

GIRLS AND GREEN SPACE:  
SICKNESS-TO-HEALTH NARRATIVES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the vital role of green space in the lives of young female protagonists in *Jane of Lantern Hill* by Lucy Maud Montgomery, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and *Understood Betsy* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher. The transformations from illness to wellness that each protagonist undergoes are linked to experiences in rural environments. The application of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and ecopsychology to fiction from the past unearths the ways in which the pastoral nature of the texts is connected to contemporary environmental concerns.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

I have long been aware of the ways in which land and literature have shaped my life. The research, analysis, and writing of my thesis gave me the chance to fully explore this awareness. Growing up in a semi-rural setting in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, I had access to forests and riverbanks, fishing docks and fields. I know what it is to roam freely and unsupervised in green space. During my childhood, the old farm estates and wild lands of the valley stood on the cusp of development, and I had the chance to explore many of these places before they were parcelled off and subdivided, as seems to be the inevitable trend. Time spent in these green spaces gave me the confidence that firsthand experience brings and the consolation of peace in nature.

My taste in books reflects my love of the land. I am often drawn to stories that take place in wild or rural settings, set in past times. My grandmother's memories supplemented these stories and made the details real: she told stories about creating a swimming hole by damming the creek, berry-picking in sight of bears, and not going hungry during the Depression because, though her family was poor, they grew their own food.

The way people interact with the environment has changed since my grandmother's time. The land is transforming quickly, just as taste in literature is shifting. I believe there is a connection between endangered green spaces and endangered books. As our relationship to green spaces is altered by development, our ability to connect with the green spaces in fiction – spaces from the past that no longer resonate with us today --

diminishes. In this context, though, fiction from the past can, with readerly imagination, serve as a portal, a window into a natural world and a way of life that are mostly gone now.

Considering these texts as artefacts, particularly in light of the natural world they represent, is just as problematic as the contemporary trend of speaking about the natural environment solely in terms of crisis. But it is difficult to avoid an elegiac tone when we are losing both aspects of the natural world and our textual link to it. For me, books from the past provide a way to maintain green spaces. But, I wonder, are these spaces important because I knew them outside of books as well? Without firsthand experience, can the environments in books hold much meaning for readers? What will happen when my grandmother's generation is gone and there is no one left to decode the natural environments of these books?

Exploring the intersection of the real world with worlds in literature is at the heart of my thesis. In examining pastoral children's literature from the past, my intention is to collect and articulate, through textual analysis, a strong argument for the connection between the natural world and the sense of self in pre-adolescent girls as represented in literary narratives. In regarding both textual and actual green space as psychological resources, I hope to contribute to the survival of these stories and these spaces.

### **Origins of Interest**

The ideas in this study have been on my mind for several years now. In 2004, I went to Japan to teach English. Because I enjoy the comfort of revisiting beloved books, I packed a number of long-time favourites to keep me company there. One afternoon during my second year of teaching, I looked at the books on my shelves and noticed a

pattern: many of the stories had transformations at their core. Later, in graduate school, I would learn that the transformation trope is almost as common in children's literature as the orphan trope. But at the time, I was struck by how important these books have been to me since childhood, and I began to look closely at the reasons why. A number of the stories on my shelves deal with characters' transformations from sickness to health; the three books that stood out as being especially significant to me -- Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911), Dorothy Canfield Fisher's *Understood Betsy* (1917), and L.M. Montgomery's *Jane of Lantern Hill* (1937) -- all centre on sickness-to-health transformations that are rooted in each female protagonist's experiences within a rural green space.

### **Rationale for selection of primary texts**

When I first began talking about my research ideas with colleagues and instructors in the Master of Arts in Children's Literature program at the University of British Columbia, a number of related primary texts were suggested, such as Anita Horrock's *Almost Eden* and Eloise McGraw's *The Moorchild*. I read and enjoyed these books, along with *Jasmin* by Jan Truss, *Alone at Ninety Foot* by Katherine Holubitsky, and *Willow and Twig* by Jean Little. All these stories deal with some variation of a sickness-to-health transformation, as do classic novels like Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*, Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna*, and Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did*. Picturebooks such as *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* by Beatrix Potter and *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney also hold aspects of the transformation narrative I was interested in researching.

All these stories were contenders, but my reasons for not choosing them helped bring my final choices into focus: in *Almost Eden*, it is the mother who is ill, and not the

daughter; I knew I wanted to focus on child characters, preferably prepubescent girls. *The Moorchild* is a fantasy text, and I wanted to incorporate environmental literary criticism, or ecocriticism, into stories grounded in realism. The young female protagonist in *Jasmin* undergoes a marked transformation, but the timespan as it relates to her immersion in the natural world and in which the change occurs is too brief; stories that moved through at least one full season were what I was looking for. The protagonist's transformation in *Alone at Ninety Foot* is based on trauma rather than issues of self-perception and self-esteem, and would require a psychoanalytic background that took me away from my research interests; also, the text is very contemporary, as is the case with *Willow and Twig*. Because I knew I wanted *The Secret Garden* as a cornerstone text in my research, I was unsure how to bridge this historical work with more contemporary stories. With *Heidi*, the historical criterion is clearly met, but the sickness-to-health aspect is convoluted: although Heidi suffers away from the mountains, she is a healthy child at the start of the story; Clara undergoes a huge transformation, but she is not the protagonist. The transformations in *Pollyanna* and *What Katy Did* are much the same: both protagonists are healthy at the start of the each story. And finally, while I am interested in the ecocritical themes of Cooney's and Potter's texts, I am keen to focus on the textual theories of chapter books rather than on theories of visual literacy.

The three texts I have selected -- *The Secret Garden*, *Understood Betsy*, and *Jane of Lantern Hill* -- all reflect an idea expressed by Rosemary Sutcliff in her autobiography, *Blue Remembered Hills*. Of her childhood in the English countryside she writes, "Above all, I soaked in the 'feel' of the downs, the warm sense of the ground itself actively holding one up; a sureness, a steadfastness; and the sense that one gets in down country



of kinship with a land that has been mixed up with the life of men since it and men began” (37). The protagonists of my chosen texts are all “held up” in various ways by the land. Each girl’s connection to the land builds her sense of personal capability, and the environment is more than backdrop.

### **Introduction to Primary Texts**

#### ***The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett**

My three primary texts are considered classics, but of them all, only *The Secret Garden* is still widely read. It was published in 1911 and was received with mostly positive reviews, though as Phyllis Bixler reports, there were some critics who found it “over-sentimental and dealing almost wholly with abnormal people” (13). The most damning review dismissed it as a story that “will appeal to many women and young girls” (qtd. in Bixler 13). In 1951, Marghanita Laski reassessed the literary value of *The Secret Garden*, and by the 1980s, it was labelled a classic. Since then, it has garnered much scholarly attention and is listed on the syllabi for many university children’s literature courses.

Since first reading the book as a child, I have never tired of Mary’s transformation story. It has become a seasonal read for me: when the snowdrops come up, I read *The Secret Garden*, as that is when Mary’s metamorphosis begins. The symbolic connection of Mary with her environment is endlessly satisfying as her journey to health is paralleled with that of the secret garden’s: her isolation and unhappiness match the barren landscape of the English winter; both she and the garden have been ‘locked up’ for 10 years; and together, they come to life.

### ***Understood Betsy* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher**

Dorothy Canfield Fisher is remembered more for her liberal politics and academic career than for writing *Understood Betsy*. There is very little scholarly material on the novel, and existing reviews tend to come from online bookseller's sites, written by contemporary adult readers who loved the book as children. Even at the time it was published, in 1917, the story was considered a little didactic and a little dated.

But the same appeal that keeps regard strong for *The Secret Garden* propels *Understood Betsy*: at its heart, the story holds the power of metamorphosis. Elizabeth Ann begins her tale as a pale, shadowy ghost of a girl. The twist of fate that relocates her from an urban environment to the Vermont countryside also triggers her transformation into a strong, capable child, re-named Betsy. The value of self-reliance and simple living runs like an undercurrent throughout *Understood Betsy*.

### ***Jane of Lantern Hill* by Lucy Maud Montgomery**

*Jane of Lantern Hill* is Montgomery's second-to-last book. One of her biographers, Jane Urquhart, notes that Montgomery wrote this story during a time of deep unhappiness, which accounts for the element of fairytale wish-fulfilment noted by critics Mollie Gillen and Theodore Sheckels. As with *Understood Betsy*, very little critical discussion exists on this work. Because of its benign subject matter, it is often overlooked, particularly when compared to Montgomery's other works, such as the *Anne* and *Emily* series.

But the fairytale elements of Jane's story are what make it compelling: witnessing a young girl move from awkwardness and self-loathing to sturdy self-confidence contains the primal appeal and power of transformation.

The parallels between my three primary texts that are most significant to my study are these: the amount of time each girl spends in a healing environment is similar in all three stories. Mary's transformation begins in winter and ends in late summer. Betsy's story begins in winter and ends the next fall. And Jane's time on the island spans two consecutive summers, totalling six months. In each story, the sickness-to-health trope is centred on a lack of confidence, or on being ill at ease, versus actual illness. All three protagonists are nearly the same age: on the cusp of adolescence but still children. And finally, each story is set in the Edwardian era.

### **Research Questions**

The questions most central to my thesis deal with the nature of green space in the pastoral novels by Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery. How does contact with green space change the protagonists in a way urban living cannot? What is healing about these rural environments? In terms of engagement with the natural world, does lack of firsthand experience in nature cause illness, or the state of being ill at ease with oneself and the world? Considering the context of these novels, what is the function of nostalgia? Do pastoral settings from the past have any bearing on contemporary readers, in terms of both fiction and our current environmental climate?

### **Overview of Thesis Chapters**

The scope of the research for my thesis is broad, and my literature review, immediately following in this first chapter, reflects both the wide range and the interconnectedness of the different disciplines I draw from. In analysing the metamorphoses at the heart of my primary texts, I make links between transformation narratives and the larger world.

In the second chapter, I introduce my focal theory, ecocriticism, as well as my two subsidiary theories, ecofeminism and ecopsychology, and discuss the ways in which I apply them to children's fiction from the past.

In analysing the nature of the illness each protagonist suffers from at the beginning of her story, I apply a less traditional definition of disease to my primary texts in Chapter Three. The ways in which an underdeveloped sense of self-confidence affects the protagonists on multiple levels is the main focus of this chapter.

Chapter Four centres on the pastoral nature of the green space in the texts. I look at the role of place in the protagonists' transformations, and at the nature of the experiences available to the girls in these rural spaces.

The focus of the final chapter is the nature of the transformation each girl goes through by her story's end. I look at the ways in which the rural environments change the protagonists, and the specific factors behind their transformations.

## Literature Review

### Transformation Narratives

Popular culture is fixated on transformations. From personal style makeovers to weight loss journeys to home renovations, TV programs and magazines are full of before-and-after stories. But these tales of change are not just a modern fascination; found in fairy tales, Greek myths, Shakespeare, and the Bible, transformation stories have been enthralling audiences for centuries. In her foreword to *Metamorphoses in Children's Literature and Culture*, Leena Kirstina observes that “the idea of metamorphoses is a central concept” of human life, and that “we live in a continuous state of metamorphoses from birth to death, especially in childhood” (7). It makes sense, then, that our cultural products reflect this central facet of our lives. And as childhood is naturally a time of heightened metamorphosis and growth, transformation narratives are central to children's literature. Many of these tales are animal stories or fantasy texts that address the change from human to animal.

In the primary texts I have chosen to work with, each protagonist undergoes a marked transformation from illness to wellness. The aspect of the sickness-to-health narratives that I explore in my thesis centres on the places in which these transformations occur. The link between the role of place in children's literature and the role of place in children's lives is not often discussed jointly in academic writing. This thesis represents my attempt to begin bridging disciplines. I draw on what Juliet Dusinberre distinguishes as the literary and the literal (220); in my research, I have found that the borders between the two are often blurred and often intersected by similar or complementary ideas.

### **Green Space: Literary and Literal**

Green Gables, Wonderland, The Lumberlost, Sunnybrook Farm: place names are emblazoned in the titles of many children's classics, highlighting the vital role of place in these stories. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century children's texts, natural spaces are given particular importance, suggesting that setting is more than just backdrop.

