspect of ecocriticism is not necessarily the differences it exposes between the natural world and humans, but instead the negotiation itself. This concept of a conversation between the individual and the natural, undefined world echoes many discussions within the field of ecocriticism.

Perhaps the most intriguing, unique, and inherently problematic aspect of ecocriticism as a discipline is its inescapable tie to the science of ecology. From the publication of Rachel Carson's socially and politically charged 1962 book *Silent Spring*, the tradition of ecocriticism draws not only on the textual presence of nature in literature, but also heavily upon the environmental implications of our changing social and political policies. As Gerrard navigates his way through *Silent Spring* primarily as a literary critic,

he notes the importance of rhetoric in the distinction between ecological problems and problems in ecology. Specifically he asserts that “ecological problems” are socially constructed, and therefore exist in the spheres of literary and cultural studies and that “problems in ecology” necessarily imply a scientific examination (5).

While Gerrard does not approach the relationship between children and nature, the trends he notices within the rise of ecofeminism mirror the beliefs and associations later analyzed by various other critics. While ecofeminism is necessarily tied to the feminine, Gerrard notes that it was not something inherently within nature that propelled this area of study, but instead two historically upheld dualities, that of nature and man and of man and woman:

Ecofeminism involves the recognition that these two arguments share a common ‘logic of domination’ (Warren 1994: 129) or underlying ‘master model’, that ‘women have been associated with nature, the material, the emotional, and the particular, while men have been associated with culture, the nonmaterial, the rational, and the abstract’ (Davion 1994: 9), and that this should suggest common cause between feminists and ecologists. (23)

While Gerrard delves deeply to examine the underlying dichotomies in place in ecofeminism, Richard Kerridge sees this discipline as much simpler in his Introduction to the 1998 anthology, *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*: “there is an important body of thought in feminism which argues that the beliefs and institutions which oppress women are largely those which cause environmental damage, and that feminism and ecology can make common cause under the heading ‘ecofeminism’” (6).

While Kerridge addresses the same dichotomies Gerrard focuses upon, he also makes gestures towards the socio-economic effects of ecofeminism: “Women, worldwide, are likely to have more experience of the effects of ecological damage, because of their relative poverty and because of the special vulnerability of children” (7). While Kerridge attempts to bridge the gap between the tangible and the theory, Gerrard works specifically in the theoretical realm of ecofeminism, carefully navigating himself through this hotly debated territory. Not only have there been modern threads of radical ecofeminism celebrating the seemingly innate bond between women and nature through goddess worship, but also there is a large amount of discourse responding to this extreme interpretation within the tradition of feminism: that is, combating the historical tendency to view gender as innate, natural, or inescapable instead of as a construction of society. Gerrard notes that “radical ecofeminism clearly functions as an inspiration to many to change their lives, but as a critical philosophy its irrationalism and essentialism are serious limitations” (27). While ecofeminism as a discipline often reads the woman into nature, many ecofeminists are not only fighting against this tradition, but are also working to devalue the socially constructed dualities of human and nature, man and woman, and reason and emotion.

As the Romantic period embodied a significant period in shaping the modern, Western view of the role of nature, it simultaneously furthered the field of ecocriticism by intensifying the pastoral:

Since the Romantic movement’s poetic responses to the Industrial Revolution, pastoral has decisively shaped our constructions of nature ... No other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture, or so deeply problematic for

environmentalism. With its roots in the classical period, pastoral has shown itself to be infinitely malleable for differing political ends, and potentially harmful in its tensions and evasions. (Gerrard 33)

Gerrard notices the differences between the classic pastoral, the British pastoral, and the American pastoral. While the classical and British pastoral have their roots in a rigid social order, the American pastoral “continues to supply the underlying narrative structure in which the protagonist leaves civilisation for an encounter with non-human nature, then returns having experienced epiphany and renewal” (49). The American pastoral was at once able to maintain the wonder and escapism of the wilderness while simultaneously building roots in the agrarian tradition as America’s farmlands expanded. As David L. Russell also notes, the pastoral was “characterized by a search for simplicity and flight from complexity” (121). Gerrard notes that the American pastoral was perhaps more powerful than the classic or British; the entire nation provided the aesthetics of the pastoral tradition of new beginnings, restoration, and freedom.

In his essay “The Pastoral Influence on American Children’s Literature,” Russell defines the pastoral as the literary form of humanity’s “innate distrust of progress, as well as a nostalgic longing for an imagined idyllic world of the past” (121). While the pastoral represents an accessible middle ground between the wilderness and the rapidly growing, ordered agrarian culture, it also provides a means of escape from the increasing demands of the growing urban environment, for adults and children alike. However, Russell suggests that the child does not approach the pastoral from a nostalgic place, as the new inhabitants to America viewed Britain as a comforting familiar. Instead, children simply view this natural entity as a place of respite or escape:

[In] the rural images, the seductive feeling of comfort and security, and the exuberant sense of freedom, young readers may see in the pastoral landscape a respite from the ceaseless pace of the adult world. (123)

This fleeing to nature does not necessarily suggest that there is inherent truth within this place; however, it does suggest that nature can provide respite from trauma.

Gerrard notes that there was also a significant gender-based understanding in the American pastoral period, specifically in terms of the relationship between the pioneers and their frontier. He credits Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975) with first exploring the gendered implications of the pastoral. She writes that the move back to the pastoral for Americans was a "regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape" (6). The return to the land after escaping the pastoral tradition of the Old World signifies more than a reconnection with the land itself; it is also a retreat back to a place of comfort and safety, i.e. the womb. Here, Gerrard notices the gendered coupling between the pastoral and the feminine, but he and Kolodny also point to another idea, that of nature becoming tied with safety, retreat, and sanctuary. While Gerrard does not immediately trace this idea of nature as sanctuary to children's culture or literature, he certainly opens the door for these further interpretations.

Gerrard continues to examine many other areas of discussion that equally present themselves in the world of ecocriticism—areas such as the wilderness, nature as a site of apocalypse, the importance of place as mediation between nature and the immediate, and the role of animals in our understanding not only of our interactions with the wild, but

also our own inward examination of the social orders in place, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

While ecocriticism has long been applied to and studied in adult literature, it has a very short history in the world of children's literature. In Karen Lensnik-Oberstein's essay "Children's Literature and the Environment," published in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature* (1998), she argues that the tie between children and the environment emerged primarily due to John Locke's belief in the existence of a "true nature" in a child. Through this simple observation, Locke implies that nature is at once definable and real while it also mirrors the pure and simple nature of a child. It is this pairing of children and nature that allows adults and parents and also writers for children to create a connection between the presence of nature and a child's own understanding (Lensnik-Oberstein 210-217). While this bond seems static and unchangeable, it also seems inherently inconceivable and inaccessible to adults. Paradoxically, adults are both the producers and the mediators of children's texts that perpetuate the presence of nature motifs.

Ecocriticism as a discipline attempts to define or understand the signs in nature. This definition comes out of the belief that "nature makes direct statements," echoing Locke's own philosophies as mentioned previously (Glotfelty 71). In this view, nature becomes the ultimate teacher and readers become interpreters of these hidden, albeit natural, laws. From this angle, the literature that features nature seems to transcend the intended purpose of the author or illustrator, existing beyond the individual text. Glotfelty's implication about the ability of nature to speak clearly exemplifies the written work at hand, suggesting that the role of nature surpasses the confines of any one book.

As Sidney Dobrin and Kenneth K. Kidd argue in the introduction to their volume of essays gathered from a variety of writers, *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism* (2004), many modern, urbanized children are deprived of and prevented from experiencing the natural world around them. They suggest that a complete lack of nature-based stories, experiences, and education could lead these nature-deprived children to take drastic measures in order to fulfill their need to experience nature first-hand, citing the phenomenon of the draw of the wilderness, especially for young males. Dobrin and Kidd reference John Krakauer's *Into the Wild*, the tragic story of a young man who abandoned all his worldly possessions and cut off communication to the outside world in hopes of living off the land in wild Alaska only to be found dead months later, to showcase the almost undeniable youthful need for interaction with nature. While their examples use worst-case scenarios, Dobrin and Kidd are merely attempting to unearth the ferocity with which some crave interaction with nature.

The essays Dobrin and Kidd have collected interrogate the issues of globalization, industrialization, and the changing structure of the contemporary Commonwealth school system, all of which play into the decreasing role of nature in the child's world (see Appendix B for the *Wild Things'* Table of Contents). Despite this general decline in the role of nature in children's lives, authors and illustrators of literature about loss and grief still rely on the motifs of nature and on comparisons among humans, plants, and animals to broach topics sensitive to children.

In their own literature review, Dobrin and Kidd point out that the relationship between children and nature seems twofold. The first, perhaps most prolific belief, is that children are innocent, virtuous, and pure. Because of the association between nature and

the ideal created in the Romantic period, and persisting through the Victorian era, children are still necessarily tied to nature based on their shared assumed quality of being immaculate and honest. The second tenet is the child's lack of knowledge of or relationship with nature. While this view of children lacking something seems to be in direct opposition to the previous point, it instead opens another area of the child-nature binary, that of instruction and environmental education. Whereas the first tenet attempts to delve not only into the past, but also into the theoretical arena of ecocriticism, this second point lifts ecocriticism into the practical world. Here, ecocriticism comes alive in school systems fighting for more time outdoors, in the push for environmental education at a young age, and in community-based initiatives to urge children to actively participate in protecting and saving their local wildernesses.

As Jane Darcy notes in her ecocritical study, "The Representation of Nature in *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Secret Garden*," nature has the ability to instruct, as suggested earlier, but also generally to improve the life of a child. She asserts that both novels in her study suggest "that closeness to the natural world can promote physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual health" (216). While she addresses the possibility of these works becoming overly didactic, she believes that they achieve their means through "showing" rather than "telling." While these works both represent historically outdated views of children and nature, that of nature as nurturer and nature as magical, both writers, Kenneth Grahame and Frances Hodgson Burnett, attempt to illustrate the educational and/or healing powers a relationship with nature can foster.

In their introduction, Dobrin and Kidd first explore the idea that the terms employed within the doctrine of ecocriticism are free-floating and changeable within

differing contexts. Words such as “wild,” “nature,” or “environment” naturally change based on time period, intended audience, actual audience, or field of study. While this is not a new idea among ecocritics, Dobrin and Kidd echo these thoughts before launching into their own history of ecocritical children’s literature. Echoing previously discussed works on the pastoral, these authors discuss the idea that the natural world provides a special space for “sanctuary and retreat,” perpetuating the idea that it is natural for both children and adults to seek a nature-based solace in times of trauma (5). Dobrin and Kidd note the celebration of the tie between children and nature during the Victorian era, citing the role of the garden, both literal and metaphorical. While the physical garden allowed children to grow and mature within nature, it also was a socially constructed world, near the home, that celebrated order and balance, and that existed metaphorically as the mediation between domestic and wild (6).

While giving a brief history of the child’s relationship with nature in literature, Dobrin and Kidd essentially hint at a broader conversation about space in the Victorian era, specifically the idea of the social sphere in discord with the natural sphere for a child. These authors seem to point to the importance of the garden to the child in the Victorian era as a means of mediating between the wild and the domestic and also existing as a space for exploration with safety (6). As Suzanne Rahn notes, writers within the Victorian era not only were interested in mediating nature through the garden motif, but also aimed to exert dominance:

This intense interest in nature, however, was often bound up with a desire to control it, or even exert dominance over it. Victorian zoos, for example, suggests Harriet Ritvo, not only provided exotic subjects for scientific study, but served as

satisfying emblems both of human domination over nature and Euro-American domination over the “uncivilized” world. (154)

While the domesticated and structured interaction with nature was lauded within the Victorian period, the celebrated view of nature changed drastically through time. Following the trend of nature-as-pastoral to nature-as-wilderness, the idea of and perceived need for nature seems to be based on raw, real, and concrete experiences in nature instead of domestic interpretations of the world.

Nevertheless the concept of “space” has persisted, both in the arena of ecocriticism and beyond. In his 1999 essay, “Imagined Territory: The Writing of the Wetlands,” William Howarth discusses the idea of imagined spaces and places within literature and their inherent boundaries and meanings. Using the poetry of Emily Dickinson, he asserts, relying on her own writings, that knowledge is not solely made by humans and understood by humans, suggesting that truth and knowledge can also be found in nature—in its impressive and almost didactic silence. Because nature is eternally silent, Dickinson lauded its ability to teach a range of lessons not only despite, but also through its still and peaceful character. Subsequently, he makes a distinction that is especially important to ecocriticism: “place differs from the geometrical idea of *space*, a set of points or dimensions that measure distance, area, and volume....space is an abstraction with limited semantic reach” (511).

Although Howarth uses this distinction to further his own examination of the role of literary spaces, specifically the wetlands, this contrast is helpful in navigating the world of ecocriticism in children’s literature. When discussing the role that space in nature can have on children, it is important to note that we do not mean the undefined,

abstract idea of space, but instead the importance of place as Howarth describes it: the concrete, tangible world of nature and the outdoors.

Through Howarth's discernment, Kerry Mallan's focus on space in the outdoors "Secret Spaces: Creating an Aesthetic of Imaginative Play in Australian Picture Books," becomes approachable within the realm of ecocriticism. Mallan echoes critics of the British classic *The Secret Garden* when expressing how the Australian suburban backyard operates "as a transition from 'the bush' of the Australian outback, a vast space of untamed wilderness, to the domesticated, safe, cultivated space of the (sub)urban landscape" (168). Although Mallan draws on the aesthetic of space to investigate the importance of children's hidden spaces from adults, she also speaks directly about space here. When defining the backyard ideal, she actualizes the significance of place in terms of nature, whether the child is in nature, withheld from it, or somewhere in the middle.

Picture Book Theory

While picture books are known for their young readership and simple narrative style, much scholarly attention has been focused on the dynamic, intangible, and intricate relationship between text and image. Although illustrated children's books use artwork to respond to or complement the text, picture books are inherently a marriage between text and image. Through either the opposition or union between the words and artwork, meaning is made in picture books. While many can be read with multiple meanings, Perry Nodelman notes in his landmark book, *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* (1988), the necessary dependency within these special books: "Because the words and the pictures in picture books both define and amplify each other,

neither is as open-ended as either would be on its own” (viii). While this idea might seem contradictory to popular views on picture books, Nodelman’s view instead establishes the groundwork in research not only for the accepted view of the dependent relationship, but also for the implied intricate exchange between the text and image.

In his essay “How Picture Books Work: A Semiotically Framed Theory of Text-Picture Relationships,” Lawrence Sipe notes that, in a picture book, the verbal and the visual “have a synergistic relationship in which the total effect depends not only on the union of the text and illustrations but also on the perceived interactions or transactions between these two parts” (98-99). Not only does the link between the text and image work to enhance the storyline, it also essentially builds the meaning within the text. In his article “Decoding the Images: How Picture Books Work” (128), published in Peter Hunt’s anthology *Understanding Children’s Literature* (1999), Nodelman notices that there are three distinct stories being told in any one picture book: one through the pictures, one through the textual narration, and one through the combined effect of both. In the relatively new field of research in picture books, the idea that picture books are more complex than previously noted is echoed by many critics in the fields of education and literacy studies and also in theories of semiotics.

Nodelman also suggests, “picture books ... convey ‘simple delight’ by surprisingly complex means, and communicate only within a network of conventions and assumptions, about visual and verbal representations and about the real objects they represent” (“Decoding” 131). Not only do picture books rely on a reader’s ability to incorporate two forms of storytelling to engage in the story, but they also draw on many

other complex visual and literary traditions that may, at first glance, seem easy for a child reader to understand.

David Lewis, in his book *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks*: Picturing Text* (2001), argues not only that there are inherent difficulties found within the tradition of picture books, but also that there is an interweaving of disciplines that must collide in order for scholars to speak on the subject: “Language and literacy is [sic] always embedded within social and cultural contexts which have a shaping influence upon discourses and utterances and which are, in turn, shaped by language and literacy events” (47). While Lewis does not immediately point to the complexities within the image-text dichotomy, he notes the often overlooked negotiations between the traditions of literacy studies within the dynamic and rapidly changing world of culture and language. Using this point within the framework of ecology, Lewis notes the benefit of using such a broad, scientific term to study the world of picture books, specifically the relationship of text and image:

The major gain is in flexibility and complexity. In claiming that picturebooks possess an internal ecology we are not claiming the exact same relationship of word and image for each and every picturebook.... Similarly, some pictures and words in picturebooks seem to be tightly bound together so that not much could be changed on either side without the narrative being dislocated or fractured in some way. In other books, the relationship is looser and freer. (47)

* While there is an ongoing debate about the spelling of picture book (v. picturebook), my own practice is to follow the spelling used by Nodelman, Sipe, and other prominent theorists rather than that used by Lewis and Nikolajeva and Scott.

This fluid take on the art-and-text relationship in picture books enables critics to understand the varying effects of one system on another.

As the meaning within the picture book is built through the shifting relationship of the text and image, each plays an important part in forming the perspective or point of view within the narrative. As Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott note in her book, *How Picturebooks Work* (2001), “perspective, or point of view, presents an extremely interesting dilemma in picturebooks, which once again has to do with the difference between visual and verbal communication, between showing and telling, between iconic and conventional signs” (117). In Nikolajeva’s narratology theory, she asserts that “words [act] as *primarily* conveying the narrative voice, and pictures [act] as *primarily* conveying the point of view” (117). Through these vying narrative forms, child readers are simultaneously presented two distinct forms of the picture-book narrative, each competing for the child’s attention.

While textual narratives clearly operate from a certain point of view, that of first-person, second-person, third-person, or third-person omniscient, visual perspectives are often more difficult to ascertain. While verbal texts can be introspective and internally focalized, implying a first-person perspective, Nikolajeva notes that pictures inherently lack the ability to reflect a character’s inward emotions and thoughts. While a picture may be limited in providing true introspection, visual images excel at providing omniscient, subjective points of view. Through large-scale, detailed scenes or in depicting two events at once, pictures easily operate within an omniscient, third-person point of view.

While pictures are unable to show characters' inner thoughts and feelings, they can hint at introspection through their own means, such as "intrusive" visual narrators, the use of mirrors, or the placement of the child viewer in a position of powerlessness (119). Characters depicted looking head-on towards the reader demand not only attention from the viewer, but also may be described as providing the reader an intimate, personal viewing into their emotions. In much the same way, images that depict a character through a mirror create the sense of a first-person perspective. By placing a viewer above the characters' plane of action within the text, illustrators create a power divide, presenting the child reader with a sense of the character's inferior narrative position.

While Nikolajeva notes the varied trends in narration and point of view within the world of picture books, she notes an interesting development: "an ever growing number of picturebooks use an intradiegetic-homodiegetic (first-person child) verbal narrator, apparently in an attempt to bridge this distance" (119). While other works use parallel narrative modes to build the story, these particular works do just the opposite and pair the first-person child narrator with a third-person, omniscient, authoritative visual viewpoint. Although this disunion between narrative forms seems problematic, the varying forms of perspective create some of the most intriguing picturebooks.

Anticipating Nikolajeva, Nodelman notes in his essay "The Eye and the I: Identification and First-Person Narratives in Picture Books" that while picture books may employ a verbal first-person narrative and the images may reflect the focal point of the protagonist, the pictures themselves "rarely convey the effect of an autodiegetic first-person narration" (2). While this may not be problematic for older children, the discordant narration places high demands on the young child reader who may not fully

understand the “I” perspective (Nikolajeva 125). However, through artistic manipulation of the images, illustrators can attempt to create the sense of an intimate, first-person visual point of view to match the first-person textual narrative if needed.

While some critics view the two functions of image and text in a picture book to be competing or independent of each other, Nodelman views them as inseparable in not only their logistical union, but also in their ability to dictate truths or realities for a child’s world. In “Decoding the Images,” he states that “picture books, with their intended purpose of showing viewers what the world implied by the words looks like ... are particularly powerful milieus” in which social and cultural meanings can be examined (131). Through the coupling of images with the text, writers and illustrators take it upon themselves to teach young children about their surrounding world, integrating them into the ideology of their dominant culture. Not only should the two aspects complement and build upon each other, but the balance of information is especially important to young readers who are building the meaning of the world around them at least in part through picture books.

Bibliotherapy

While books have always provided an emotional site for readers—from mirroring similar emotions and experiences to aiming to instill ethical values—bibliotherapy as a therapeutic practice is an invention of the early twentieth century. The term itself—bibliotherapy—is a broad umbrella name for many varied applications involving patients and clients, formal and informal, and books that either address the issue at hand directly

or work more indirectly to open a conversation about a difficult issue. As Beth Doll and Carol Doll note in their text *Bibliotherapy with Young People: Librarians and Mental Health Professionals Working Together* (1997), “Simply defined, *bibliotherapy* is sharing a book or books with the intent of helping the reader deal with a personal problem” (1). While noting the genre’s simplicity, the authors also note the varied uses of bibliotherapy, the required adaptability of practitioners within different contexts, and inherent problems of addressing emotional issues through literature.

While the goal of many professionals or individuals practising bibliotherapy is simply to create an open, inviting space in which to discuss deeper issues, John Pardeck and Jean Pardeck (1993) note in their book *Bibliotherapy* a few specific goals unique to bibliotherapy:

- (a) to provide information about problems, (b) to provide insight into problems,
- (c) to stimulate discussion about problems, (d) to communicate new values and attitudes, (e) to create an awareness that others have dealt with similar problems,
- and (f) to provide solutions about problems. (1)

Using this list of goals, therapists, teachers, or individuals should not only be able to introduce new ideas through a work, but also to follow through, providing coping mechanisms and formation of new ideas.