Author Astrid Lindgren, in an interview with Jonathan Cott in his book, *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, articulates the significance of the natural world in her own childhood:

Rocks and trees were as close to us as living beings, and nature protected and nurtured our playing and our dreaming. Whatever our imagination could call forth was enacted in the land around us, all fairy tales, all adventures we invented or read about or heard about, all of it happened there and only there, even our songs and prayers had their place in surrounding nature. (151-2)

Edith Cobb extends the idea that nature permeates the physical and imaginative lives of children in *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*; her hypothesis explores how childhood experience in nature forms the foundation of creative adult experience. In other words, Cobb is interested in the way nature shapes people:

Experience in childhood is never formal or abstract. Even the world of nature is not a "scene," or even a landscape. Nature for the child is sheer sensory experience, although any child can draw in the wings of his surroundings at will and convert the self into a "theatre of perception" in which he is at once producer, dramatist, and star. (29)

In a chapter entitled "Theatres of Girlhood" from Seth Lerer's *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*, Mary Lennox of *The Secret Garden* is

described as “director of this drama” (246). Rather than regard her as a female character who is usurped by Colin at the story’s end, Lerer sees Mary in a much more active role, and as she “digs up, replants, orders, organizes, and reshapes the garden,” it becomes “a stage for her performance” (245).

In my primary texts, I argue that nature, or green space, functions as more than a place for performance. In her thesis, *Daughters of the Land: An Ecofeminist Analysis of the Relationships Between Female Adolescent Protagonists and Landscape in Three Verse Novels for Children*, Victoria VanSickle, drawing on Rebecca Lukens, defines a backdrop setting as “universal; in it, the particulars of time and place are fairly inconsequential and have little effect on the story” (18). An integral setting, however, “is essential to the story and influences plot, character, and conflict” (18). In all three of my primary texts the landscape is integral to the protagonists’ transformations, an argument I flesh out in Chapter Five.

In most stories with integral settings, values are prescribed to the land. In her regional work, *The Power of Place: Landscape in New Zealand Children’s Fiction, 1970-1989*, Diane Hebley writes, “[T]here is nothing either good or bad in the landscape, but thinking makes it so” (9). Her discussion of the ways in which landscape in literature reflects cultural attitudes finds echoes in Shelagh J. Squire’s essay, “Ways of Seeing, Ways of Being: Literature, Place, and Tourism in L.M. Montgomery’s Prince Edward Island”:

In cultural geography, much landscape research has been concerned with describing the meanings and values associated with particular environments. What has tended to go unrecognized is that culture and the cultural landscape

must be interpreted as active human constructs and ... systems of communication (144).

The pastoral and Romantic literary traditions evident in my primary texts demand analysis of the values inherent in such depictions of landscape.

The tendency of children's literature to oversimplify the differences between urban and rural settings by demonizing one and valorizing the other is discussed by Myra Pollack Sadker and David Miller Sadker in *Now Upon a Time*. They observe that often in children's stories, "the city becomes an example of a disrupting and dysfunctional environmental influence ... the enemy of a pure and clean environment" (276).

Interestingly, this dichotomy is not just a feature of children's literature. Authors such as Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* and Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden* document this longstanding pattern in English literature. Williams' systematic and thoughtful inquiry into perceptions regarding divisions of country and city reads like an act of archaeology. Of the newly post-Industrial world, he writes:

in and through these transforming experiences English attitudes to country, and to ideas of rural life, persisted with extraordinary power, so that even after the society was predominantly urban its literature, for a generation, was still predominantly rural; and even in the twentieth century, in an urban and industrial land, forms of the older ideas and experiences still remarkably persist. (2)

Frances Hodgson Burnett, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and L.M. Montgomery were writing with these "older ideas" in mind, and their work is tinged with nostalgia. As a reaction to change, and as a form of conservation, nostalgia serves multiple functions in my primary texts, an idea which I discuss further in Chapter Four of my thesis. Williams does an



impressive job of searching back in history to explain the persistence of nostalgia, and the role of the Romantics in circulating it, noting that “[t]he agrarian confidence of the eighteenth century has been counterpointed, throughout, by feelings of loss and melancholy and regret” (127). It is Wordsworth, Williams argues, who heralds a return to “a confidence in nature” (127), however fictional and idealized. Marx’s work also explores the myth of the pastoral ideal in literature, and the longstanding human fascination with utopias, Edens, virgin wilderness, and prelapsarian paradises, but from an American perspective, and with more focus on the conflict between technology and nature than Williams. Marx’s belief that the literary and the literal are not separate makes his work invaluable to my study as he connects environments and attitudes about environments in books to the larger world. He believes that “[t]o appreciate the significance and power of our American fables it is necessary to understand the interplay between the literary imagination and what happens outside literature, in the general culture” (4).

Anthropologist Barbara Ching and English professor Gerald W. Creed discuss in depth the issues surrounding the opposition of rural and urban places in both literature and the literal world in *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*. They explore the politics of place, and the biases and prejudice inherent in the social hierarchy of urban versus rural. Two of my primary texts, *Jane of Lantern Hill* and *Understood Betsy*, illustrate this complicated hierarchy explicitly. Urban environments are intentionally portrayed by the authors as being simultaneously more sophisticated and more degraded than their rural counterparts. While Ching and Creed document that “the urbane believed rustics incapable of appreciating nature” (21), Burnett, Fisher and

Montgomery privilege rural living and rural lives with superior health/healing capacities in their respective works.

### **Green Space as a Psychological Resource**

The central question of my study asks, What is healing about green spaces? The tenets of environmental psychology, or ecopsychology, a theory I discuss in depth in Chapter Two, provide a starting place in my search for an answer. *The Power of Place* by Winifred Gallagher and *The Experience of Place* by Tony Hiss both look at how place affects well-being, and the importance of understanding the effects of environment on human behaviour. Gallagher in particular looks at the apparent resistance to acknowledging this relationship: “Like those of other living things, our structure, development, and behaviour rise from a genetic foundation sunk in an environmental context. Yet while we readily accept that a healthy seed can’t grow into a plant without the right soil, light, and water, and that a feral dog won’t behave like a pet, we resist recognizing the importance of environment in our own lives” (16). My primary texts do not resist this recognition but instead intrinsically acknowledge the importance of nature as a natural part of the girls’ lives.

Using narrative to impart ideas such as the importance of environment is a tactic used by Hiss; he uses anecdotal detail to support the idea that “the places where we spend our time affect the people we are and can become” (xi). He is particularly concerned with the ramifications of rapidly altering landscapes, a feature of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century living. In my key texts, the natural world is unthreatened, which perhaps points to a definition of utopia. I discuss the prevalence of utopian landscapes

and nostalgia in children's fiction, and take a closer look at the ideologies beneath nostalgia, in Chapter Four.

Writing from a contemporary and literal perspective, Colin Ward works to debunk the myth of "nostalgia-ridden rural mythology" concerning children who are raised in rural areas (7). In *The Child in the Country*, he documents the advantages and disadvantages of both rural and urban upbringings in the twentieth century. Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery valorize rural experience in their respective works. Ward explains the roots of some of the mythic traditions these authors are writing in, with particular emphasis on the Romantics.

Gill Valentine likewise addresses the rhetoric surrounding contemporary children and the environment in *Public Space and the Culture of Childhood*. She examines the adult language of fear and crisis that permeates the environment and outdoor play. Carolyn Sigler parallels Valentine's point, but from a literature standpoint in *Wonderland to Wasteland: Toward Historicizing Environmental Activism in Children's Literature*, noting that now "even isolated wonderlands and secret gardens are endangered" (150). Valentine extends the idea that even seemingly idyllic experiences are no longer available to children living in rural places by pointing out that "contemporary rural children, like their urban counterparts, also have less opportunity to explore their local environment than previous generations" (72).

Valentine defends the importance of children experiencing the natural environment, and in a section titled "Battery-Reared Children," she states that "independent outdoor play in public space is a vital means through which children develop physically, mentally and socially" (80). Environmental psychologists Andrea Faber Taylor, Frances E. Kuo,

and William C. Sullivan believe that even green views can provide significant psychological benefits to children, as documented in “Views of Nature and Self-Discipline: Evidence from Inner City Children” (49). But not all researchers share this outlook. Owain Jones wrote “Naturally Not! Childhood, the Urban and Romanticism” in defence of the possibility of healthy urban childhoods. He argues that “notions of childhood and notions of the urban are largely unacknowledged and unexamined. These disjunctures are to do with romantic inheritances that see childhood as a state of naturalness and innocence, and the urban as a cultural (often corrupted) edifice which has moved away from nature” (17). He addresses the impact that Romantic and children’s literature has had in perpetuating the myth of innocence in nature, and offers suggestions for moving past limiting perceptions: “our countryside is repeatedly shown to be a cultural creation, just as much as the urban is ... their strengths and weaknesses as childhood spaces need to be assessed relationally and contingently” (28).

### **The Necessity of Firsthand Experience**

Considering the argument from both sides, what is it about rural environments that allows the protagonists in my primary texts their transformations? Much research exists on the calming effect of nature, and there is much qualitative, anecdotal evidence that points to the peace of mind that green spaces inspire. But there is more to the transformations in my key texts than the girls simply coming into contact with nature. I argue that the protagonists become healthy and at ease with themselves because of the type of experiences granted them in rural settings. Richard Louv, Stephen R. Kellert, and Edward S. Reed each write passionately about the importance of direct contact with nature in childhood. In “Experiencing Nature: Affective, Cognitive, and Evaluative

Development in Children,” Kellert notes there are now “unprecedented technologies for representing nature through the mass media ... evidence suggests a concurrent decline in children’s direct experience of healthy and abundant natural systems” (120). Not only are contemporary children learning about nature in terms of crisis, as suggested by Sigler, but their chances for firsthand exposure to green spaces are endangered.

Kellert goes on to say that as second-hand knowledge of nature takes precedence, “[a] worrisome feature of contemporary society is that many children increasingly experience nature through the imagined and exotic rather than through the actual and local” (128). Louv similarly believes that “[t]oday, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment – but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading” (1). The effects of detachment from nature are established early in my key texts, serving as a reference point for the state of dis-ease the girls must each recover from. Most important to my study is Kellert’s assertion that the “functional benefits stemming from [close contact and immersion in nature] include inclinations for exploration, discovery, curiosity, inquisitiveness, and imagination, *enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem by demonstrating competence and adaptability in nature, and greater calm and coping capacities through heightened temporal awareness and spatial involvement*” (emphasis added, 131).

Louv is largely concerned with behavioural disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which he feels are on the rise in contemporary society due to detachment from nature in childhood. Conditions such as this are thought to derive from over-stimulation, yet Kellert observes that “the natural world is the most information-rich environment people will ever encounter” (123). So what is it about

green spaces that reduces mental overload, that calms and soothes? I give this answer much consideration in Chapter Four of my thesis.

My key texts elucidate beliefs and concerns about children's contact with the natural world that are emerging increasingly in the forefront of environmental and developmental psychology today. Just as Louv and Kellert explore the ramifications of a de-natured childhood, Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery use fiction to do the same. These early twentieth-century authors were writing at a time when "the child's direct experience of nature [was] viewed as largely unplanned rather than formally organized into structured programs and activities" (Kellert 119). Reed distinguishes between the quality of experiences in his treatise, *The Necessity of Experience*.

Authors such as Louv and Gary Nabhan discuss the importance of nature-based experience in childhood, but Reed discusses the need for both adults and children to experience the world firsthand, giving no special attention to green space. He is concerned more with the human need for experience and the lack of opportunities for this experience in contemporary schools and workplaces. He believes the current focus on technology and philosophy results in detachment from the literal world. This detachment, which he calls the "degradation of opportunities for primary experience," can result in an inadequate understanding and perception of the world, which in turn affects relationships and overall health (5). By his definition, "[e]xperience ... is a search for meanings in order to find and use the goods of the earth and the social world around us" (126). He sees lack of experience as a Western ailment, noting that in traditional, rural cultures, children learn by doing; Western schools lack the balance between first- and second-hand experience (127-28). All three girls in my primary texts are educated

and attend school, but suffer an almost total lack of firsthand experience in their urban lives. It is not until they are each relocated to the countryside that they begin to develop skills from hands-on learning. Though products of fiction, and of a prior era, these protagonists seem to illustrate perfectly the ideologies concerning health and experience as voiced by Louv, Kellert, and Reed.

Nicholas Tucker bridges the literary and the literal in his essay, “Good Friends, or Just Acquaintances? The Relationship between Child Psychology and Children’s Literature.” His support of interdisciplinary approaches to research is pivotal to my study:

Psychology is a far more normative study than those who argue for its purely scientific status are prepared to admit. Both it and children’s literature will go on evolving, setting new norms in time and continuing to have a two-way influence upon each other. For while psychologists are now quite good at painting the wider picture of different developmental processes, individual psychological portraits have always been best created by novelists. (173)

Drawing on Rousseau’s belief, and in consequence, the Romantics’ belief, in primary experience, he points out that the children in children’s literature [largely early-mid twentieth century] “are rarely shown doing any reading. They are too occupied instead learning at first hand from Mother Nature” (158). Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery are undoubtedly writing in this tradition. But their girls are not replicas of Rousseau’s Sophie. They learn by doing, and not just by doing domestic, indoor tasks. Tucker notes, “[F]or whatever reasons, the image of the child always learning best from or in the presence of nature remains an important literary ideal right up to our own times” (159).

Does lack of first hand experience cause illness, or the state of being ill-at-ease with oneself and with the world? Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble, in tracking the influence of the natural world on children's development and their future connection to nature in *The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places*, find that adults' recollections of books they read as children often have the same effect on memory as time spent in wild places. This suggests there is something about land and literature experienced in childhood that changes and forms us.

### **Illness and Metaphor**

Millicent Lenz's overview of children's texts that engage with the human/earth relationship, "Am I My Planet's Keeper? Dante, Ecosophy, and Children's Books," is a wide-ranging essay that introduces topics like ecofeminism, anthropocentrism, and deep ecology, all mentioned later in my study. Of the power of image and metaphor in children's environmental literature, Lenz writes, "Since traditionally children's books tend toward the hopeful rather than apocalyptic, I have selected books that express a variety of responses to the environment, and I ... approach their images as ... metaphors that generate certain attitudes" (160). She believes "it is imperative that we become aware of the impact of the metaphors of nature presented to young readers and of how these metaphors are likely to shape ecological realities in the future" (160).

The power of metaphor in influencing attitudes is at the core of Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*. She examines the ways in which language surrounding disease influences perceptions of the ill. Writing specifically of tuberculosis, cancer, and AIDS, she says, "it is hardly possible to take up one's residence in the kingdom of the ill unprejudiced by the lurid metaphors with which it has been landscaped" (4). Sontag



makes the connection that attitudes toward the ill are evidence of larger cultural discomforts:

Our views about cancer, and the metaphors we have imposed on it, are so much a vehicle for the large insufficiencies of this culture: for our shallow attitude toward death, for our anxieties about feeling, for our reckless improvident responses to our real “problems of growth,” for our inability to construct an advanced industrial society that properly regulates consumption, and for our justified fears of the increasingly violent course of history. (87)

In my study, I differentiate between disease and dis-ease (defined in Chapter Three), or the state of being ill at ease. I argue that as evident in my primary texts, dis-ease brought on by lifestyle and environment is as disabling to all three protagonists as would be disease. John J. McDermott’s philosophical essay, “Ill-at-Ease: The Natural Travail of Ontological Disconnectedness,” addresses this difference explicitly: “Alice James knew the difference between ill-at-ease and dis-ease. For her, to be ill-at-ease was far more painful to her person than to be racked with a dis-ease afflicting her body” (10).

In *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk: Death, Disability and Cure in Classic Fiction for Girls*, Lois Keith explores disability as opposed to illness in popular children’s stories. As Sontag does with illness, Keith seeks to dispel the myths surrounding aspects of disability, particularly the nostalgia of “miracle cures” (95). And like Sontag, she is interested in examining the language that pervades depictions of disability, and the ramifications of this language. She questions the trend in Victorian children’s literature to first cripple and then heal girls, noting that the trope is often used as a teaching tool to cure them of independence and high spirits. Written just after the Victorian period, the

primary texts of my study involve three protagonists who gain independence and high spirits, who become stronger by their stories' ends and are not tamed by illness. Keith writes that "illness and the eventual cure of the disabled child are not recognised as significant issues in themselves but as the metaphorical equivalent of sadness, powerlessness and dependency" (97). The transformations from sickness to health in my key texts work against this trend. The girls gain health and confidence not because of caregivers or medicine; I argue it is their individual connections to green space that heal them.

Much of my research has revealed a surprising resistance to social and literary norms on the part of Montgomery, Fisher and Burnett in their creation of Jane, Betsy, and Mary, respectively. The authors were writing in an era whose traditions, socially and in literature, were uncomfortably close to the repressive Victorian period. But all three of them constructed ultimately strong female characters at a time when "the brand of patriarchy typical of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England actually promoted female sickness as a goal, surrounding women with 'images of disease, traditions of disease and invitations to both disease and to dis-ease,'" as pointed out by Kimberley Reynolds in *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910* (95), who draws on Sandra M. Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (57).

The authors were not alone in their resistance to mainstream schools of thought about female health and body image. In *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful: Purposive Exercise in the Lives of American Women 1800-1870*, Jan Todd documents the esoteric culture of Victorian female body-building. She shows where Rousseau and his

beliefs concerning women and exercise played a key part in influencing attitudes of later generations:

Where Emile's physical training was expected to instil the desirable attributes of strength, autonomy, and independent thinking, Sophie exercised because it enhanced her physical appeal to Emile. The more attractive women were, Rousseau reasoned, the more men would wish to mate with them, and the stronger the family would be. (12)

Through their fiction, Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery show that embracing a physical life instils in their girls the attributes reserved only for males at the time. Rousseau's contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft, said "the women she most admired, those who in her circle of acquaintances acted like rational creatures and showed vigor of intellect, 'have been allowed to run wild' as children" (15). Location is assumed in Wollstonecraft's statement: children need wild places in which to run wild. In my primary works, I study the ways in which green space enables Mary, Betsy, and Jane to develop both physically and in self-confidence.

Todd reports that a century after Wollstonecraft's time, "[reformer-physician Dioclesian] Lewis changed forever the basic dialogue concerning women's bodies. Rather than encouraging women to view their physical ideal as small, frail, slightly ill, and painfully weak, Lewis championed health, vigor, and substance" (274). As he was writing in the 1860s, and Victorian attitudes towards women's bodies and health prevailed in fiction for some time after, I would argue that Todd over-credits Lewis' success in shaping cultural attitudes, however much he may have helped the cause.

At the time Lewis was writing, Romanticism was at the height of its influence in England. In Louise Chawla's interdisciplinary study, "Spots of Time: Manifold Ways of Being in Nature in Childhood," she makes invaluable links between literature and the natural world, illuminating the Romantic belief that "our connection with the natural world depends on how we inhabit our bodies in the world" (221). When Chawla's essay is paired with McDermott's work on being ill-at-ease with the human condition, the relationship between humans and the natural world becomes more complicated to define. He points to nature as a source of dis-ease in that it is terrifying, unpredictable, and indifferent, but acknowledges Edward O. Wilson's concept of biophilia, defined as a love of living things, as a remedy for dis-ease. "We are both fed and destroyed by nature" (23), McDermott states in his struggle to come to terms with the "Janus face" of nature (17). He does not state the connection explicitly, but he does suggest there is a link between human activity contributing to the degradation of nature and the subsequent illnesses, both metaphysical and physical, that result.

All three theories I work with and elucidate in Chapter Two of my study – ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and ecopsychology – have at their cores many of the questions and musings McDermott raises in his essay. The primary texts I work with appear to portray relatively uncomplicated depictions of the human/nature relationship. In applying my three theories, and in regarding these texts of the past from a contemporary perspective, I offer a more substantive discussion than has previously been attempted.

## Children and the Environment

In my primary texts, direct experience with the land puts the girls at ease with themselves, and with others. Peter H. Kahn, in *The Human Relationship with Nature* asks, “Do children have a deep connection to the natural world, which in time gets largely severed by modern society?” (1). This query brings up a question specific to my key texts: Do the girls in my primary texts reach their natural states of being by the end of their stories? Or do they become the best versions of themselves? How does their contact with green space change them in ways that urban living cannot? Kahn, like others I draw from in my study, acknowledges that the human relationship with nature is an interdisciplinary topic. He applies the concept of “the machine in the garden” to literal explorations of humans and the environment, focussing largely on childhood development.

Kahn also uses Wilson’s biophilia hypothesis as a theoretical framework, but recasts it to “take development and culture seriously” (3), rather than the more generalized idea that all humans have an affinity for living things. Unlike some of the researchers I draw from (for example, Owain Jones and Jane Jacobs), Kahn argues “that nature is not a mere cultural convention or artifact, as some postmodernists maintain, but part of a physical and biological reality that bounds children’s cognition” (7). He furthers his discussion of children and nature in his essay, “Children’s Affiliations with Nature: Structure, Development, and the Problem of Environmental Generational Amnesia.” His proposal that “we all take the natural environment we encounter during childhood as the norm against which we measure environmental degradation later in our lives” (106) is integral to my study. I believe that fiction from the past such as *The Secret Garden*, *Jane of*

*Lantern Hill*, and *Understood Betsy* serves as a reference point for a way of life that no longer exists. Even if the environments in these books are fictional and idealized, they serve as a reflection not just of human desires but also of attitudes toward landscapes that have changed.

Contemporary trends in fiction lean toward dystopian themes rather than the more utopian ideals that were popular in prior centuries. Monica Hughes' *The Refuge* is an ideal example of this trend: she takes Burnett's *The Secret Garden* and "relocates it in that paradigmatic modern wasteland, the industrial park" (Wallace 77). The protagonists in my primary texts initially live in urban or foreign worlds free from environmental problems, yet they suffer poor health. Not until they are relocated to rural spaces do they experience recovery.

Kahn advocates firsthand experience as a way of understanding environment and environmental problems, and says that "we are biological beings with an evolutionary history ... any account of children's affiliation with nature needs to build from this perspective" ("Affiliations" 104). He does not take into account any differentiation in experience based on gender. But the longstanding association of females with nature in literature warrants examination in my study. In *The Role of Place in Literature*, Leonard Lutwack comments, "It is no accident that emphasis on place begins to assume real importance in fiction when the plight of a female character is the subject" (109). I address the question of why females and nature are so connected when I look at the ecofeminism in Chapter Two of my study. Lutwack makes no mention of children's literature, but his discussion of the function and effects of landscape on characters, particularly the male/female differences, is central to my thesis: in all three of my

primary texts, the “plight” is that the girls are ill-at-ease/dis-eased, and it is a specific change of environment that brings them back to health, defined here as a confidence in self. Seth Lerer also acknowledges the effects of landscape on gender, with particular reference to children’s literature, claiming that “the garden is a space that defines boys and girls as different” (248).

Gardens serve, among other things, as microcosms of how people interact with the larger natural world. They are places to learn stewardship, sustainability, and balance. And just as global green space is being degraded, so, too, are garden spaces. In “Childhood’s Garden: Memory and Meaning of Gardens,” Mark Francis notes that “many unstructured or wild areas have been systematically removed from suburban and urban places, including home gardens” (3). The effects of domination over the land are not just visible in once-pristine areas but have also infiltrated cultural productivity, as reflected in garden spaces. As Patrick Imbert points out in “The Garden and Its Multiple Contexts in Canada, the United States, and Latin America,” gardening becomes a metaphor for “reactivation of the biblical narrative that claims that Man was made of and from the earth” (52). While on one hand this metaphor grants the human/nature connection and symbiosis, it also implies a right to domination by possession.