In addition to the goals noted above, Doll and Doll address a few more goals in their own list, specifically the trigger of an emotional catharsis. Through catharsis, a reader can experience a release of psychological or emotional tension by reading about the feelings of characters in books. Catharsis can not only decrease stress and tension, but can also enable readers to identify their own emotional unease. Interestingly, Dr. Kyung-

Won Jeon, an Early Childhood Education professor, (cited in Doll and Doll 1997) “points out that book-induced emotions are easier for children to cope with and for adults to assist with because they are more predictable and controlled than the spontaneous emotions that children experience otherwise” (8). By reading about specific incidents and clear emotional responses, Jeon hints that children might be able to better understand their own feelings and perhaps apply the coping mechanisms within the text to their own lives. Echoing Jeon, Carol Berns finds “that children may be more inclined to share in these ways through a third person or the safe distance of a storybook character, cartoon, or animal. Children can then talk about the characters rather than about themselves directly” (325). Not only can bibliotherapeutic books provide information on the problem at hand, but also they can specifically provide coping techniques, strategies for understanding, and a consciousness that the reader’s problem is not unique.

While Pardeck and Pardeck reiterate that books have indirectly provided aspects of bibliotherapy since the dawn of literature, they also note that bibliotherapy, as a clinical method of treatment, did not become established until the early twentieth century. While many books published prior to this time operated within the now-established genre of bibliotherapy, the practice itself began gaining momentum in the United States in the 1940s through literature that focused on the psychological validity of the new technique. As the 1940s and 1950s saw theoretical analyses of the therapy, the 1960s saw practical, hands-on research into the applicability and effectiveness of bibliotherapy as a treatment tool (Pardeck and Pardeck 3).

Just as there are varying definitions of bibliotherapy, there is a wide range of contexts in which it can be facilitated. Pardeck and Pardeck note that while bibliotherapy

is used frequently by counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and medical doctors, social workers are the least likely to practise it. Although social workers could logistically use bibliotherapy with clients, they “have little access to information on bibliotherapy because little is written about the approach in professional social work journals” (3). While Pardeck and Pardeck provide readers with a fairly straightforward answer as to who practices bibliotherapy, Doll and Doll loop the differences in clinical practices back to the variety of interpretations of the term *bibliotherapy*.

As bibliotherapy gained popularity in the Western world in the late twentieth century, a major divide occurred between untrained “therapists” and skilled professional workers who used it. While teachers, librarians, and parents are certainly qualified to provide books to children who might benefit from bibliotherapy, professionals warn against overstepping the boundaries. Because bibliotherapy, psychological therapy, and simple recommendation of a book operate under obscure and overlapping definitions, it is difficult to establish clear guidelines for each type of caregiver. As these lines are not clear, Pardeck and Pardeck (1986) suggest that the level of training needed to effectively practise bibliotherapy depends on the type and clinical level of bibliotherapy being practiced.

While Doll and Doll note the positive achievements possible with bibliotherapy for children, they also examine four main negative impacts that can occur if an unqualified bibliotherapist oversteps his or her bounds. First, the too-casual prescription of books to children with serious problems can pose difficulties if the book is simply inadequate or if the child lacks the needed skill to understand, possibly driving the child to reject further approaches. Second, the fictional plot within a text could be traumatic to

a child if it too closely follows events in his or her own life. If unskilled bibliotherapists are ill-equipped to handle the upsetting flashbacks or painful memories, the child may reject the initial treatment, becoming wary of further attempts. Third, an unrealistic plot could lead child readers to expect improbable outcomes or feelings to their own problems. While fictional characters usually reach a peaceful understanding by the end of the text, the child reader is still in the process of grief, confusion, or understanding. This divide could be upsetting if the text had been approachable and effective to the child. Fourth, the bibliotherapy may simply be ineffective, too simple, or beyond the means of the child. Hinted at here through all of the seeming downfalls of bibliotherapy, Doll and Doll echo Pardeck and Pardeck's (1993) statement that "the most important limitation to bibliotherapy is that it should never be used as a single approach to treatment; it is rather an adjunct to treatment" (16). In this context, many books excel at opening up conversations about difficult subjects, especially for young children.

Bibliotherapy for children necessarily involves more precautions than for adults, but bibliotherapy for *young* children necessarily requires even more. Pardeck and Pardeck (1993) note that when attempting bibliotherapy for young children below the age of five, there must first be a strong, trusting relationship in place between the therapist and the child (13). Because most young children cannot yet read, reading aloud to them is not only necessary, but also encouraged. In this way, the practitioner can emphasize certain words or phrases while modeling the appropriate emotional responses to the text. Typically, in bibliotherapy for young children, practitioners would not only introduce the text, but also follow up with discussions and activities to further explore the child's understanding.

While bibliotherapy can approach a range of issues for young children, one genre that can either be used to open a general, instructive conversation or to examine a child's own personal, psychologically troubling time is that of death literature. In Danaï Papadatou and Costas Papadatos' collection of essays entitled *Children and Death* (1991), they explore many aspects of death for a child, including the child's own understanding of and feelings about the concept of death, coping guidelines for both parents and children, and examinations of various scenarios involving death and children. In Hannelore Wass's article, "Helping Children Cope with Death," she discusses the understanding young children inherently lack about such difficult concepts.

Because young children, up to approximately age five, lack the necessary concepts of irreversibility and universality associated with death and dying, they necessarily have an incomplete view. Wass notes how these young children "view death as a sleep, loss of mobility, a temporary malfunction, a restorable condition ... because the reasoning they use to understand and explain happenings in the world is immature—'preconceptual' or 'preoperational' in Piaget's (1929) terms" (13). In bibliotherapeutic death literature for young children, the concepts of irreversibility and universality need to be stressed in order to begin furthering understanding.

Continuing the examination of the understanding of death with older children and adolescents, Wass notes how older children understand death as a procession of occurrences, particularly due to their interest "in objective observation, in concrete physical and mechanical aspects of things and processes, and in the laws describing them" (19). Once understanding the finality and universality of death, older children typically become fascinated with its morbid, somewhat gruesome details. While they may

understand two of the most difficult concepts about death, older children may still become fearful and irrational through their fixation on funerals, corpses, and decay. Bibliotherapeutic death literature for older readers might focus not only on the potential emotions of the reader, but also would explore the process after death while alleviating the fears of the child reader.

While many bibliotherapeutic texts stress the child's need to strengthen his or her understanding of the concepts of irreversibility and universality, Devereaux Poling and Julie Hupp examine a third, often overlooked facet of the child's understanding of death, that of nonfunctionality, the understanding that all bodily functions shut down and stop working in death. In their content analysis of children's death literature, they surveyed twenty-four death-themed children's picture books. Reading these books for their reliance upon three themes—the biological facets of understanding, cultural or religious understanding, and the range of emotions associated with the grieving process—the researchers analyzed the trends in children's death literature.

Most of the twenty-four picture books surveyed discussed all three aspects of death literature: biological occurrences, sociocultural practices, and emotional reactions. As the authors note, their study focused on a specific type of bibliotherapy: "We examined a specific genre of death-themed literature consisting of books that are both instructional and story-like in nature, the primary function of which is to serve as bibliotherapy for bereaved children who are anticipating or coping with loss. In addition to providing a source of comfort of support, such literature can also facilitate children's conceptualization of death" (171). Through their survey, trends in death literature for young readers become clear.

The prominence of biological facts in picture books on death, books meant to be read to children, suggests to the authors that they “may be geared toward teaching about life and death in a general education sense beyond specific grief counseling, whereas books that are targeted for children to read on their own may be more narrowly intended as a form of grief counseling” (Poling and Hupp 171). Older readers may already have an appropriate and realistic biological knowledge of death. While the authors note that a strong biological understanding of death is necessary, the interactions and trust formed with peers, mentors, parents, and therapists during a traumatic time may be invaluable: “For children, this genre of literature may provide useful guidance regarding the loss of a loved one and may also facilitate a deeper understanding of a broad range of death-related topics, either through shared experience with a parent or independently” (172). Death-related picture books, if administered properly and effectively within the practice of bibliotherapy, can introduce the biological concepts necessary for understanding death, while also providing a nurturing, relatable, and emotionally relevant story for a young reader.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Using two distinct theoretical lenses, I will in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis explore the role of nature in three picture books that approach the issues of death or grief. As my principal theoretical questions arise out of the construction and subsequent role of nature within the texts, I will primarily position myself within the theory of ecocriticism. Because I am analyzing picture books exclusively, I will also use the analytical techniques found in picture book theory to make claims about the particular images within each of my primary works. While I do not attempt to explore or comment on bibliotherapy as a clinical ideology, I do question the proposed effectiveness of the works within the literary genre of bibliotherapy.

As suggested earlier in the literature review, ecocriticism embodies a range of theoretical approaches to literature, from questioning the role of human involvement with the environment to the development of ecofeminism. However, in the three chapters ahead, I will focus on three specific historical movements within ecocriticism: the Romantic period, the American pastoral period, and the Victorian era.

As researchers such as Anne Lundin, Greg Gerrard, and Sidney Dobrin and Kenneth Kidd have claimed, the writers of the Romantic period characterized nature as having intrinsic yet accessible truths about the world. Many writers in the Romantic period stressed the importance of first-hand experiences with nature; they simultaneously upheld the belief that nature embodied the ideal environment, free of human interference. In questioning the influence of the Romantic tradition within the three picture books I have selected, I will examine the construction of nature in the text. Is nature shown to

have some constant, pure principles that can be applied to the child reader's own life? I will examine the methods through which the authors instill values about life and death through the natural world, identifying and describing the didactic nature of the language which the authors employ. Do the authors rely on examples in the natural world to instruct the child reader into an understanding of death?

While the Romantic tradition upheld the belief that nature held a tangible truth, the American pastoral and the Victorian era celebrated nature as a space in which to escape from the confines of the growing urban environment or to safely explore and grow between the wild natural world and the domestic sphere. In examining my primary texts within the tradition of the American pastoral, I look to critics such as Greg Gerrard, David L. Russell, and Annette Kolodny, who explore the idea within the pastoral that nature embodies a space for retreat and respite. To apply this theory to my picture books, I examine how and when the setting of the natural, unmediated world of nature is presented within the text. I ask these two questions: Is nature presented as a comforting space for the child character during his or her time of grief or trauma? Does its position and importance shift throughout the book as the child character experiences a range of emotions? In order to prove that one of my primary texts upholds the principles of the American pastoral tradition rather than those of the Victorian era, I will examine how the setting of nature is constructed, questioning its raw, unmediated state and its ties to the domestic sphere of the home.

Echoing the idea of the American pastoral tradition, writers in the Victorian era, as examined by critics such as Dobrin and Kidd and Mallan, characterized nature primarily as a space of growth and exploration. However, nature within the Victorian

tradition, especially for children, becomes distinguished as a mediated safe interpretation of the actual, raw, wild world. Extolling the garden, writers within the Victorian tradition viewed the space of cultivated, controlled nature as a healing and nurturing haven for children. By questioning the mediated construction of nature in addition to the role of the domestic within the primary works, I will be able to distinguish between the pastoral and Victorian traditions. Because the Victorian era enabled nature to be a space for emotional healing rather than a space of escape, I will look closely at how the space of the environment is described by the narrator, as either a sanctuary or a respite, and experienced by the child character within each picture book.