The act of gardening plays a focal role in *The Secret Garden* and *Jane of Lantern Hill*, and the gardens of both texts are portrayed as healing spaces. In their essay, “What Makes a Healing Garden?”, Ulrika A. Stigsdotter and Patrick Grahn ask, “Is it possible for a garden to be anything else than healing? Is not the aspect of healing woven into the very concept of *garden*?” (60). Philosophical and speculative, the piece outlines theories and definitions surrounding healing gardens and horticultural therapy, as well as garden

design. Their findings link back to views held by Louv, Kellert, and Reed: “The health effects are due to the fact that the garden or the wild nature with its shapes, colors, odors, etc., plus the activities that can be carried out there, can restore a person to a more positive view of himself and his capacities” (63). The opportunity for direct experience with nature in a garden environment is also valued by Francis, who writes, “when children become involved as gardeners or farmers rather than as passive observers of gardens, a deeper significance and meaning is established” (8). According to these researchers, the connection between interaction with living things and natural rhythms is key to both personal and social health. Many seem to agree with Francis that a disconnection from nature in childhood “may mean a missed experience of place that may affect their environmental and spatial values as [the children] become older” (11). In *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*, Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan support this stance explicitly:

As psychologists we have heard little about gardens, about foliage, about forests and farmland ... Perhaps it is time to recognize this resource officially for what it is, time for governments and mental health professionals and economists to acknowledge what others may have already figured out ... Perhaps this resource for enhancing health, happiness, and wholeness has been neglected long enough. (198)

### **Children’s Literature and the Environment**

In “The Girl in the Garden: Variations on a Feminine Pastoral,” Gwyneth Evans discusses *The Secret Garden* in conjunction with Hughes’ contemporary retelling, *The Refuge*. By pairing the two novels, written nearly 80 years apart, Evans finds that “what



happens to the image of the secret garden in the later twentieth century suggests both the nature of this distinctively feminine pastoral form and the ways it has responded to social change” (20). Her analysis illuminates “the value and importance of the garden, in terms of the psychological development of the young girl who creates and shelters in it and in terms of society’s need for and responsibility to Nature” (20). Explicit environmental messages are generally regarded as a feature of contemporary children’s literature, but as Sigler documents in “Wonderland to Wasteland”, while

many Victorian and early-twentieth-century children’s writers continued to develop the radicalized or activist view of nature ... in response to growing threats to and separation from nonhuman nature, ... another response to industrialization can also be seen in the tendency of Victorian fantasy to return to the conventional pastoral tradition of escape into an idealized, removed setting, remote from both human and nonhuman concerns. (150)

So while the fiction produced by Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery does not appear to contain green messages that coincide with contemporary issues surrounding the environment, it is likely these authors were responding to more than a desire for pleasant fiction.

The Victorians’ complicated relationship to the natural world is clarified by Suzanne Rahn in “Green Worlds for Children”: “Awakened by Romanticism to nature as a source of poetic and spiritual inspiration, they lived at a time when exploration and scientific discovery were opening up new realms of nature on an unprecedented scale” (2-3). She goes on to note that “[t]his intense interest in nature, however, was often bound up with a desire to control it, or even exert dominance over it” (3). Interestingly, Rahn illustrates

how the popular adventure stories for boys of the time reflect this penchant for domination, but how they were followed by books like *The Secret Garden*, “in which the protagonist, [Mary], lived close to nature and in harmony with it” (5). Rahn and Sigler both open an unexpected window into the early environmentalism apparent in Victorian children’s literature, and they elucidate the progression towards current trends in literature for children.

Lisa Lebduska builds on the discussions posited by Rahn and Sigler in “Rethinking Human Needs: Seuss’s *The Lorax*.” She takes a thoughtful look at the place of environmentalism in children’s literature from the 1970s onwards. Like Lenz and Sigler, she extends the borders of her discussion to encompass politics, philosophy, and consumerism. Especially relevant to my study as a contemporary reference point is her critique of “[e]nvironmental extravaganzas [such as “fund-raising events to save whales or rainforests”] that organize nature into spectacle and divorce it from daily lived experience. Nature becomes a vacation, environmentalism a momentary event or a product whose purchase Saves the Planet” (172). I position the green space in my primary texts as natural to the lives of the protagonists, and intrinsic to their transformations from illness to wellness. No nature lessons are needed.

My research and analysis of transformation narratives and the environment point to two major findings: that humans need nature to both survive and to thrive, and that there is a link between poor human health, degraded environmental health, and our waning link to the natural world, both fictional and real.

I have found that most current criticism of pastoral children’s stories from the past analyses issues of race, gender, and class from a postcolonial perspective. There is little

critical discourse on the environment in these critical works. Recent discussions of setting in contemporary children's literature centre on current environmental crises, which positions the environment as under threat. Such a position emphasizes the detachment of contemporary human life from the natural world.

I propose that there is value for contemporary readers in engaging with texts from the past – texts that promote a harmonious relationship with the natural world. I aim to use environmental theories and perspectives that encourage real-world application. Drawing from both literary and literal theories, I form in the chapters ahead an interdisciplinary argument that supports critical discussion of past landscapes from a contemporary perspective. In examining the context in which Edwardian pastoral children's literature was written, and in applying theories of psychology, ecology, environmental theory, and literary theory to validate the necessity of these texts' long-term survival, the link between land and health is illuminated.

At the core of my argument are reasons why these books still matter, and will always matter. My intention is to encourage the survival of these texts from the past in contemporary homes, libraries, and classrooms.

## CHAPTER TWO: THEORY AND METHODS

Ecocritical scholar Cheryl Lousley believes that “[e]cocritical analysis should attend not only to representations of nature or environment, but, more fundamentally, to how characters, narrators, and readers are positioned as knowing or not knowing the environments they inhabit and produce” (13). As I examine literature that incorporates green space as a point of renewal and resolution, ecocriticism is a natural theoretical framework for my study. I use the theory to answer questions that engage specifically with how a close relationship with the natural world is associated with positive growth and development in girls on the cusp of adolescence. Ecocriticism strives for a practical application that sets it apart from other literary theories, making it a near-ideal theory to apply to a study that attempts to bridge the literary and the literal.

In *Practical Ecocriticism*, a book that reviewer Michelle Scalise Sugiyama describes as having “one foot in ecology and one foot in literature” (4), Glen Love writes, “Literature loves interrelationships” (47). I find that the researchers with the most impact in their fields are the ones who engage in exploring interrelationships – that, is, they are able to bridge disciplines and to extend and cross borders effectively: Rachel Carson (biology and literature); Ralph Metzner (psychology, mythology, and ecology); Theodore Roszak (psychology, ecology, and history); Lawrence Buell (literature and ecology). Inspired by these thinkers, I have chosen to analyse my primary texts from an interdisciplinary perspective, using ecocriticism as my critical framework, and drawing from the related fields of ecofeminist literary theory and ecopsychology to supplement my analysis. All three theories are considered interdisciplinary in nature.

Cheryll Glotfelty asks, “What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics?” (xix). Jonathan Levin extends this question in considering what can be achieved by crossing literary studies with “resources associated with natural history, earth sciences, and even new scientific fields like complex systems theory, ethology, and cognitive science” (qtd. in Heise 7). These are important questions in analyzing the effectiveness and fortitude of an emerging theory. The possibilities of ecocriticism appear vast and diverse, qualities that can be regarded as both strengths and a source of weakness as they suggest the lack of a coherent centre. The stance I take in my study draws from a general sense of the science of ecology – the recognition of interdependencies – and focuses on ecocriticism’s potential to illuminate cultural attitudes embedded in texts, and to shift attitudes toward the environment by highlighting our reliance on the natural world.

Lawrence Buell observes in his ecocritical work *The Environmental Imagination*, “We live our lives by metaphors” (3). In my study, I look at the power of language and representation in shaping cultural attitudes. Specifically, I am interested in examining how nature is positioned in my primary texts and what this position reveals about cultural values. I agree with Love in his statement that the “most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to full consideration of its place in a threatened world” (“Revaluing” 237). And so the function of ecocriticism from this view is to “analyse critically the tropes brought into play in environmental debate, and, more tentatively, to predict which will have a desired effect on a specific audience at a given historical juncture” (Garrard 14). Glotfelty asks as a way of defining the emerging

literary theory, “How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it?” (xix). For my part, questions surrounding metaphors are repeated throughout my research, and I draw from William Howarth’s summation of the function of ecocriticism: “Ecocriticism seeks to examine how metaphors of nature and land are used and abused” (81).

Ecocriticism has been used largely in the past to address environmental issues in explicit nature writing such as that of Rachel Carson and Henry David Thoreau. In recent years, ecocriticism has been applied to a wider range of writing, including children’s literature. I am using it to look at transformations that take place within an idealized rural setting during the early twentieth century to construct an analysis that connects a healthy body and mind with a healthy earth, as well as to build a comparison between past and contemporary landscapes in literature. Ecocriticism looks not simply at how characters interact with setting, but at how a society’s understanding of, and consequently, attitudes toward, the environment are reflected in literature. The idyllic spaces in my three primary texts are not necessarily entirely accurate representations of landscapes, but I believe they do reflect a social attitude toward the environment in the early twentieth century. In contrast, the environmental crises at the heart of much contemporary literature reflect current perceptions of the environment.

The interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism allows for a flexibility and flow of ideas not possible in more fixed theories: its critical strength is due in part to the fact that “it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and nonhuman” (Glotfelty xix). The potential of ecocriticism to move between the real and the theoretical brings its subject matter an immediacy that is becoming increasingly relevant from an environmental perspective. In applying this

relatively recent theory to my study of early twentieth-century fiction, I hope to bridge the gap between representations of the natural world from the past with contemporary understandings of and attitudes toward the environment.

Extending the literary into the literal is one of the central challenges and opportunities posed by ecocriticism:

Ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology. Ecocritics may not be qualified to contribute to debates about problems in ecology, but they must nevertheless transgress disciplinary boundaries and develop their own ‘ecological literacy’ as far as possible. (Garrard 5)

Love argues that much modern literary theory is inaccessible in its deliberate obtuseness; it is designed for the enlightenment of a few and not intended for practical application by the many. He believes that “recognizing the primacy of nature, and the necessity for a new ethic and aesthetic embracing the human and the natural [is] our best hope of recovering the lost social role of literary criticism” (“Revaluing” 238). This is why I chose Love and Glotfelty as my key ecocritics: they ground their philosophies in the real world while maintaining the theoretical rigour needed to engage with the larger academic world, and they stay focussed on the central issue: human regard for nature. David Orr provides an ideal example of this regard in “Political Economy and the Ecology of Childhood”:

The important fact is not simply the effects of materialism but the more complex effects of the worldview conveyed in relentless advertising that hawks the message of instant gratification in a world of endless abundance. Whatever its

other effects on the child, *nature in a culture so lived can only recede in importance*. Time once spent doing farm chores, exploring nearby places, fishing, or simply playing in a vacant lot has been replaced by the desire to possess or to experience some bought thing (emphasis added, 228).

As technological culture continues to take precedence, nature's place within the new scheme is further marginalized. In contrast, nature plays a central role in my primary texts, and is of vital importance to characters' lives. As ecocriticism is concerned with cultural production, applying the theory to texts in which nature exists centrally is one way of understanding this shift in the contemporary natural world's role from integral to marginal.

David Mazel's definition of ecocriticism is appealing in its simplicity: "the study of literature as if the environment mattered" (1). In *A Century of Early Ecocriticism*, he explains how ecocriticism is a direct product of environmentalism, and how it differs from other landscape studies, which are concerned with social rather than ecological consequences. In "The Postnatural Novel: Toxic Consciousness in Fiction in the 1980s" Cynthia Deitering documents how "[f]iction of the 1980s, in its sustained and various representations of pollution, offers insight into a culture's shifting relation to nature and to the environment at a time when the imminence of ecological collapse was, and is, part of the public mind and of individual imaginations" (196). This insight begs the question, Does the fiction of every era offer this insight? Considering contemporary depictions of nature in fiction, and through investigating the historical context of my primary novels, my analysis points to the affirmative.



Ecocriticism as a literary theory is new, but its roots are Romantic, which is a tradition Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery were either working in or drawing from. As England shifted from an agricultural society to an industrial culture, treatment of landscape in literature likewise shifted. Louise Westling explains that “British ecocriticism ... emerged from within an older literary tradition concerned with long-domesticated and densely populated landscapes and, for the past 200 years, with the problems of industrialization and urban space” (3). Howarth offers the American perspective: “most of [America’s] early myths (frontier, virgin land, garden) derived from the imperious natural science that drove European exploration and settlement across the New World” (75). Taken together, “[t]hese contexts create very important theoretical differences between British and American ecocriticism”(3). As *The Secret Garden* is set in England and was written by a British-born author who later lived in America, and *Understood Betsy* and *Jane of Lantern Hill* are North American works, understanding the inception of ecocriticism on both continents helps shed light on attitudes toward the natural world in older works such my primary texts. In Chapter Four of my study, I draw from Leo Marx and Raymond Williams to further discuss the differences in American and British forms of ecocriticism.

Susan Fenimore Cooper is counted among the early ecocritical writers, as she wrote about the environment as if it mattered, under Mazel’s creed. In *Rural Hours*, she recounts an area’s history from the perspective of nature<sup>1</sup>, effectively situating “human history under the gaze of the pines in order to redefine it as accountable to natural history

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<sup>1</sup> This biocentric perspective aligns with the principles of deep ecology, a philosophical branch of radical environmentalism. As defined by Greg Garrard, deep ecology promotes the “shift from a human-centred to a nature-centred system of values” (21). Conversely, ‘shallow ecology’ focuses on anthropocentric environmental concerns such pollution and resource depletion.

as a higher authority than its own parochial institutions” (Buell 265). So often, “Nature is only valued in terms of its usefulness to us. Many environmentalists argue that we need to develop a value system which takes the intrinsic or inherent value of nature as its starting point” (Garrard 18).

Positioning a stance within ecocriticism requires broaching a question central to the theory: Are people part of nature, or apart from it? The first of the secondary theories I work with, ecopsychology, addresses this question explicitly: “Ecopsychology is a psychological undertaking that essentially says ‘we too are nature’” (Fisher 7). Ralph Metzner, who prefers the term green psychology, observes that most theories of psychology exist as though “in a vacuum or a space capsule” (2). He notes that the people who have begun to remedy this imbalance are not psychologists but ecologists, historians, theologians, and philosophers (2). As my study is concerned with the role of green space in both the psychological and physical transformations of the protagonists in my primary texts, the interdisciplinary nature of ecopsychology strengthens my argument. As with ecocriticism and ecofeminism, ecopsychology combines tenets of ecology with other theories. In *Radical Ecopsychology*, Andy Fisher defines the nature of this hybrid theory in stating, “Ecologists study nature, while psychologists study human nature. Assuming these natures overlap, psychology already has obvious potential links to ecology” (4). This is an assumption that is only beginning to be explored.

Ecopsychology attempts to unravel the connection between social ills and psychological illness. In “Nature and Madness,” Paul Shepard explores the self-destructive, and consequently earth-destructive, tendencies that have evolved over the

course of human history, and why these tendencies are difficult to remedy: “Something collective seems to block the corrective will, not simply private cupidity or political inertia. Could it be an inadequate philosophy or value system?” (23). He cannot provide an answer as to why the human race has increasingly severed its harmony with the natural world, but speculates that the reason is “irrational and unconscious, a kind of failure in some fundamental dimension of human existence, an irrationality beyond mistakenness, a kind of madness” (24). The result of this failure is illness and its rippling effects: as a society becomes ill, so follows the natural world, and vice versa.

In “The Ecopsychology of Child Development,” Anita Barrows looks at why mainstream psychology has historically ignored the resources for healing and wholeness found in nature. Drawing on Theodore Roszak, she observes that “[t]he psychological theories that frame our late-twentieth-century grasp of the human condition were evolved ... in urban settings by urban theorists” (102). Kahn’s hypothesis of generational amnesia can be applied here: the reference points for rural life had faded, or were fading, at the time the major theories used in contemporary psychology were being developed, a fact that makes ecopsychology and ecocriticism a potent theoretical combination when being applied to literature from the past.

Robert Kern states that “ecocriticism becomes most interesting and useful ... when it aims to recover the environmental character or orientation of works whose conscious or foregrounded interests lie elsewhere” (qtd. in Heise 8). As Leavis and Thomson argue in “The Organic Community,” “we have to consider the fact that the organic community has gone; it has so nearly disappeared from memory that to make anyone, however educated, realize what it was is commonly a difficult undertaking” (73).

To my mind, the key function of applying new theories such as ecocriticism and ecopsychology to texts from the past is to highlight and decode the role of these narratives in providing an environmental reference point: “[The organic community]’s destruction (in the West) is the most important fact of recent history – it is very recent indeed. How did such a momentous change – this vast and terrifying disintegration – take place in so short a time?” (Leavis and Thompson 73). Understanding the answer to this question is arguably the central challenge of ecocriticism; understanding the ramifications of this question to psychological health is likewise the challenge of ecopsychology.

The final theory I apply to my study is ecofeminist literary criticism, a literary offshoot of the larger political theory of ecofeminism. As I focus my thesis on the relationship between female protagonists and green space, ecofeminist literary criticism completes my theoretical framework as it centres on the relationship between women and nature as depicted in literature. Whether people are part of, or apart from, nature is also a central question of ecofeminism. Garrard writes that “in the dominant Euro-American culture, humans are not only *distinguished* from nature, but *opposed* to it in ways that make humans radically alienated from and superior to it” (25). Ecofeminism extends this observation in a way that ecocriticism does not, or cannot, as its central concern is the way in which gender affects differences in experience with landscape. Although he was writing before the term was coined, Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*, defines the core of ecofeminism: “There is the separation of possession: the control of a land and its prospects. But there is also a separation of spirit: a recognition of forces of which we are part but which we may always forget, and which we must learn from, not

seek to control” (127). Ecofeminist literary criticism works to identify locations of domination over the natural world in literature, and to reconceptualize the dualistic hierarchies that position culture above nature and male above female. The goal of ecofeminism, as VanSickle notes, is “to integrate these concepts as complementary and of equal value” (40).

Stephanie Leland theorizes that in “viewing ourselves as separate from nature, through seeing the earth as Object and ourselves as Subject, the earth has also become that which should be subdued, controlled, dominated” (70). In such a worldview, and in terms of literature, nature becomes backdrop rather than an integral part of experience. In “The Rape of the Well-Maidens: Feminist Psychology and the Environmental Crisis,” Mary Gomes and Allan Kanner use the Arthurian story of the well-maidens to illustrate how “the despoiling of the Earth and the subjugation of women are intimately connected” (112). Because I focus on the relationship of female child protagonists to the natural world, an ecofeminist perspective is especially useful in analyzing both the nature of the green space and the nature of the transformations the girls experience within those spaces. In linking psychologist Mary Pipher’s notions of contemporary “girl-poisoning culture” (12) with the pollution of the earth, an ecofeminist critique as applied to pastoral children’s literature from the early twentieth-century becomes an invaluable comparative approach to my study.

The longstanding association of females with nature, which extends to the trope of land as feminine, is a divisive issue in ecofeminism. As VanSickle notes, “whether or not women should affirm or reject this perceived association” is an ongoing ideological question (39). In citing Catherine Roach, Christine Cuomo points to the problem of

“environmental theories which naturalize the relationships between women and nature” (100). Children and nature are often naturalized in the same way, though without the sexual politics of reproduction. The pairing of children with nature has its roots in Rousseau’s concept of children, nature, and original innocence. But Rousseau placed boys in nature; Fisher, Burnett, and Montgomery place their girls in nature. In my study, I look at how female child protagonists, who do not yet possess the physical attributes of adult sexuality, interact with the natural world. Where do female children stand in the nature/woman dualism?

In “Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature,” Kate Soper talks about women and nature without using the term ecofeminism, but addresses “this coding of nature as feminine -- which is deeply entrenched in Western thought, but has also been said by anthropologists to be crosscultural and well-nigh universal ...[that] lies in the double association of women with reproductive activities and of these in turn with nature” (139). Because the association of women with nature is generally thought to centre on fertility and reproduction, the preadolescent status of the girls points to a potentially different mode of analysis. Cuomo writes, “Women must be empowered with regard to their own bodies, their role as creators of culture, about their role and power in sexuality, and about their self-creation of identities other than as mother” (102). In their respective novels, Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery create strong female characters who gain independence and health as a result of their engagement with the natural world. Nature is not feminized in these stories, and the girls are not limited by gender. The apparent lack of sexual politics in these books makes the applications of ecofeminist theory particularly interesting.

The matching of children's literature with all three of my theories – ecocriticism, ecopsychology, and ecofeminism -- is a relatively new undertaking, and potentially a potent one. It is possible that the inherent limitations in each of these critical fields can be partway remedied by a partnership. These are young theories, interdisciplinary in nature, with flexible, evolving parameters. William Rueckert asks, “[H]ow can we do something more than recycle WORDS? Let experimental criticism address itself to this dilemma” (121). Rueckert believes the experimental and fluid nature of ecocriticism grants it the capacity to push past the limits that contain more established theories. Flexibility is a feature of all three of my key theories. They each deal with land, but they are liquid: they pool, permeate, are muddied, are clarified, freshen, flow through and around. These theories are also practical and grounded in realism. In applying them to children's fiction from the past, I am essentially aiming to defend why these books still matter in contemporary society. Nature is very central to many children's books from the past. Arguably, in today's literature, nature is still as central, but the tone has shifted from nature as an integral part of characters' lives to nature as depicted in a state of crisis. In focusing on theories that are involved with various forms of ecology, I hope to illuminate the interdependence that exists between cultural attitudes and literary representation.

### **Methodology**

The three ecologically centred theories I draw from are complementary in both their similarities and diversities. My decision to follow an interdisciplinary approach as a means of extending discussion beyond the literary in my study models an approach favoured by many of the researchers I encountered, such as Juliet Dusinberre, Leo Marx,

and nearly all the theorists from the three theoretical fields. As I aim to connect the phenomenon of transformations located in my primary texts with the healing effects of green space in the literal world, I have intentionally sought out researchers who are comfortable bridging one discipline with another. Accessing the literal in understanding the literary, and vice versa, is not common practice in most literary theories, but in the research and assessment of my three key theories, I have found that there is a growing trend towards practical application of theory as a means of validating a real-world context.

My own beliefs surrounding the shaping power of land and literature, which I discuss in the introduction, are embedded in my choices of both primary texts and theories. Undergraduate English studies familiarized me with the popular postcolonial theories surrounding *The Secret Garden*, and children's literature courses on classic fiction inevitably covered the sexist and racist values inherent in this fiction. In this study, I aim to highlight the aspects of these classic books -- namely the treatment of the natural world -- that can be discussed alongside contemporary values without the postcolonialist's need to pardon the writers. Engaging with fiction from the past requires an understanding of the era that produced these texts, and in the course of my research, I have located a number of relevant overlaps between Edwardian fiction and the inception of ecocriticism. Both the appeal and apparent falseness of the pastoral settings of my primary texts provide a rich analysis for comparison with the more elegiac and crisis-riddled contemporary environmental writing being produced, particularly through an ecocritical lens.



I offer comparative analysis of the three novels in each of the three chapters that follow, and apply the three theories accordingly: in Chapter Three, I use ecocriticism to identify the nature of the green space in the texts. In Chapter Four, I apply both ecofeminism and ecopsychology to look at the nature of the illness in all three books, and Chapter Five incorporates both ecofeminism and ecopsychology in my discussion of the nature of the transformations in the three books. In discussing the well-known and critically well-covered *The Secret Garden* alongside the lesser known *Jane of Lantern Hill* and *Understood Betsy*, I hope to unearth parallels not previously discussed; through close comparison and with the application of interdisciplinary theories, I hope to uncover nuances in the transformation narratives that will validate their long-term survival.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE NATURE OF THE ILLNESS

The nature of the illness depicted in *The Secret Garden*, *Understood Betsy*, and *Jane of Lantern Hill* is central to my argument for restorative environments. Sander Gilman uses the concept of illness “to represent physical and mental states that are understood in Western culture as pathological and ‘dangerous’ because of their life-threatening, stability-threatening or chronic nature” (11). Gilman’s distinction between illness and disease provides a foundation for my analysis:

‘Disease’ is the social construct that always provides the frame for an understanding of ‘illness’. ... What the cause of that illness is remains unspecified. It may be somatic or psychosomatic or, as is usually the case, a complex mixture of physical and psychic causes and/or symptoms. (12)

Drawing from this definition, I define illness as it relates to dis-ease, that is, being ill at ease, in my analysis of sickness-to-health narratives. The parameters of my definition include psychological symptoms as they relate to physical symptoms, which are collectively linked to the larger world. The protagonists in all three novels in my study begin their stories ill at ease, both with themselves and with their environments. In this chapter I examine the possible connection between the manifestations of this dis-ease and urban spaces.