While my principal questions of theory lie within the realm of ecocriticism, I will also use tenets of picture book theory to explore my three primary texts. This analysis will ask where and how the child reader is positioned within the text. Relying on Maria Nikolajeva's work, I will primarily examine the agreement or discord between the narrative point of view in the print text and the assumed perspective in the images. Examining the point of view and the visual perspective first allows me to see the possible connections the child reader can experience with the narrator. Does the use of a third-person, authoritative point of view strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of the text for a child reader? Leaning on the research of Carole Scott and Maria Nikolajeva and Perry Nodelman, I will examine the visual images, specifically analyzing how the child reader views the scene, whether from an elevated, powerful position or from a limited, powerless position. Questioning where the child reader is positioned, I can better analyze the purpose of each picture book.

While I do not use bibliotherapy as a theoretical lens for my thesis, I do examine and evaluate my three primary works against the purported aims of the clinical practice. As John and Jean Pardeck and Beth and Carol Doll discuss, bibliotherapeutic books for children intend to provide explanatory gateways into troubling issues from developmental problems to death and grief. Because *Lifetimes* operates within the bibliotherapeutic tradition, I examine it through the theories of both ecocriticism and picture book theory to judge its merit within the genre. In this thesis, the principles of bibliotherapy become closely aligned with the traditions of the Romantic period in that both attempt to instruct the child reader.

When examining *Lifetimes*, I situate myself within the traditions of the Romantic period of nature that provide answers or knowledge about life and death to the child reader, in addition to the principles of the American pastoral, specifically the idea that unmediated nature is a space for growth and escape during time of trauma. I also will rely on the tenets of picture book theory to comment on Ingpen's illustrations.

While I will also use the principles of the American pastoral in examining Schotter's *In the Piney Woods*, I delve deeper into the theory, analyzing the role of nature as a place of escape for the child character from the confines of her stifling domestic environment. In addition, I use the beliefs of the Romantic period to explore the instructive aspect of nature.

In approaching Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*, I primarily use the tenets of the Victorian era as described earlier in this chapter to analyze the role nature plays in constructing a safe, healing space in which to explore the child character's emotional

journey. The Victorian ideals of the garden provide the appropriate framework with which to examine the coupling of nature and the domestic sphere in the text.

Through this analysis of nature in my three primary works, I explore the continuation of historical trends of the role of nature within literature in modern picture books for young children that deal with death, dying, grief, and loss. While there is a definite difference between the examination and view of nature as space in the American pastoral tradition and that of the Victorian era, there are essentially two main ideologies of nature being explored within this thesis that of nature-as-space and nature-as-knowledge. As nature exists as a source of knowledge or truths about life and death within some works, it is also effectively presented as a safe or nurturing space in which to escape, mature, or process emotions such as grief, loss, or depression.

Chapter 4: *Lifetimes*

In this chapter, I explore the role of nature in *Lifetimes*, examining the author's and illustrator's use of the natural world not only to create a safe, healing space in which the child reader is invited to explore his or her own emotions, but also to characterize nature as providing lessons or knowledge to the child reader about the universality and finality of death. Echoing the traditions of the Romantic period and the Victorian era, Mellonie and Ingpen's text celebrates both the existence of nature as a nurturing space and also nature's inherent abilities to teach lessons about life. Due to the authoritative voice exhibited in both the textual narrative and the illustrations, *Lifetimes* emerges as an effective bibliotherapeutic book, but one that ultimately limits the ability for the child reader to make real, meaningful connections with the text. Due to the divide created between the implied adult reader and the implied child reader within the text, the book becomes ineffective to a child lacking an adult mediator.

Working in the bibliotherapeutic tradition, Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen's *Lifetimes* employs an authoritative voice, both visually and verbally, that works to build an instructive introduction to the concept of death for very young children. As Mellonie's text gently introduces the universality and finality of death, the child reader is met with Ingpen's simple, realistic, lone images of fish, plants, insects, or animals strikingly positioned against a white backdrop. In addition to creating a divide between adult and child through the construction of an adult narrator, the book furthers this break by creating an implied adult reader in addition to the implied child reader. The heavy reliance on nature in the images within the text suggests the important role nature can

play as a safe space in which a child can be nurtured, adequately explore his or her emotions, and grow into an understanding of death. In addition to perpetuating the healing essence of the natural world, the reliance upon nature also bolsters the idea that there is an inherent ideal or truth to nature, which can be of use in the explanation of death to a young child.

Lifetimes makes it immediately clear to readers that Mellonie is not attempting to create a light-hearted story, but instead has very definite aims of providing a useful, instructive text about death. From the subtitle “The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children,” the authoritative tone is set into place. Interestingly, this tone is not immediately aimed at a child audience, but instead addresses adult readers, who are presumably mediating the conversation about death to a child. In contrast, the primary text within addresses the child reader. The distinction must be made here between the primary and secondary texts within *Lifetimes* as Mellonie inserts tiny and erudite captions for all of Ingpen’s realistic and intricate drawings that urge the implied adult reader to further the discussion with the child reader.

As the narrator addresses the child reader in the primary text, the use of an authoritative, third-person point of view continues to be employed. The first page opens with the words, “There is a beginning and an ending for everything that is alive. In between is living”(1). While the text itself is stylistically dry, the straightforward language characterizes the speaker as distinctly different from the child reader. Through endowing the narrator with the ability to speak on such broad, undefined ideas such as universal beginnings and endings within the first page, Mellonie creates a divide between the child reader and the narrator that becomes constant as the text progresses.

While the point of view shifts slightly as the narrator injects himself into the work, the authoritative style is upheld. Instead of instantly creating camaraderie between the reader and the narrator through the use of “us” and “our,” the second-person perspective works to build the message that death is universal. As Mellonie states on the second page “[a]ll around us, everywhere, beginnings and endings are going on all the time,” the child reader does not feel more connected or identified with the authors, but instead views them as having more inherent knowledge enabling them to make such sweeping statements (3).

In the attempt to illustrate the finality and universality of death to a child reader, Mellonie points to similarities between the child and examples of living creatures to illustrate the repeated concept of a lifetime. Once establishing that all living things must die, Mellonie uses repetitive and simple phrases to illustrate the absoluteness of death regardless of species: “This is true for all living things. For plants. For people. For birds. For fish. For trees. For animals. Even for the tiniest insect” (7-8). This same structure appears later in the text to illustrate the finality of death, starting the list with “[i]t may be sad, but it is the way of all things and it is true for everything that is alive” (13). As Mellonie and Ingpen’s text is clearly intended for a young audience, the heavy reliance on repetition and clear, simple phrases highlights the innocence of the intended age group while also accentuating the sensitivity of the subject.

Once establishing the universality of death through its existence among all types of living things, the book moves to stress the idea of lifetimes, thus explaining the title of the book. After stating, “There are lots of living things in our world. Each one has its own special lifetime,” the narrator approaches a few specific living things, describing in detail

their growth, their own expected lifetime, and finishing each item with the phrase, “That is their lifetime” (15; 17). Through the focus on trees, rabbits and mice, flowers and vegetables, butterflies, birds, and fish, the book extends the concept of lifetimes across multiple species, not only universalizing the fact of death but also furthering the narrator’s authoritative status within the book.

As the book attempts to move beyond the plant, animal, and insect subjects, the question, “And people?” is posed (29). The medium-sized, boldfaced type rests against the skyline of a double-page watercolor depicting a child running through sand dunes away from the ocean and towards the reader. The softly colored and peaceful image leaves much white space on the remainder of the pages, compounding the magnitude of the question and causing the reader to pause to process his or her own thoughts. While the authors engineer these pages to be a break from the rest of the ordered, thematic, and repetitive text, they immediately return to the previous structure on the next page. In explaining that people simply follow the same pattern as all the other living things already examined, Mellonie falls back to the oft-repeated set:

It can happen, though, just as it does with all other living things, that people become ill or they get hurt. Mostly, of course, they get better again but there are times when they are so badly hurt or they are so ill that they die because they can no longer stay alive. It may be sad, but that is how it is for people. It is the way they live and it is their lifetime. (33)

Just as the book focuses on the life, the lifespan, and the death of each featured item, the authors also address these issues for humans, again highlighting the finality of death.

Concluding with the discussion of people and adhering to the established formulaic pattern, the use of repetition with the authoritative voice work to create an informative end: “So, no matter how long they are, or how short, lifetimes are really all the same. They have beginnings, and endings, and there is living in between” (35). The narrator speaks like a schoolteacher, using a casual tone that still asserts authority when addressing the child reader. Ironically, Mellonie chooses to end his bibliotherapeutic text with an exclamatory, emphasized declaration. While once again stressing the universality of death, he lists the items that all share these qualities: “For plants. For people. For birds. For fish. For animals. Even for the tiniest insects. EVERYWHERE!” (37). Through the use of the exclamation mark and the capitalization, Mellonie not only projects emotion into his work that is absent from the rest of the text, but he also seems to celebrate an obviously morbid part of death. While many picture books that attempt to broach the emotional aspects of death address the topic of rebirth or regeneration, Mellonie seems to commemorate a more solemn fact: that everything dies.

While this aspect of Mellonie’s text sits outside the genre of picture books, the emphasis on death’s universality mirrors the aims of death literature within the bibliotherapeutic genre. As Wass notes in her essay, “Helping Children Cope with Death,” the concepts of irreversibility and universality need to be stressed in literature for young children as they necessarily lack a complete and truthful understanding of death (13). However, the celebration of this facet of death understanding, as exhibited by the sudden emotional punctuation, is unique to Mellonie and Ingpen’s book.

Much as Mellonie uses an authoritative, omniscient point of view in *Lifetimes*, Ingpen employs the same realistic, straightforward, authoritative style in his simple

images. Each picture is presented alone against a backdrop of white space on the right hand side of the page, typically adjacent to the text on the left. The animals, plants, and insects are not distorted in any way and work to give the reader an honest and authentic representation of the natural world. Because the colorful and detailed plants and animals are drawn against this backdrop, they jump out of the page, demanding attention and visual scrutiny. In addition, they also appear as subjects taken out of their natural habitat to be studied, examined, and analyzed furthering their already established persona of reality. Through providing the young child reader with such sensible and unfantastic images, the authors strengthen the authoritative voice exhibited within the text.

Although the narrator operates within a distinctly authoritative perspective in the primary text towards the child reader, there is a slightly different perspective working within the secondary text, that of the captions next to Ingpen's illustrations. *Lifetimes* has two intended audiences, that of the primary child reader and of the supportive adult mediator. While both aspects of the textual narrative employ the third-person omniscient point of view, the narrator uses the small captions to build a rapport with the implied adult reader, a relationship that is completely avoided with the child reader in the primary text.

Not only do the captions differ in the size of the type, but they also appear in a different section of the page. While the boldfaced primary text, approximately 16 point in size, appears in the upper left hand corner positioned opposite from the images, the secondary text, approximately 11 point in size, emerges in the lower right hand side of the left page, flanking the image. Set in an unusually small type size for a children's text, the captions are easily overlooked in the shadow of the large, clear primary text. Through

the use of repetition, textual patterning, and simple wording of the primary story, it becomes clear that the intended readership is between the ages of three and eight years old. However, not only does the type size and positioning of the captions indicate the additional, older and more mature intended audience, the ideas and concepts referenced in the captions are also well beyond the grasp of a young child.

While many of the captions simply note what the image depicts, a lionfish or a nest with bird eggs, some portray concepts too advanced for a child to grasp or reference ideas beyond his or her limited experiences. As the narrator describes the lifetime of a tree, the accompanying image depicts an “old grape vine budding” (18). While grape vines may not be totally unfamiliar to children, the concept of budding would likely exist outside of their limited knowledge of growth. When the concept of people’s lifetimes is addressed, Ingpen illustrates four female figures, all smiling and staring straight at the reader. As both adult and child absorb their warm gazes, the adult reader discovers that the female figures are all related through the simple caption of “Four generations” (31). While many young readers would be well versed in the concept of the family and familial connections, the idea of “generations” seems beyond the grasp of a young reader who is only beginning to become acquainted with ideas such as lifetimes and death.

While the captions then seem to directly address the adult reader, many provide the mediating adult with ideas for furthering the conversation about death or growth with the child. As Ingpen layers the focused, detailed image of the budding grape vine over the image of a larger, indistinct vine, he provides the adult reader with a chance to break away from the text and launch into his or her own discussion about new growth. While

Mellonie may be excluding the child reader from the secondary text, he essentially opens the door for possible auxiliary conversations.

As the captions work to alienate the child reader from the narrator and provide further discussions to the adult reader, they also build camaraderie between the adult mediator and the narrator. As the narrator describes how people, like plants and animals, can become sick or injured and could die, the reader views an intimate scene in which a very young boy has a splinter taken out of his hand. While the young boy's face nearly fills the page leaving minimal white space, he stares just past the reader as he nervously awaits his freedom. Although the use of this intimate image could build rapport between the child reader and this particular character, the chance for camaraderie is lost due to the lack of permanent characters within the text and the boy's averted eyes. However, rapport is built through this image between the adult reader and the narrator.

As both readers stare at the little boy, the caption to the immediate left exclaims "Just a splinter!" (33). Because it is evident to an adult reader that the tweezers approaching the little boy's hand indicate a splinter, it seems puzzling that the narrator would attach this humorous comment to the secondary text instead of opening this up to the primary text, and in turn the child reader. In a second analysis of the variations between the texts, the humorous phrase does not seem fitting within the instructive and solemn world of the bibliotherapeutic primary text. However, by excluding the child reader and including the humor within the secondary text, Mellonie furthers the divides between child and adult and child and text.

By ultimately addressing an adult reader through the title and captions rather than a child, the authors are necessarily endowing the adult with a responsibility that is

withheld from the child. While death is an abstract, difficult concept for all to grasp, including adults, Mellonie suggests that adults can more easily understand the finality and universality of death, in addition to ably mediating the conversation between text and child. The text not only favors the implied adult reader through granting him or her a power denied to the implied child reader, but also the text itself is essentially an adult creation for children. In this way, nature, and its instructive and healing properties, becomes mediated for the child, simply unavailable to the primary intended audience without the presence of an able adult. While many bibliotherapeutic books employ the same authoritative, adult voice as *Lifetimes*, it is by no means a hallmark of the genre. Mellonie's use of the definitive primary and secondary text coupled with Ingpen's realistic images distinguishes the text to be an adult's creation of a child's understanding of death and subsequent grief.

While Mellonie and Ingpen's work operates solely in the genre of bibliotherapy, *Lifetimes* straddles two distinct understandings of the role of nature within literature. Nature not only is the main character within the book providing the necessary lessons about death, but also is the setting in which the child reader is gently introduced to the difficult subject matter. Using a mediated form of nature in their text, Mellonie and Ingpen echo the Victorian era's understanding of nature as a safe, moderated space in which the child can begin to heal. While writers within the Victorian era valued and celebrated the need for nature as a sacred space for children, the ideals of the garden, a space that provided access to the natural world while bordering the safe, wholesome domestic space of the home, were also lauded. As Sidney Dobrin and Kenneth Kidd note in *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism*, "[t]he garden is not only ... [a]

space of renewal but also a literalization of emplotment of the child's organic innocence" (6). Through the emphasis on the child reader as innocent, Mellonie and Ingpen echo writers of the Victorian period in their insistence that nature be mediated.

Although *Lifetimes* avoids any connotations of the domestic in its representation of nature, the text's insistence that nature can provide a space for healing and understanding mirrors similar ideas present in the Victorian era. Interestingly, the safe space that the role of nature within the text creates is essentially an adult-sanctioned space. Without the presence of a child voice or the ability of the child reader to make effective emotional connections with the text, the belief that nature provides an inherently safe and nurturing environment for children can merely be guessed at. Nature seems to exist as a safe retreat for adults, and this belief is simply being presented to the child audience. Here, the authors may not be reflecting an inherent truth, but instead may be indoctrinating the child reader into an idea proposed and upheld by adults.

As *Lifetimes* reflects the idea that a mediated form of nature can provide a child with a necessary haven during times of trauma, the text wholeheartedly upholds the tenet of the Romantic tradition, asserting that there is an instinctive and educative truth within nature on the subject of death. With Mellonie's full reliance on nature to guide the introduction of death and the lessons surrounding it, he sits comfortably in the belief that nature contains inherent knowledge that can be accessed by humans in order to better understand the world. As critics such as Anne Lundin and Greg Gerrard note, writers within the Romantic period upheld the belief not only that nature was to be celebrated in its raw form but also that nature held truths about life that could be gleaned through an interaction with the natural world (214; 4). Not only does Mellonie design his book to

first introduce the ideas of lifetimes and the universality of death through all living things, but also he establishes these lessons through his animal, plant, and insect subjects before applying these same ideas to people.

Through this transfer of the principles of lifetimes from nature to people, Mellonie enables nature to be the comforting setting to his story, but also nature directs the themes and message to the reader, allowing for further transfer to the reader's own life and experiences. As Mellonie and Ingpen use the authoritative voice through the third-person omniscient narrator and the realistic, austere images, they enable their text to at once provide a straightforward, relevant introduction of death among all forms of life to a very young reader, while also suggesting and supporting the idea of nature as a nurturing, safe spot during times of trauma or confusion. While there is an inevitable divide between the text and the child due to the creation of the implied adult reader and the camaraderie between the adult narrator and reader, the child is still encouraged to glean the clear message that everyone dies.

Chapter 5: *The Red Tree*

In this chapter, I will analyze a different literary approach to the explanation of death to young children, that of an emotional exploration of depression rather than a practical, instructive bibliotherapeutic text. In examining Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*, I primarily use picture book theory, specifically the work of Maria Nikolajeva and Perry Nodelman, to analyze the discordant, yet still effective visual and verbal perspectives at work in Tan's narrative. Tan enables nature to exist as a space of comfort and healing for his child character, as Mellonie and Ingpen did for their child reader in their work *Lifetimes*. However, nature in *The Red Tree*, as signified by the red leaf, becomes characterized as healing and hopeful exclusively within the domestic sphere, echoing the connection of nature and the home evident in the Victorian era. While this emphasis on nature as healing only in the domestic realm may seem limiting to some, Tan is simply exploring another aspect of nature as space for both his own child character and the implied child reader.

Unlike *Lifetimes*, Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree* does not focus explicitly on death or attempt to explain anything about it. Instead, Tan creates a text that veers away from the traditional picture book format, giving readers a lyrical look into one little girl's emotional journey through depression and loss, purposefully omitting the cause of (and interestingly the solution to) the girl's troubles in lieu of a plot-driven book. Minimal text, coupled with elaborate, dream-like illustrations, effectively captures the often intangible emotions of loneliness, fear, loss of faith, and hope. When remembering the beginnings of *The Red Tree*, Tan notes that his primary interest was in creating a book

without a story, essentially a picture book about feelings (Tan). While Tan consistently inserts the image of a red leaf into every illustration as a signpost for hope amid the sadness, he is not suggesting that nature is the answer to the character's problems. Instead, nature, symbolized by the leaf and eventually the red tree, emerges not as a force of knowledge providing answers within the text, but instead as a place of refuge for the suffering child, for both the girl character and the identifying child reader. By providing the child reader with the varying perspectives of the images coupled with the effective, non-didactic reliance on nature, Tan produces a work that appeals to a child reader, while also celebrating the need for exploration of emotions within the safe haven of the natural world.

Tan's award-winning book* opens simply, with a single black leaf floating down the muted gray end papers, which as reviewer Sylvia Pantaleo notes "sets the tone for this intriguing and thought-provoking picture book" (n. pag.). The narrative opens on a small, red-haired girl sitting alone in her bed while dark leaves fall aimlessly around her. As she stares blankly ahead, readers are met with the opening line, "sometimes the day begins with nothing to look forward to" (1). While the tone is ominous, readers are met with more intense language on the next page. As the girl pushes past the waist-high pile of leaves in her bedroom, the narrator continues dismally, "and things go from bad to worse" (3). The pages themselves are quite large, but the first two images of the girl's bedroom are quite small, approximately half the size of the page, framed in a simple,

* *The Red Tree* has been awarded the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature in the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards (2002), and was an Honour Book for the Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year (2002). It was also shortlisted as the Children's Book in the Western Australian Premier's Book Awards (2001).

pencil outline. Upon moving forward in the text, readers are catapulted into a dream-like sequence of landscapes depicting the child character's inner feelings.

Tan's imaginative illustrative style varies from scene to scene: as the feeling of inescapable darkness is represented through a giant open-mouthed fish floating directly above the girl's head, blocking out any of the city's light on one page, Tan's art shifts immediately to a depiction of the girl trapped in a glass bottle stranded alone on a deserted beach. Although the narrator's language is sparse, it performs as a poetic and necessary backdrop to Tan's detailed illustrations. While the textual narrative is powerful and insightful in and of itself, Tan traces the illustrative-based beginnings of his work on his personal website: "what resulted after many scribbles was a series of imaginary landscapes connected only by a minimal thread of text and the silent figure of a young girl at the center of each one, with whom the reader is invited to identify" (n. pag.). Although the language may be spare, it instinctively draws readers in, implicitly asking if they too have been let down, confused, misunderstood, or left behind.

Using mixed media of collage, oil, acrylic, and pencils, Tan not only achieves a layered and infinitely textured look, but he is also able to add incredible amounts of detail to his work. One scene that perfectly captures this quality accompanies the text "sometimes you wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and wait and wait but nothing ever happens" (12-13); with each passing moment, Tan attentively zooms out in each of his eight comic-book-like images, slowly revealing the lone girl marking day after day atop a large shell-like structure presumably in the middle of a lonely field.