In my primary texts, the state of being ill at ease affects the physical lives of all three girls, who are each described at the beginning of their stories as thin, meek and/or painfully awkward. When Mrs. Medlock first sees Mary, she [Mary] feels “as small and lost and odd as she looked” (24). Likewise, Betsy is described as “nervous, self-absorbed, unhealthy, and undeveloped” (Cummins 15), and Jane wonders “how any one so lovely

as mother could have a daughter so plain and awkward as herself” (6). Gilman observes that “[t]he dichotomy between the beautiful and the ugly seems to be inherent in all of the cultural constructs of health and disease in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (54). Montgomery, Burnett, and Fisher are clearly writing in this tradition as each girl is both unwell and referred to as unattractive in some way at her story’s start: Jane “was rather bony and awkward” (38); Mary had “a thin little face ... and a sour expression” (3); and at the beginning of *Understood Betsy*, Elizabeth Ann is described as being “neither very strong nor very well. She was small for her age, with a rather pale face and big dark eyes which had in them a frightened, wistful expression”(5).

For the purpose of my thesis, I argue that being ill at ease is arguably as debilitating or disabling as other forms of illness as it affects not only how the protagonists view themselves, but also their relationships with others. At her grandmother’s house in the city, Jane is made to feel “silly and crude and always in the wrong” (68). This near-constant negativity undermines her sense of self-worth, and cripples her relationships with family and peers; more significantly, it colours the ways she sees herself, because though she likes very few people, “she like[s] herself still less. “What was the matter with her? [she asks herself]. Couldn’t she like *anybody*?” (56). Mary suffers similar discomfort. Of the three protagonists, Mary is the most overtly unwell in body, and this affects her way of interacting with others, earning her the moniker “Mistress Mary Quite Contrary” (11). “People never like me and I never like people,” she says to herself (38). Elizabeth Ann is too meek for any noteworthy interactions, except that on her arrival at the Putney farm, Claudia Nelson notes the girl

“is neurotic, helpless, and painfully timid” in her inability to communicate with the family she has just met (64).

In *What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of Classic Stories for Girls, 1850-1920*, Shirley Foster and Judy Simons discuss how psychologist Friedrich Froebel’s belief that “a correlation between mind and body was necessary for healthy child development” is embedded in *The Secret Garden* (174). But there is more to the connection: in all three primary texts, the environment factors centrally in the correlation between land and health. The binaries of urban/foreign and rural/natural, and illness and wellness, are established early in all three key texts. All three protagonists grow up detached from nature, and authors Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery put considerable emphasis on the unhealthy aspects of the non-rural environments in which each protagonist begins her story.

In *The Secret Garden*, the rural/urban dichotomy is more politically charged in that the opposite of Mary’s rural experience in England is India, which is relentlessly positioned as different. Because of this perceived difference, Mary is at odds with India (and initially with Yorkshire), and consequently, with herself: India is hot and humid, and Mary never belongs there, nor does she seem at ease: “ Her hair was yellow, and her face was yellow because she had been born in India and had always been ill in one way or another” (3). However problematic the cultural assumptions are in this assertion, Burnett’s beliefs in the connection between environment and health are inherent and implacable.

In all three key novels, it is apparent that the writers share this philosophy. In *Understood Betsy*, Fisher “makes no bones about her valorization of fresh air, rural

landscapes, and nature, which she aligns with health, self-sufficiency, happiness, freedom, and independence” (Cummins 15). Likewise, when Jane transitions from “the urban hell of Toronto” to “heavenly P.E.I.,” the effect this move has upon her sense of well-being is almost immediate (Sheckels 7). And when Jane returns to Toronto after a summer on P.E.I., she feels her environment restricting her:

She ran to the window, opened it, and gazed out ... but not on starry hills or the moon shining on woodland fields. The clamour of Bloor Street assailed her ears. The huge old trees about 60 Gay were sufficient unto themselves ... they were not her friendly birches and spruces. A wind was trying to blow ... Jane felt sorry for it ... checked here, thwarted there. (146)

The effects of oppressive environments and the subsequent inability of these environments to provide primary experience are central to Edward Reed’s belief that there is something wrong with a society that “does little or nothing to help us *explore the world for ourselves*” (original emphasis 3). In the books I have chosen, the girls are almost entirely denied primary experience in their urban environments. Montgomery’s narrator reports that “[i]t was so seldom [Jane] was allowed to walk anywhere alone ... to walk anywhere at all, indeed” (30). Jane craves the chance to move freely, but the narrator states that “[o]ne was almost terrified to walk over the lawn lest one do something to Uncle William’s cherished velvet. You had to keep to the flat stepping-stones path. And Jane wanted to *run*. You couldn’t run at St. Agatha’s either” (4). In *Understood Betsy* Aunt Frances tells the doctor, “I try to see that she [Elizabeth Ann] has plenty of fresh air. I go out with her for a walk every single day. But we have taken all the walks around here so often that we’re rather tired of them” (Fisher 53). Exercise

becomes a mechanical activity in the city, and Aunt Frances' idea of fresh air is not the fresh air of the farm that Betsy will later experience and that Fisher valorizes. In these three novels, then, the freedom to explore is curbed by the limits of urban geography, by concerned caregivers, and by fear and restraint.

Environmental psychologists Russell Veitch and Daniel Arkkelin admit that “[w]hile there certainly seem to be some ill effects of city life, some theorists have argued that much of this research starts with a biased and pessimistic assumption that cities are bad” (235). This is a longstanding trope in English literature, both for adults and children, as evident from centuries of stories that pit the virtues of the country against the city. Maureen Devine touches on this phenomenon in *Woman and Nature: Literary Reconceptualizations*, noting that by “1900, the wilderness was becoming rare and the over-crowded cities came to be regarded with as much hostility as the wilderness had been a century or more earlier” (65). With overcrowding came pollution and disease, and consequently, a heightened sense of urban life as degraded in comparison to the natural world.

Of my three primary authors, Fisher's sense of this urban degradation is most apparent. Her narrator dismissively describes the story's opening setting as “a medium-sized city in a medium-sized state in the middle of this country” (1). Aside from providing a way of understanding Elizabeth Ann's poor health, little other attention is paid to the city. Aunt Frances says, “I suppose the exciting modern life is bad for children” (11), but no details of what constitutes this sort of life are given. Aunt Frances may be vague, but Fisher is not: in terms of providing health, the country trumps the city.

Impersonal and stale, Fisher's urban setting is incapable of supporting health, and the contrast of the Vermont countryside as healing is established.

Reed's conviction that "a number of our society's psychosocial ills have a common root in our culture's disdain for primary experience" (133) is embedded in my primary texts: urban life is depicted as providing few opportunities for firsthand experience. Jane has "strong, capable little hands" (16) and no place to use them in the city, and Elizabeth Ann's initial attempts at creating something leave her "in dismay, looking at the shapeless, battered heap of butter before her and holding out her hands as though they were not part of her" (53). The girls are disconnected from their abilities, and environment is the common denominator, as is made poignantly obvious when in India, Mary sticks cut flowers into piles of dry earth in a sad pantomime of gardening. The effects of detachment from nature manifest themselves in a state of dis-ease experienced by all three girls. Lack of engagement with the natural world creates a poor sense of belonging to the environment. Reed comments that "[f]or understanding our place in the world, ecological information is thus primary, processed information secondary" (2). As is implied in this statement, understanding comes with experience, which the girls are denied, just as they are denied freedom to explore.

The girls' urban lives echo the contemporary situation that concerns Richard Louv in *Last Child in the Woods*: children in urban environments are afflicted with "too much watching, too much sitting" (10). In Mary's early days at Misselthwaite Manor, "[i]t was plain there was not a great deal of strength in [her] arms and legs when she first began to skip" (76). And as Christine Wilkie notes, "When we first meet Mary, she is wild, passionate, bewildered, and hostile" (76); but more significantly, and perhaps as the

cause of her behaviour, “Mary is rootless” (Wilkie 76). India, in its difference, is unnatural to her and therefore not able to provide her with the stability she needs to flourish. In a similar vein, Fisher’s narrator imparts that in the city, “Elizabeth Ann [is] very small and thin and little. And yet they all had plenty to eat” (2). It is implied here that the problem behind the girl’s poor health lies elsewhere than in a shortage of healthy food.

In *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life*, Andy Fisher writes that “the childhood need for nature is poorly recognized by most psychologists” (144). It is a need that Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery acknowledge in their respective works. And Nicholas Tucker states that “while psychologists are now quite good at painting the wider picture of different developmental processes, individual psychological portraits have always been best created by novelists” (173). As demonstrated by my primary authors, novelists also have the power to depict situations and environments that affect the psychology of their characters. At the beginning of all three stories, the girls live restricted, urban lives. Through his collective research, Richard Louv demonstrates how such lives are susceptible to dis-ease: “as the young spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings, their senses narrow, physiologically and psychologically, and this reduces the richness of human experience” (3). Being both ill and ill-at-ease are the by-products of this detachment from nature. The girls begin their lives and their stories untouched by the natural world and in a state of dis-ease; their authors provide an antidote in green space, which I discuss further in Chapter Four of this study.

John McDermott believes being ill-at-ease is a natural part of the human condition, “that the being of being is to be disconnected, ontologically adrift”(11). My primary



authors illustrate that urban environments, depicted consistently as unhealthy, create this disconnect, this illness. Through their stories, Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery show support for the connection between illness, wellness, and environment, but psychologist Stephen Kellert, from a broader, contemporary perspective, notes that the “relative absence of published material on this subject may be indicative of a society so estranged from its natural origins it has failed to recognize our species’ basic dependence on nature as a condition of growth and development” (118). Despite testimony that supports the connection between land and health, both in fiction and in psychology, the connection is difficult to quantify; as a result, the value is only anecdotal.

The problem of estrangement lies at the core of ecofeminism. In *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Criticism*, Marion Copeland recognizes Beatrix Potter and Gene Stratton Porter as early ecofeminist writers as they align their work with concern about “the domination [by a patriarchal, industrial culture] of nature and of all animals, wild and domestic, human and nonhuman” (71). I consider Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery to be ecofeminist writers in their concern with the relationship between place and health, and in their alignment of girls with nature. In their respective works, degraded urban environments (or, in Mary’s case, an environment unnatural to her) diminish the girls, and they need rural spaces to be replenished. In speaking to this need, Louv echoes the ecofeminist principle that

[r]educing the deficit – healing the broken bond between our young and nature – is in our self-interest, not only because aesthetics or justice demands it, but also because our mental, physical, and spiritual health depends upon it. The health of the earth is at stake as well. (3)

Contemporary North American “girl-poisoning culture,” defined by Mary Pipher as being sexualized and media-saturated (23), and the poisoned landscapes of the contemporary industrial world (Louv 198), are paralleled to a degree in my primary texts. While there are no clues in the texts pointing to a natural world in peril, the industrial shift was affecting rural landscapes at the time the authors were writing. In depicting early twentieth-century urban landscapes and culture as “poisonous” to the health of the girls, Montgomery, Burnett and Fisher align with the contemporary concerns voiced by Louv and Pipher.

In “The Superfund Gothic: Susanne Antonetta’s *Body Toxic: An Environmental Memoir*,” Christine Flanagan discusses the ways in which Antonetta charts “the radical poisoning of a landscape and her subsequent psychic and physical illness” (49). The assumption that the urban landscapes in my primary texts are poisoned and/or poisonous is found in the effect these places have on the girls. Both contemporary fiction and fiction from the past can effectively portray the link between land and health. Shepard addresses how the problem of ignoring the connection between environmental health and human health is fatal to both people and land, and that

the private cost is massive therapy, escapism, intoxicants, narcotics, fits of destruction and rage, enormous grief, subordination to hierarchies that exhibit this callow ineptitude at every level, and perhaps, worst of all, a readiness to strike back at a natural world that we dimly perceive as having failed us. (Shepard 35)

Flanagan points out that as Antonetta relates her father’s contemptuous attitude towards the women’s liberation movement, she realizes that the “natural world is similarly dismissed” by him, and by the larger culture (51).