Although Tan excels in creating lonesome, eerie landscapes full of empty space, he also triumphs in his illustrations that highlight his collage and dye skills. When the

narrator describes the world being “without sense or reason,” the reader is immediately met with a full two-page spread bursting with color and texture. Among the many newspaper clippings and clever cut-outs fashioned out of dyed papers, it becomes challenging to find the child character. Nestled among many red and orange paper towers, she climbs a ladder, attempting to enter a new scene through a false window. Not only does Tan invite readers to identify with the girl’s emotions, he seems to want to evoke these same emotions or thoughts in the reader in order to create empathy, and perhaps an understanding, between the child character and the child reader. By creating images that perfectly mirror the confusion, solitude, or helplessness of the girl character, Tan urges his readers to connect with his creation and his story through more than just the narrative itself.

While Tan uses visual metaphors of place and setting to amplify the little girl’s feelings, he strategically places a red leaf in every image to signify constant hope amid the visual and verbal struggle. Readers are met with the leaf as a piece of framed art hanging above the girl’s bed in her room in the first two images. However, that quickly changes as the girl enters into her own visual manifestations of depression. Tan cleverly places each red leaf within every large spread, prompting the reader to find them in each fantastical scene. Ironically, the child reader’s search for the red leaf, essentially the search for hope, becomes almost amusing, recalling games of I-Spy and scavenger hunts for kids.

As the girl re-enters her room at the end of the day, she is met head-on with a single red leaf standing upright in the middle of the space, glowing from the hall light. Accompanied by the words “and the day seems to end the way it began but suddenly

there it is right in front of you bright and vivid quietly waiting,” the text and image together convey a shift not only in the visual structure, but also in the girl’s depression. As the child returns to her room, the reader too leaves behind the sweeping illustrations of the dramatic and illusory landscapes to return to the small, framed images of the domestic scene. Turning to the last page, the reader finds the red tree. As the girl approaches the tree, still glowing in the middle of her room, she turns up her face and smiles, a first in the text. Basking in the light of the red tree, both the girl and the reader experience the feeling of a new beginning, a hopeful start for something fresh.

While *The Red Tree* is not a bibliotherapeutic text, and Tan is not attempting to provide answers or suggest treatments for depression, the work invites and celebrates the connections between reader and character. As John Pardeck and Jean Pardeck (1993) note in *Bibliotherapy: A Clinical Approach for Helping Children*, in order for a young child to learn the lessons or the appropriate emotional responses in bibliotherapy, “[t]he child must be able to see similarities between the self and the character in the book ... [as well as] similarities between the child’s problem and the problem presented in the book (Cianciolo, 1965)” (12). Through the language, the effective imagery, and the simple message, Tan’s *The Red Tree* provides a space for readers not only to visually and emotionally explore the experience of the girl, but also to explore their own emotions.

To create a textual narrative that at once implies authority or knowledge in addition to appealing to a reader, the narrator speaks in the second-person point of view using the pronoun “you.” Although second-person point of view is somewhat uncommon in adult literature, it immediately creates intimacy between the narrator and the reader. While Tan chooses this second-person point of view for the narrative, the illustrations

operate in a third-person, omniscient perspective. By positioning the child reader where he or she is granted full visual access to the scene, Tan necessarily grants that reader power within the text. As Perry Nodelman notes in *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* (1988), figures “seen from above become part of an environment, either secure in it or constrained by it” (150). Through the use of the omniscient, downward viewpoint, Tan characterizes his scene, and his child character, as powerless throughout the text. In the first image of the girl's bedroom, the child reader views the scene from slightly above, allowing the reader to see not only the girl, but also the leaves falling around her and the framed red leaf above her bed. While Tan does not make the child character gaze out at the reader, he enables the reader to connect despite the initial power imbalance.

Even though the reader sits in a powerful perspective, the use of white space, framing, and the small size of the image work to recreate the girl's emotions. While the girl is not staring at the reader, the feelings described within the text are palpable to the reader through Tan's styling of the physical layout of the book. The white space coupled with the framing accentuates the cramped, bleak mood of the girl's room throughout. Even though the pages are quite large for traditional picture books, Tan has chosen to minimize the space for the domestic settings in his book, amplifying the stifling nature.

However, Tan shifts from small, enclosed settings to double page spreads when he enters into the introspective illusions of the girl. He still employs the third-person omniscient perspective, allowing the reader full access to the entire image, irrespective of what the child character can see. As he does in picturing the opening scenes of the girl's room, Tan here condenses perceptible and raw emotions within his images while

avoiding the use of a demanding, first-person visual point of view. Through this illustrative style and clever use of positioning, the reader not only has full access to the girl's emotions, but also is visually invited to share these experiences with her.

Although the child reader effectively views the powerful images in their entirety in Tan's two-page spreads, he or she is positioned in a manner that easily allows for direct emotional comparison and understanding towards the child character. In a startling and affecting image in which the girl experiences astounding anguish, the reader not only sympathizes with the experience being described, but also senses an overwhelming connection to the girl through the visual clues. As the reader turns the page, the words "then all your troubles come at once" swell across the upper left page, mirroring the ferocious waves that beat on multiple massive ocean liners (14-15). At first glance, the girl seems absent, but upon closer inspection is found clinging to a tiny, flimsy sailboat amid the nautical turmoil. As the reader turns the page to find this chaotic scene, he or she is at once confused, disoriented, and frightened. The large gray ships seemingly fold into each other suggesting collisions, sinkings, and other misfortunes. When the reader's eye settles on the child character, there is an immediate mirroring of the girl's fear and discomfort in the child reader. Although her face is barely visible, it is not her expression that accounts for the emotional affinity, but instead her position within the visual depiction of her anguish.

Tan employs the same emotive images in the next spread. In the next image, Tan has positioned the girl so that she is directly facing the reader; however, it is not her numb expression or her closed eyes that cause the reader to feel akin to her. Instead, it is once again Tan's beautiful and powerful images that reflect the inner workings of the

narrative. With the phrase “wonderful things are passing you by” on the left, the reader is left viewing a locked window framing the girl in the shadowy, dark left corner (16). With her hands on the glass panes, it becomes evident that she longs to experience the magic depicted in the reflection, which presumably occurs behind the reader. While red and orange clouds surge up from the landscape, an intricate paper creation bursts out colorful sparks that transform into butterflies. Staring at the girl trapped inside, the reader becomes aware that he or she too is essentially trapped—prevented from experiencing the same things. Although the reader can view the fantastical images in the reflection, he or she is still simply a viewer. Having the same limitations of action and interaction as the girl, the reader begins to view the lock on the window as a symbol for more than just the girl’s distress. Manipulating the positioning of the girl and the implied reader through the artwork, Tan is able to evoke an emotional connection between the reader and his child character without using a striking, first-person visual point of view.

Using discordant points of view between the images and the text, Tan sits comfortably in the opposition of perspective, enabling the child reader to connect with the child subject. By employing an objective, omniscient viewpoint of the artistic scenes, Tan entrusts the child reader with a powerful gaze. Whereas the visual narrative allows the reader an authoritative viewpoint of his or her own in which he or she can explore and investigate the images at his or her own pace, the textual narrative operates in the second-person point of view. As Nikolajeva hints at in her examination of differing visual and verbal narratives within picture books, works that employ distinctly contradictory points of view often produce the most intriguing overall narratives (120). This union of an omniscient perspective with a second-person narrative voice creates a distinctive literary

space in the world of grief literature whereby child readers are invited to share a non-threatening exploration of their own feelings absent of a didactic, authoritative voice.

The narrator uses exploratory, inquisitive phrases that instead of pigeonholing the text into a particular genre or purpose enable *The Red Tree* to straddle literary categories and audiences. In this way, he creates a unique literary space in which readers are invited to explore their feelings. While these spaces vary tremendously throughout the dream-like journey within the text, one constant is Tan's use of the red leaf.

Migrating from the home to follow the child character on her wild journey through the unstable, frightening, and confusing stages of depression, the red leaf almost seems to lead the girl back to her original, familiar space of the domestic. Despite the numerous dream-like spaces in which she is placed to explore her own feelings, it is only in her bedroom that the girl is able to clearly see the hope that has been with her all along. Using the bedroom as the place of realization and rebirth, Tan is necessarily endowing the domestic sphere with an importance not granted to the other settings. While the bedroom appears stifling, unsupportive, and bleak in the first two images, it ultimately emerges as the place for healing, recognition of support, and recovery through the discovery of the red leaf, and subsequently, the red tree. While Tan's characterization of the domestic as comforting or therapeutic is not unusual in grief literature, his particular use of nature as the signpost for hope within this exploration is striking. The positioning of the red leaf's formation into a signpost of growth and hope within the domestic sphere gestures to beliefs about nature found in the Victorian tradition.

While Tan does employ this symbol of nature to signify the regeneration of hope, essentially the regeneration of life, within the little girl, he is referencing a very specific

aspect of nature. Through coupling the natural aspect of the red tree with the safety and security of the home, Tan echoes the principles of the Victorian tradition within ecocriticism, specifically those that cherished the site of the garden. As noted by Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd, the garden in the Victorian period was celebrated, especially for children, for its ability to allow them to experience nature while being nearby to the ordered, safe haven of the home (6). While Tan is in no way attempting to reinvigorate the Victorian ideals, his placement of nature exclusively within the home echoes back to the recognition that children need space, specifically space within nature, to grow and mature.

Because Tan's text operates as an open-ended, interpretive work, the ideas of nature and the home as being necessary to overcoming depression are not concrete themes, but are instead Tan's way of exploring the idea of the importance of imaginative space in times of healing. Just as Tan does not attempt to attach any bibliotherapeutic lessons to his narrative, he attempts to distance himself from any particular associations the image of a tree conjures: "The red tree may bloom, but it will also die, so nothing is absolute or definite; there needs to be an accurate reflection of real life, as something that is continuously in search of resolution" (Tan, n. pag.). While Tan does not aim to be definite in any manner about his creative choices, he certainly does gesture that the regeneration within the natural world, the safe sphere of the domestic, and the mediation between the two are spaces not only of use to children in times of trauma, but paths to healing, knowledge, and peace.

Chapter 6: *In the Piney Woods*

In this chapter, I analyze my third primary text, *In the Piney Woods*, examining the role of nature as both milieu and source for education about death, regeneration, and rebirth. Through the discordant visual and verbal perspectives, I explore the ability of a child reader to make emotional connections with the book, a necessary component of a bibliotherapeutic text. While *In the Piney Woods* echoes the idea of nature-as-knowledge explored in Mellonie's *Lifetimes*, it ventures into a previously unexplored area of ecocriticism as it characterizes nature as a form of escape or respite from stress, specifically the distress of grief. As both *Lifetimes* and *The Red Tree* work to engender nature as a mediated, safe healing space, Schotter's *In the Piney Woods* celebrates the child character's retreat to the raw, uncompromised natural world in her attempt to escape from the domestic sphere and her own emotions. While I certainly hint at comparisons between my three primary works in this chapter, I delve deeper into their similarities and differences questioning their effectiveness within the larger genre of death-literature for children in my concluding chapter.