Incomprehension and dismissal are apparent in the girls' perspectives when they first behold the rural spaces imposed on them. Travelling from the city into the Vermont countryside, Elizabeth Ann "looked out dismally at the winter landscape, thinking it hideous with its brown bare fields, its brown bare trees ... nothing looked colder than that bleak country into which the train was now slowly making its way" (21). Jane's journey and impression are much the same. When she travels by train to Prince Edward Island for the first time, she thinks to herself, "So this was P.E. Island ... this rain-drenched land where the trees cringed before the wind and the heavy clouds seemed almost to touch the fields" (54). And Mary, crossing the moor for the first time, "felt the drive would never come to an end and that the wide, bleak moor was a wide expanse of black ocean through which she was passing on a strip of dry land" (23). Each girl is being forced into a new, rural environment, each is unwell in body and mind, and each sees the land in terms of her state of being.

Ill regard for the natural world is a product of detachment from this world. As Paul Shepard notes, this disconnect is amplified over time in that "[f]rom this erosion of human nurturing comes the failure of the passages of the life cycle and the exhaustion of our ecological accords" (35). Detachment in itself becomes an illness, a failure to acknowledge the connection between human health and environmental health. Ralph Metzner supports this idea in *Green Psychology: Transforming Our Relationship to the Earth*: "The disease metaphor for our planetary condition depends on the following underlying analogy: Earth is a living organism, and humans and other individual organisms are the cells in this superorganism" (81). Following this analogy, an "organism cannot continue to function healthily if one group of cells decides to dominate

and cannibalize the other energy systems of the body” (97). This statement can be extended and applied to a number of hierarchies: human domination of the natural world, the effect of urban sprawl on the individual, and the patriarchal oppression of women.

The ecofeminist concern that the “devaluation [of women] is conceptually related to devaluation of the natural environment and its members” (96) is reconfigured, to a point, by Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery. By asserting the alignment of female child protagonists with a pastoral landscape and clearly positioning the restoration of health in a natural setting, they focus on the results of a life lived in nature. In Chapter Five of this study, I discuss the changes that occur in the girls’ attitudes toward their environments as they each grow in health.

My primary authors also reconfigure depictions of illness, particularly as they relate to gender. The historical context of the novels supports the portrayal of pale, heroic invalids in literature. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, an analysis of nineteenth-century women writers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write that “[s]urrounded as she is by images of disease, traditions of disease, and invitations both to disease and to dis-ease, it is no wonder that the woman writer has held many mirrors up to the discomforts of her own nature” (57). Though Montgomery, Fisher and Burnett were writing in this tradition, they each use the transformation trope to work against this discomfort by ultimately creating strong, healthy girls.

Discomfort with a culture that supports “the close relationship between representations of illness and cultural fantasies about illness” is also evident in their respective works (Gilman 18). Literary fashion of the era centred on

the aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty – no doubt associated with the moral cult of the angel-woman – obliged ‘genteel’ women to ‘kill’ themselves into art objects; slim, pale, passive beings whose ‘charms’ eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead. Tight-lacing, fasting, vinegar-drinking, and similar cosmetic or dietary excesses were all parts of a physical regimen that helped women either to feign morbid weakness or actually to ‘decline’ into real illness. (25)

Rather than create suffering, angelic heroines or use illness as punishment, these writers subvert this common trend by creating girls who move past the confines of illness, and by removing their protagonists from an urban culture that adheres to these views.

The issue of illness, gender and space permeates the tenets of both ecofeminism and feminist literary theory. In analyzing George Eliot’s *Mill on the Floss*, Elaine Showalter states, “Because he is a cripple, Philip has led a girl’s life; he has been barred from sports and swordplay and ultimately forced to be ‘perfectly quiescent,’ as immobilized as Maggie herself” (*Literature* 127). The assumptions latent in this statement suggest that a healthy body is masculine, and that indoor space is feminine. A number of questions are raised with regard to my primary texts: Because the girls are not thriving at the start of their stories, does this mean they are more feminine when they are ill than at the story’s end when they are strong in body and self-confidence? What is the nature of the connection between space and wellness if indoor space is feminine and equated with illness/stillness? Does the opposite stand to reason, that outdoor space is active and masculine? I address the questions of transformation and space in Chapters

Four and Five of my study, and conclude Chapter Three by addressing the issue of illness and gender.

In all three primary texts, the girls are granted the freedom to develop their physical selves once they move to rural locations, but the initial restrictions of their urban environments do not allow this development, either culturally or geographically. In *Physical Culture and the Body Beautiful: Purposive Exercise in the Lives of American Women 1800-1870*, Jan Todd documents the restrictions placed on women at this time:

In the eighteenth century, French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau provided a philosophical rallying point for exercise with his descriptions of the importance of outdoor athletics in the formation of manly, ideal men. Unfortunately, Rousseau did not advocate the same sorts – or the same intensity – of purposive exercise for women. Rousseau did not want women to be truly weak, but he did want them to be fertile, submissive, nonambitious and content to stay at home. (11)

In *Emile*, Rousseau reveals that his attitude towards women extends to girls in his assertion that “Sophie exercised because it enhanced her physical appeal to Emile” (12). The limitations inherent in this statement are not supported by my primary authors. Rather, they remove their girls to rural spaces that allow them freedom not often granted girls in this era. Nineteenth-century women’s rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton writes, “We simply cannot say what the woman might be physically, if the girl were allowed all the freedom of the boy” (qtd. in Todd 184). But in their respective works, Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery offer a statement about what females can be, given the freedom and the appropriate environment. And writing in the late 1800s, Doctor J.H. Hanaford said

Woman has muscles and she as right to use them in a proper manner ... there is no reason why she should ignore them or be ashamed to develop them. ... What if her limbs become a little rotund, her hands enlarged, her brow somewhat bronzed. ... She need not be ashamed of it, since such efforts will impart just the vivacity, suppleness, stamina and endurance she will need. (qtd. in Todd 295).

In relocating their girls from sickness to health, Montgomery, Burnett, and Fisher embed this creed in their work. The hope inherent in metamorphosis is at the heart of these narratives of healing. Gloria Feman Orenstein believes the function of ecofeminist literature is to act as “‘medicine stories,’ literature whose function is to teach us lessons about healing” (qtd. in Flanagan 52). There is an element of the ‘medicine story’ in each of my primary texts. Through transformations that bind personal health and wellness to the land, the healing potential of green space is illuminated.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATURE OF THE GREEN SPACE

As a cornerstone question of ecocriticism, Cheryll Glotfelty asks, “Where *is* the natural world in the text?” (xxiii). In their respective novels, Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery position the natural world centrally, and in opposition to urban spaces. At the heart of their stories lies green space, and it is the nature of this space that determines the transformation each girl experiences.

My study draws on Louise Chawla’s definition of nature as “the ‘green world’ of forests, fields, farms, parks and gardens – the elements of earth, water, air and growing things that exist independent of human creation, although they may be shaped into forms of human design” (200). The green spaces of all three texts are alternately referred to in critical discussion as *idyllic*, *Arcadian*, *agrarian*, and *utopian*, revealing the parallels and the interchangeable quality of these terms. These are cultivated spaces that appear to balance nature and culture. The concept of wilderness is beyond the scope of my study. In terms of green space versus green places, I look to Yi-Fu Tuan’s *Space and Place: The Perspective of Freedom* for distinction: “place is security; space is freedom” (54). The protagonists in my key texts are relocated to rural places – farms, gardens, villages – that, over the passage of at least one full season, grant the girls space to breathe, move, grow, and learn.

Only in rural spaces can these girls journey from sickness to health. The green spaces there are sites of transformation and potential, standing in opposition to the sterility of the urban environments in which each girl begins her story. Yet these rural environments are not without restrictions. In her discussion of classic children’s texts, Maria Nikolajeva notes that in “many texts, the secluded character of the setting is emphasized. The garden



walls or fences are boundaries to the surrounding – adult – world, boundaries both protecting and restricting” (23). This idea of existing in a borderland connects to the Edwardian era in which my primary texts were written, an era in which the inherited Victorian culture and a burgeoning modern world were vying for position. Seth Lerer observes that

the Edwardian [identity] embodies something about childhood itself. All children live on such a cusp: between the memories of their comfortable youth and the fears of the future ... between a natural world through which they romp and the demarcation of that world by the fences, walls, rails, roads, and bridges of adult administration. (273)

As Lerer indicates, a demarcated world is not necessarily restricting, but the quality of the experiences available in these semi-controlled spaces varies. For example, Robert Pyle maintains that “Nature reserves ... are not enough to ensure connections. Such places, important as they are, invite a measured, restricted kind of contact” (qtd. in Kellert 146). At Lantern Hill, where nature is a natural part of Jane’s life, she finds a landscape with “free hills and wide, open fields where you could run wherever you liked, none daring to make you afraid, spruce barrens and shadowy sand dunes, instead of an iron fence and locked gates (Montgomery 83). Betsy’s life on the Putney farm and Mary’s experiences in the walled garden are more overtly circumscribed than Jane’s, but within each of these environments, the girls are granted a freedom to explore that is comparable to Jane’s.

Around the time my primary texts were written, “children’s environmental literature began to depict nature in a more ‘realistic’ manner and not merely as an illusion or fantasy. Nature became something wild, something that changed, something with which

children may interact, not merely sit prettily within” (Holton 151). As I focus on female protagonists, I am interested in examining how gender affects this interaction. Jacqueline Rose and Kate Soper offer insights on the ramifications of regarding nature as gendered. Rose writes that in “fictitious romance for boys ... discovering, or seeing, the world is equivalent to controlling, or subduing it” (58). The underlying ecofeminist assumption here is that the natural world is feminine. Soper complements this observation by noting that “[f]eminized nature is not ... emblematic simply of mastered nature, but also of regrets and guilts over the mastering itself; of nostalgias felt for what is lost or defiled in the very act of possession” (143). The history of gendered landscapes in literature and cultural mythology is discussed by Patrick Imbert in “The Garden and its Multiple Contexts in Canada, the United States, and Latin America”:

Christian mythology arrived here on the shores of North America in October of the year 1492. At which point God as man met God as woman ... and thereby hangs a tale of what are probably the worse cases of rape, wife battery and attempted wife murder in the history of the world as we know it. (61)

In tracing the connection of New World mentality to attitudes of possession and domination toward land and women, Annette Kolodny extends the discussion to gardens, referring to “the initial impulse to experience the New World landscape, not merely as an object of domination and exploitation, but as a maternal ‘garden’” (172). There is much critical discussion about the secret garden as a maternal, internal space. The nature of the garden space in terms of gender is interesting, but as the green spaces of my primary texts encompass myriad life cycles, and there is no textual evidence to support a particularly

feminine landscape, it is the nature of the experience offered by these green spaces that is relevant to my study.

While the landscapes of my primary texts are not explicitly gendered, the fact that I centre my discussion on female protagonists as written by female authors bears analysis.

Mary Rubio writes in consideration of the era in which Montgomery was writing that

[c]hildhood, obviously, is the only time of her life during which a woman is permitted not to know that her reality inevitably involves marriage. It is tempting to speculate, then, that Montgomery's attitude toward marriage might well have influenced her preference for treating in fiction the lives of young girls. What is possible for a girl in childhood far exceeds what is allowed her after the onset of adolescence. (142)

All three of my primary texts reflect a level of freedom that is unusual for girls from this era: Mary is largely left alone to explore the Misselthwaite estate; Jane roams freely around the PEI countryside, herding cows and once, a lion; and Betsy navigates her way to school and to the county fair solo. But some critical work on the nature of the sexual politics in these texts de-emphasizes the freedom granted the girls. Critics such as Mollie Gillen and Theodore Sheckels regard Jane as a Cinderella-type figure, entirely domesticated, and in her view of Mary as being cultivated into a normative female role, Price fears Mary is "train[ed] to be in a drama for which others have written the script" (12).

The garden space is particularly subject to discussions of gender, an idea supported by Lerer's argument that "the garden is a space that defines boys and girls as different" (248). He asserts that gender dictates the type of experiences available to male

and female characters in these spaces. For boy characters such as Colin, the space fosters an outwardly active dynamic. For girls, the garden is a quieter, more introspective place. Gwyneth Evans supports Lerer's argument in her view of Mary's journey as inward, enclosed, and emotional. Price sees Mary's cultivation as incorporating many qualities of "the perfect garden: enclosure, imprisonment, and instruction, producing beauty and comfort for the enjoyment of the male sex" (7). As well, feminist readings of *The Secret Garden* often point to Mary's apparent negation in the story as Colin's health improves.