Straddling two genres of children's picture books, Roni Schotter's *In the Piney Woods* operates as a traditional plot-driven picture book, while approaching death, grief, and the natural process of regeneration from a nature-oriented, bibliotherapeutic perspective. Schotter's lyrical, yet instructive text is coupled with illustrator Kimberly Bulcken Root's sweeping watercolor illustrations making for a powerful, yet completely approachable picture book for young readers, ranging in age from four to eight years old. By allowing the main character, Ella, to tell her story using the first-person point of view,

Schotter enables her work not only to instructively broach the subject of death, but the language also allows for Ella to exert an authoritative influence upon the subject. While the first-person perspective is employed textually, Root provides the reader with a third-person perspective of the visual scenes. While these perspectives are discordant, they each work in diverging, yet cohesive ways, allowing both the child reader and Ella to assert their own authority towards the concept of death while learning about the life cycle through nature.

While *In the Piney Woods* centers on Ella and her relationship with her grandfather, Schotter employs nature as a strong and prominent third main character in her text. As the reader opens the book and learns of Ella, her grandfather, and their summer home, nature exists simply as the backdrop to the story, albeit a significant one. However, as Ella's grandfather becomes ill, the role of nature within the story shifts from being simply a refuge or healing space to instead becoming an educator to her, triggering within her the processes of regeneration, rebirth, and the cycle of life. Through the continued and accentuated use of nature within the story, Schotter enables her text to be not only a valuable work within the bibliotherapeutic tradition, but also an interesting and distinctive text on the ecology of forests. While nature operates as a source of knowledge to Ella in Schotter's *In the Piney Woods*, it also simultaneously works to craft a space of respite, comfort, and growth in which Ella can process her emotions while also escaping the confines of her home.

Upon approaching Schotter's 2003 picture book, readers are immediately met with the cover image of a gorgeous watercolor of a little girl and a grandfather figure frolicking along a beach. The title page subsequently frames this pair again kneeling

down in a small grove investigating something hidden from the reader. Before readers even arrive at the first page of the story, they are visually alerted that this book will most likely feature a story about a girl and her grandfather and that nature, specifically the landscape near the beach, could play a major role. The first page highlights both of these facts to the reader: “Long before I was born, Grandpa, strong and straight and singing, built our little house at the edge of the sandy, piney woods, near the sea” (1). Not only is Grandpa the central character within the opening pages, but also he is characterized in such a way that suggests to the reader that he will be a prominent figure within the story. The landscape of the piney woods becomes equally important, not only in the detailed description, but also in the accompanying watercolor illustration of the framed house facing the sand dunes and open sea.

Not only does Schotter’s opening page give the reader hints as to what will play a prominent role within the story, but also the language, specifically the point of view, characterizes the speaker as well as the effectiveness and appeal of the story. Even though readers are not aware of the speaker’s identity as they read the opening lines, they can correctly guess that it is the voice of the little girl pictured in the cover and end page images. With the textual clues of “long before I was born” and the assumed reference to the young man building the house as Grandpa, readers can justly assume that the little girl will be the story’s narrator, essentially its authorial voice.

As the story continues, Ella depicts her close relationship with her Grandpa, describing their intricate, imaginative play as they sway and twist in the warm wind, pretending to be gnarled trees. As Grandpa and Ella go on their daily walk through the woods, they stop to peer at pine cones, as they often do, commenting on their importance

in regenerating growth in forests after devastation by fire. Quoting her grandfather, Ella foreshadows not only the plot twists ahead, but also the inherent lessons within the story: “‘Waiting,’ Grandpa repeats as he has so many times before. ‘Everything has its time’” (7). The next day, Grandpa is too tired to go on their walk; Ella instead joins her older pregnant sister, Sada. As they rest below a tree, Ella narrates in a manner that instantly conveys not only her love of nature, but also the connection she feels between and among nature, herself, and her grandfather:

Sada rests below while I climb into the trembling branches of an old oak. Its dry leaves rattle in the sea breeze, and its ancient arms hold me up and close and nearer the sky. I pretend I am a nestle bird and call down to Sada below, ‘Caroo-caroo!’ ... I wonder if, far away, Grandpa can hear us. (12)

As Ella carries her grandfather’s walking stick, she celebrates the relationship they both share with their surrounding natural habitat.

When a fire strikes the surrounding pinewoods, Ella’s family rushes to aid the local firemen. Although Grandpa cannot help, he urges her to go on without him, taking his place. As she races to the door, she “hear[s] his thrilling words over thunder and the screech of sirens” (17). While Ella bravely defends her pinewoods alongside her family and local firemen, she is instantly brought back to the memory of her grandfather upon finding an opened pinecone in the singed forest: “I pick it up carefully, for it is still warm. I hold it gently to my chest. There is someone I want to show it to, someone who’s been waiting to see it a long, long time” (21). Although Ella’s entire family seems to share her love of nature and the pinewoods, it is only Grandpa with whom Ella feels the immediate need to share her discovery.

By weaving Ella's relationship with her grandfather through their own interactions with nature, Schotter enables her characters to become so involved with their natural surroundings that the divide between human and nature seems intangible and indistinct in the end. As Ella describes her final days with her grandfather, she captures their mutual reliance on and interest in the piney woods. Recounting stories about the pinewoods in Grandpa's past and comparing Grandpa's whistling breath to that of the wind in the pines, Ella emphasizes to the reader the role of the piney woods in her memory of her grandfather. When Grandpa, Ella's best friend, dies, she describes her own anguish as well as the only natural commemoration possible for their relationship:

On a day in autumn when the damp earth smells like salt and pepper and the falling leaves do their last, wild dance, Grandpa dies, and I've lost my best friend. Everything has its time, I know he would tell me, but his words don't help. We bury Grandpa at the edge of our land near the pinewoods. I take a seed from the open pitch pinecone I brought him, and plant it by his grave. (27)

Because Schotter has been building up the role of nature within Ella and her grandfather's relationship, Ella's choice to mark Grandpa's grave with a pinecone seems not only fitting, but also necessary.

As Ella plays with her new nephew, she solemnly vows to herself that she will carry on the legacy started by her and Grandpa:

In a few years I will take him to the pinewoods, and we will play the game that Grandpa and I used to play. I will teach him everything Grandpa taught me about the tightly closed cones of dwarf pitch pines—how patiently they are waiting for *their* chance to burst free and be. (30)

Ella comes to fully understand the lesson about the pinecones layering her knowledge of regeneration, life cycles, and rebirth onto her grandfather's own life and death. As Ella notes that the pitch pine at the grave has started to grow, she too notices how her own nephew, now sleeping in Grandpa's old room, has, in a completely different way, joined the life cycle of Grandpa. With Ella being the sole narrator, the child reader intimately experiences her relationship with Grandpa while also traveling through the inner emotions associated with her grief.

While the use of a first-person point of view can be alienating at times through the sometimes overly specific and personal nature of the writing, Ella's personal voice invites readers into her experience, not only of her relationship with her grandfather, but also her grief after his death. Because Ella narrates her own story, she reclaims her grief from an adult narrator. While the first-person perspective is not as inviting as the second-person perspective as it is used in Tan's *The Red Tree*, Ella's age and child-like disposition enable her story to be engaging and truthful in a way some other grief literature for children simply is not.

In using the first-person point of view, Schotter not only provides the child character with the freedom and independence to process her own grief and emotions, but she also grants Ella an authoritative voice. In the opening line in which Ella narrates the building of the family's beach home, she speaks retrospectively from the vantage point of adulthood. By commenting on events in the past in addition to being the only heard voice about such facts, Ella asserts herself immediately as a narrator to be trusted. Schotter creates Ella as a child character sure of herself, her thoughts, and her emotions. While many child readers may be of Ella's same age, her voice and commanding presence

within the text enable her to rise up as an entrusted guide through the feelings of loss and grief for other child readers who may be experiencing the same sort of trauma. While *In the Piney Woods* is not a strictly bibliotherapeutic text, this emotional mirroring is necessary within the genre of bibliotherapy for younger readers (Pardeck and Pardeck 12).

While Schotter writes in the first-person point of view, illustrator Root distinctly positions the reader in the third-person visual perspective. Although the reader is granted full visual access, Root allows for greater understanding through the positioning of both the illustrated characters and the implied child reader. As Ella introduces her Grandpa and explains their close relationship, Root depicts their walk in the piney woods in a particular way to accurately convey the personal and exclusive nature of their friendship. As Ella and her grandfather head out for their walk, the reader is left staring at their backs; while holding hands and heading away from the reader, Ella and her grandfather look like very close friends, essentially closed-off to the reader and other characters within the story.

In the image immediately following in which Ella and her grandfather dance among the gnarled branches pretending to be old trees themselves, the reader becomes positioned in such a way that suggests an invasion of the pair's privacy. By placing a group of twisted branches in between Ella and her grandfather and the reader, Root necessarily produces a divide between subjects and viewer. While the reader still has complete access to the image of the two dancers, the divide accentuates the fact that not only is the reader not a part of the fun, but also that Ella and her grandfather's friendship is distinct and impenetrable.

While Root uses the first few images to characterize the special nature of Ella and her grandfather, the use of the third-person visual perspective soon changes to highlight the closeness of the family unit. As Ella and her family enjoy a night of baking with blueberries, the child reader views the scene from above, allowing the reader full visual access to the action. However, this too limits the reader's own involvement within the scene by placing him or her on a different viewing plane. Later, as Ella and her family prepare to fight the fire, the reader views the family from above. Again, while this allows the reader full access to the action, it necessarily distances the reader from making an emotional connection to the characters. While this third-person, empowering view is employed for a few key images, the perspective does not work to intentionally thwart the reader's emotional attachments to the characters. Instead these images aim to characterize and accentuate the family unit as close-knit prior to the trauma of the grandfather's death.

As the visual perspective stays constant with the third-person point of view, Root continues to manipulate the possible emotional connections available to the child reader through her distinctive and varying positioning. Prior to Grandpa's death, the reader was only able to view Ella from a downward, empowering perspective, such as the image when Ella finds the burnt pinecone after the forest fire; however, after Grandpa dies, the reader finds images in which Ella is on an even plane with the viewer. While Ella does not make eye contact with the reader, the images of her grief focus on her as an individual. Allowing the reader the ability to view Ella as an approachable equal opens the door for the child reader to make emotional connections with Ella.

Because *In the Piney Woods* operates outside of the tradition of bibliotherapy existing at the edge of the genre, it is not necessary that the child reader make an

emotional connection with the child character in order to fully appreciate the story. However, due to Schotter's authoritative and insightful writing and Root's clever positioning of the characters within her watercolor images, the text enables readers to see themselves and their own personal experiences within Ella's grief-stricken position while gleaned lessons from the experiences she shares with her grandfather. While both the text and the images work separately to achieve this end, it is the pairing of the two that makes the picture book and its appeal so intriguing.

Although Nikolajeva explores the dilemmas arising out of discordant perspectives in picture books in her book *How Picturebooks Work*, she also notes the creative and intriguing possibilities available to authors and illustrators who choose to work in this dichotomous space (124-137). In creating an opposition between the textual and the visual perspectives, Schotter and Root are not attempting to create dissonance within their text, but are instead creating a collaboration that enables the reader to better understand the story while also allowing for the child reader to trust the child narrator. Once there is trust between Ella and the child reader, the lessons that Ella learns from both her grandfather and the surrounding nature can be absorbed and transferred to the child reader.

As *In the Piney Woods* straddles two genres within children's picture books, it also projects two varying views of the role of nature within the text. While Schotter and Root create both of these interpretations of nature—that of nature-as-space and nature-as-knowledge—they do not attempt to portray either interpretation as a universal principle to the audience; instead, the setting of the piney woods acts specifically as a healing, instructive space for Ella alone. Echoing both the ideals within both the American

pastoral and the Romantic era, *In the Piney Woods* characterizes nature as a space for escape and respite from the emotional struggles of grief while simultaneously portraying it as a source of knowledge and a valuable tool in understanding death, regeneration, and the life cycle of living things.

Emphasizing the comprehensive role of nature within the text, the setting of the piney woods pervades every aspect of Ella's relationship with her grandfather; it also affects her family's life in their seaside home. When Ella becomes overwhelmingly upset at the death of Grandpa, it seems fitting and crucial for her to flee to nature. As Greg Gerrard notes in his book *Ecocriticism*, the American pastoral is characterized primarily by narratives in which the "protagonist leaves civilisation for an encounter with non-human nature, then returns having experienced epiphany and renewal" (49). In the pastoral tradition, nature not only exists as a healing space in and of itself, but also as part of a dichotomy in opposition to the artificial and ordered world of the urban environment. As Ella flees to nature for comfort and respite, she necessarily also runs from the confines of the home her grandfather built and her own confusing emotions.

As Ella finds her own appropriate space within the forest to cry and experience her grief, there is no indication in either the text or the accompanying images to suggest the piney woods can provide respite for anyone other than Ella. Schotter could be using the specificity of the pinewoods to highlight the ability of a raw, unmediated natural environment to interpret and process traumas such as a death in the family. Although nature is not portrayed as a universal space for healing for both the characters and the child reader, the landscape of the pinewoods does provide Ella with the necessary space and comfort to effectively come to terms with her grandfather's death.

As Anne Lundin notes in her essay, “In a Different Place: Feminist Aesthetics and the Picture Book,” writers within the Romantic period endowed nature with ideals not immediately accessible to humans (214). While the Romantics characterized nature as possessing these truths, they were still available to humans through a real, hands-on interaction with nature. As Schotter’s text models this same relationship between human and nature, it necessarily echoes the Romantic ideals. As Ella attempts to understand her grandfather’s death, she is comforted only by the concepts of regeneration and life cycles that she learns through the pinecones in her surroundings. Using these lessons that nature provides, Ella applies these same principles to her own life, which helps her to understand the cycle within her own family. While the lessons Ella gleans from the pinewoods do not seem as ideal or universal as the concepts presented in *Lifetimes*, both texts echo the Romantic ideals, but differ in their delivery due to the limitations of their respective genres.

Because *Lifetimes* works within the bibliotherapy genre, the text is not only allowed, but also expected to present such blatant and general statements that emphasize the concepts of irreversibility and universality (Wass 13). Due to its clear language and emphasis upon these broad concepts of death coupled with the book’s reliance upon the natural examples, *Lifetimes* clearly upholds the belief of the Romantics that nature can instruct. However, Schotter’s *In the Piney Woods* first and foremost is an action-driven story with an undercurrent of bibliotherapy. Because of Schotter’s commitment to her plot, the text cannot veer away from Ella’s individual story to suddenly profess the universal truths of nature. Instead, Schotter must work within the confines of her narrative, allowing Ella to make the connections between nature and her own grief,

hoping that the child reader will identify enough with Ella and her situation to assimilate the lessons learned.

Although Schotter's *In the Piney Woods* seems at first like a simple story about one girl's trauma and subsequent grief, upon further inspection, the underlying theories and traditions of the American pastoral and the Romantic period come to the surface in this beautiful picture book. Through the discordant union of the first-person textual narrative with the third-person visual point of view, the text creates a fascinating space in which the child reader can come to identify with and trust Ella in her actions, emotions, and subsequent messages about her own understanding of her grandfather's death. While Schotter's text echoes the traditions of the Romantics in its construction of nature as an enlightening, ideal truth capable of providing answers to Ella and the child readers in times of trauma or grief, the book simultaneously upholds the tenets of the American pastoral, enabling nature to doubly act as a space of retreat and contemplation for Ella.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analyzed the role of nature in three picture books that deal with death, grief, or loss. Exploring the construction of nature in *Lifetimes*, *The Red Tree*, and *In The Piney Woods*, I have asked how and where the child character is positioned in the text through the coupling of text and image. Primarily looking at the construction of nature as either a space for retreat, growth, and healing for the child character or as a source of knowledge about the concepts of death and life cycles, I find that authors and illustrators of picture books continue to employ nature motifs throughout death literature for young children.

Through examining the reliance upon the environment not only to create the setting of the story, but also to be the primary mode of education about the concepts of universality and irreversibility of death, Mellonie and Ingpen's *Lifetimes* emerges as a bibliotherapeutic text that straddles two key historical tenets of ecocriticism. Instilling within nature the unquestionable ability to teach lessons and provide an approachable, instructive ideal of life and death, Mellonie echoes writers of the Romantic period that lauded nature's pure and tangible ideal. Due to Mellonie's use of an authoritative voice and the distance created between the adult narrator and the child reader, Mellonie and Ingpen's understanding of nature necessarily becomes an adult-sanctioned, mediated version. In their use of a mediated form of nature to construct the healing space of the natural world, they lean on the traditions of the Victorian era in their celebration of an adult-monitored safe space in which a child can grow, mature, or explore.

As Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree* relies on nature to be a signpost of rebirth within his lyrical exploration of childhood depression, he exclusively explores the hopeful, regenerative properties of nature within the safe sphere of the domestic. In this way, Tan too echoes the ideals of the garden for children, a key nature motif within the Victorian era. While nature is not mediated by adults in the same manner as in *Lifetimes*, the natural world only appears as healing or comforting within the safety of the domestic, inherently limiting the child's experience with nature.

As Schotter employs the local pinewoods as the setting for her book *In the Piney Woods*, she also endows the woods with the ability to teach her child character about death, regeneration, and the concept of life cycles. She, like Mellonie, echoes writers of the Romantic period, specifically their belief that nature held truths about life available through direct interaction with the natural world. While Schotter engenders nature to exist as a healing, comforting space for her child character as both Mellonie and Tan do, she differs from the other writers. As nature is still presented as a comforting space for the child character, it is more so a place of escape and respite from the confines of the home and her own emotions rather than an adult-sanctioned, mediated space. Echoing writers of the American pastoral tradition, Schotter explores the restorative properties that a retreat to the wild world can offer.

As ecocriticism embodies many theoretical approaches to the relationship between humans and nature, bibliotherapeutic texts for young children or picture books that deal with death, grief, or loss seem to rely on two principal motifs: nature-as-space and nature-as-knowledge. While modern children in increasingly urbanized environments may be lacking a hands-on interaction with the outdoor world, authors and illustrators of

picture books dealing with death or grief continue to rely on historical motifs of nature to explain the difficult concepts of death, regeneration, and the life cycle.

As this thesis closely examines three picture books, it is necessarily limited in its ability to speak broadly for the entire genre of picture books that approach death. In addition, the three selected texts represent three distinct approaches to the genre: a traditional bibliotherapeutic work, an aesthetic-based, emotional exploration, and a plot-driven storybook. While there is almost no critical research applying the tenets of ecocriticism to the realm of picture books, the claims within this thesis could be debatable. While the findings within this thesis are limited by these factors, the thesis still presents a valuable examination within the world of critical literary research.

Because my thesis maneuvers between three key areas of research—that of ecocriticism, picture book theory, and bibliotherapy—it fills a research gap previously left unattended. While there is significant room for further analysis, this thesis breaks the ground for further collaborative research in these three related fields. Ecocriticism as applied to children’s literature, picture book theory, and clinical bibliotherapy are all relatively new fields of discourse. As this thesis applies recent critical theories to modern picture books, it provides current insights and relevant findings for a contemporary reader.

As noted previously, this thesis forefronts the research in the three primary theoretical fields, consequently leaving space for further analysis. There should be not only additional critical examinations of other bibliotherapeutic picture books within the realm of ecocriticism, but also further analysis of picture books that do not directly address a specific death or loss, following the trend of Shaun Tan’s *The Red Tree*.

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Appendix A: Surveyed Death-Related Children's Books

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Appendix B: Table of Contents of *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism*

1. "'He Made *Us* Very Much Like the Flowers': Human/Nature in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Children's Literature," Maude Hines
2. "'Foundation-Stones': Natural History for Children in *St. Nicholas Magazine*," Kaye Adkins
3. "'Somewhere Outside the Forest: Ecological Ambivalence in Neverland from *The Little White Bird* to *Hook*," M. Lynn Byrd
4. "'The Wild and Wild Animal Characters in the Ecofeminist Novels of Beatrix Potter and Gene Stratton-Porter,'" Marion W. Copeland
5. "'Arthur Ransome and the Conservation of the English Lakes,'" Karen Welberry
6. "'E. B. White's Paean to Life: The Environmental Imagination of *Charlotte's Web*,'" Lynn Overholt Wake
7. "'ecoLewis: Conservationism and Anticolonialism in *The Chronicles of Narnia*,'" Nicole M. DuPlessis
8. "'Playing Seriously with Dr. Seuss: A Pedagogical Response to *The Lorax*,'" Bob Henderson, Merle Kennedy, and Chuck Chamberlin
9. "'The World around Them': The Changing Depiction of Nature in *Owl Magazine*,'" Tara L. Holton and Tim B. Rogers
10. "'Still Putting Out 'Fires': *Ranger Rick* and Animal/Human Stewardship,'" Arlene Plevin
11. "'Environmental Justice Children's Literature: Depicting, Defending, and Celebrating Trees and Birds, Colors and People,'" Kamala Platt

12. “(Em)bracing Icy Mothers: Ideology, Identity, and Environment in Children’s Fantasy,” Naomi Wood
13. “Eco-edu-tainment: The Construction of the Child in Contemporary Environmental Children’s Music,” Michelle H. Martin
14. “‘It’s Not Easy Being Green’: Jim Henson, the Muppets, and Ecological Literacy,” Sidney I. Dobrin
15. “Cartoons and Contamination: How the Multinational Kids Help Captain Planet Save Gaia,” Susan Jaye Dauer
16. “Disney of Orlando’s Animal Kingdom,” Kenneth B. Kidd