But Nikolajeva's concept of the collective protagonist is more useful to my study as it promotes the idea of multiple life cycles and interconnectedness. She states that "[w]ith the notion of the collective protagonist, the emergence of Colin is merely a shift within the character ... What Dickon is to Mary, Mary is to Colin, the triple character evolving from the eternity of death toward the eternity of life" (39). This perspective not only connects the experiences of male and female characters, but it also considers the characters as one, as "the emergence of Colin is merely a shift *within* the character" (original emphasis 39). According to Nikolajeva, "Colin is the lazy, dormant, apathetic part of the protagonist, and Mary's eventual discovery of him ... is an essential step in the protagonist's self-fulfilment" (39); in this scenario, Dickon represents "the most liberated part" of the protagonist. In extending this perspective to a seasonal cycle, Colin is winter, Mary is spring and summer, and Dickon is timeless and representative of all four seasons.

In her study of Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, Gabriella Ahmanson notes that an "aspect that female writers of utopias usually have in common is that they describe a matriarchy or in extreme cases, a world entirely without men. In both cases

the separation from our world has not primarily anything to do with time or place, but is realized as an escape from patriarchal society” (129). But male characters are, to varying degrees, integral to my three primary stories: Ben Weatherstaff, Dickon, Colin, Mr. Craven in *The Secret Garden*; Uncle Henry and Ralph in *Understood Betsy*; and Jane’s father, Andrew, in *Jane of Lantern Hill*. There are no power struggles between the male and female characters in these narratives; rather, there is a natural symbiosis in the relationships. And nowhere in the texts are male characters depicted as having a privileged or hierarchical relationship to the land in comparison to the female protagonists.

Lerer’s supposition that “[g]ardens ... may be places of the theatre” points to the problem of gender and performance (251). He notes that in much early twentieth-century children’s literature, “[g]irls always seem to be up on stages. How they look and sound is, in a way, far more important than how boys do” (229). But in my primary texts, the green spaces of garden and farmland are more than backdrop: they are integral settings in which the girls *do*. Green space for them is a place where their actions are not a performance but rather proof of their abilities. And while there is much emphasis in all three texts on the girls’ growing attractiveness, the emphasis on their looks provides testimony as to the restorative nature of the green spaces; beauty equals health in these texts.

Wilkie notes of Burnett’s novel that “[t]he secret garden is unquestionably a therapeutic and regenerative site” (78), a fact that is supported by Stigsdotter and Grahn, who apart from listing the physical attributes of gardens, also believe that the “health effects are due to ... the activities that can be carried out there, [that] can restore a person

to a more positive view of himself and his capacities” (63). This is true of Jane’s and Mary’s experiences with gardening and green space. Betsy is never shown to be gardening, but she is an active participant in farm life. Lutwack asserts that “[i]n spite of the honorable position of the garden image in our national ideology, American literature has never been captivated by the farmer and his way of life” (153). This may be true of literature for adults, but the farm is a consistent setting in children’s literature, particularly from the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centuries, in American texts like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, *Farmer Boy*, *Strawberry Girl*, and *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.

In order to understand the nature of the green space at the heart of my primary texts, it is helpful to define the nature of the texts themselves. They are the product of a Protestant, white culture in the Edwardian era. They are Western -- English, American, and Canadian, respectively: a Yorkshire estate and garden on the edge of the moor; a farm in Vermont on the edge of a forest; a Prince Edward Island cottage at the edge of the sea. Each story is roughly set at the turn of the century. Trains figure in all three books, and there is the occasional mention of a motor car in *Jane of Lantern Hill*, but in all three worlds, “technology is only barely there” (Lerer 272). The Industrial Age is heaving forward, but as Jane Urquhart observes in her recent brief biography of Montgomery, “it was status in a rural world, rather than an urban one, that really mattered. Most Canadians at the beginning of the twentieth century were still connected to the land and to the small towns and villages carved out of the bush only a century, at most, before” (18). But change was happening fast, and in their celebration of rural landscapes, the authors were conserving a moment in history by idealizing their environments. As Squire

notes, “Montgomery’s juxtaposition of Prince Edward Island and Toronto, a utopian-dystopian polarity that has no parallel elsewhere in her fiction, enabled her to make her most explicit statement about Prince Edward Island” (141).

Lawrence Buell writes, “The best environmental writers continually recalibrate familiar landscapes” (261). In this vein, my primary authors drew from the pastoral tradition as a means of focusing on the best possible version of their environments. But the pastoral nature of the books is often criticized for avoiding the realities of both the natural world and people’s place within it: “the sheltered, even juvenile, landscapes of Lucy Maud Montgomery ... they are situated in a fantasy world devoid of industry,” write Norcliffe and Simpson-Housely in “No Vacant Eden” (5). Such a summation denies any link to the literal world, as does the accusation that Montgomery was “writing purple prose” in her detailing of “landscape and how it shapes character (Urquhart 53). Most disdainful is Mary Rubio’s report of the acid criticism that Montgomery “writes only about an unblemished bucolic paradise for indiscriminating women and children” (6).

Burnett suffers similar critical dismissal, particularly at the hands of Humphrey Carpenter, who regards *The Secret Garden* as little more than a story Burnett accidentally stumbled upon rather than a work she created. In *What Katy Read*, Foster and Simons undermine the value of the natural environment Burnett portrays in stating that “[t]he details of house and garden, the food Mary eats, the bulbs that she plants, the visual and tactile recreation of the landscape: all serve to reinforce the solidity of the world that she inhabits. This surface realism ... fails, however, to diminish the power of the fantasy which remains the core of the story” (176). While not an entirely negative summation,

the reality of Burnett's green space in the book comes second to the fairytale qualities of the story. Phylis Bixler recognizes that the natural world of *The Secret Garden* goes beyond the surface, and is, in fact, deeply rooted:

Burnett underscores the parallel transformations of Mary and the garden through an archetypal use of the seasonal cycle. Mary had arrived in late winter, the season often associated with death. Now, when a changing Mary enters the secret garden about a month later, the green shoots provide the promise of spring, the season typically associated with rebirth. (41)

While the fairytale aspect of the story is appealing, the real-world depictions are, from an ecocritical perspective, more valuable. Mary's transformation is directly located in the natural world, thereby underscoring this value, a topic discussed in depth in Chapter Five.

To avoid a dismissive summation of nature in children's literature and to approach an understanding of the nature of these textual green spaces requires an analysis of the pastoral in literature. William Howarth writes, "Ecocriticism, instead of taxing science for its use of language to represent (mimesis) examines its ability to point (deixis) ... deixis locates entities in space, time, and social context" (80). Through the work of Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Clare, "we witness a crisis of sensibility by which nature becomes idealised in the face of its threatened destruction" (Coupe 5). Arguably, the pastoral depiction of nature in my primary texts is a product of Romantic concern, a view supported by Rubio's suggestion that "Montgomery's own responses to nature may have been heightened by her reading of Wordsworth, Longfellow, and Emerson" (33). The landscapes she created are ideal in their pastoral depiction, and free of environmental threat. As Greg Garrard notes, "Romantic nature is never seriously



endangered” (43). The green spaces of my primary texts are intact, with no evidence of ecological crisis or decay, apart from the secret garden when Mary first finds it in a state of neglect and winter dormancy.

Classical English pastorals are criticized for “present[ing] a vision of rural life so removed from the processes of labour and natural growth that they constitute a persistent mystification of human ecology” (Garrard 38). But Montgomery, Burnett and Fisher portray the workings of the natural world in conjunction with human life: growing food, making butter, fishing, learning to swim in the sea, seasonal activities: in this sense, my primary authors reconfigure and render vital the classic pastoral. As Jacqueline Rose writes, “Literature is the repository of a privileged experience and sensibility at risk in the outside world where these values are being crushed under the weight of cultural decay” (43). In my primary texts, the green world is depicted as rejuvenated and rejuvenating, illustrating the potential of pastoral literature to preserve environmental values.

In “Fresh-Air Kids,” Lois Kuznets defines pastoral literature as “traditionally demonstrat[ing] the human need for the healing power of the simple, rural, or rustic life by contrasting that life with the complex, urban, or urbane one” (156). The portrayal of these urban/rural binaries is often criticized for being simplistic, regressive, and escapist in nature. The pejorative use of the term ‘pastoral’ coincides with critical attitudes toward nostalgia. As a reaction to being ill at ease with our place in the world, McDermott feels that “some of us retreat to a vicious nostalgia, whereby the past takes on a glow that it never had in the present and seduces us into living our lives backwards. ... We become trapped in our own glass menagerie” (22). This sentiment is shared by Perry Nodelman, who in writing about children’s books such as *The Secret Garden*, says, “The

utopia these novels progress towards is actually a regressive world of perfect childlike innocence. . . . It forces us into a fruitless nostalgia – a lust for something we simply cannot have anymore” (81). But the nostalgia inherent in these pastoral texts speaks to a homesickness for a natural world that was being dismantled at the turn of the twentieth century, and points to the need for conservation. Roni Natov writes, “In the literature of childhood, the green world may serve to expose the cruelty and waste of our society. In revealing various ways we are ruptured from our nature, these stories can be as deeply critical as the literature for adults” (92). In my study, I support a wider analysis of nostalgia and pastoral than Nodelman’s and McDermott’s. Terry Gifford believes the literary pastoral offers “versatility . . .to both contain and appear to evade tensions and contradictions – between country and city, art and nature, the human and non-human, our social and inner selves, our masculine and feminine” (qtd. in Natov 92). The richness of interpretation offered by viewing the pastoral from multiple perspectives leads to the acknowledgment of multiple functions which depend on context, subject, and authorial intent.

For the purpose of my study on how land affects health, I look at pastoral children’s literature as “texts [that] do reflect how a civilization regards its natural heritage” (Howarth 77). Darcy’s assertion of *The Secret Garden* that “the real as well as the ideal is much in evidence; in fact, the two are inextricably connected” (213) further supports this reflection. Novels such as *Understood Betsy* and *Jane of Lantern Hill* “are perceived to be the acceptable face of our cultural heritage [and] it would be a great loss if they were to be dismissed altogether as not dealing with the realities of life now”

(Darcy 222). But the realities Montgomery depicts in her work are dismissed by critic Muriel Whitaker, who believes the enduring charm of texts such as the *Anne* books is partly that of a period piece. Canadiana is "in" at the moment: though we no longer use gin jars for hot water bottles or keep up a parlour for serious occasions, hooked rugs, patchwork quilts, and butter churns are highly prized and highly priced. Is the appeal of L. M. Montgomery's novels simply a matter of nostalgia or do they contain something of lasting, if minor, literary value? (52)

Whitaker lists cultural products. But my primary authors, Burnett and Montgomery in particular, list detailed aspects of the natural world in their respective works, as illustrated in this passage from *Jane of Lantern Hill*:

Jane did not know she was looking out on the loveliest thing on earth ... a June morning in Prince Edward Island ... A wave of fragrance broke in her face from the lilac hedge ... The poplars in a corner of the lawn were shaking in green laughter. An apple tree stretching out friendly arms. There was a faraway view of daisy-sprinkled fields across the harbour where white gulls were soaring and swooping. The air was moist and sweet after the rain. Aunt Irene's house was on the fringe of the town and a country road ran behind it ... a road almost blood-red in its glistening wetness. Jane had never imagined a road coloured like that. (60)

From an ecocritical perspective, this inventory reads like an act of conservation, a means of committing to memory something which could fade. Garrard writes, "At the root of the pastoral is the idea that nature is a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies" (56). Inherent in this statement is the idea that

pastoral texts serve as a reference point for the natural world at a particular time in history.

My primary texts depart from classical pastoral literature in that the three protagonists stay, for the most part, in the rural spaces in which they are healed. More common in literature is the insistence “on a return from the pastoral, so that the discovery that took place in nature can be integrated into our world in an offering of hope and renewal” (Natov 92). But as Love discusses in “Revaluing Nature,” “the western version of pastoral may be said to reverse the characteristic pattern of entry and return so that it is the green world which asserts its greater significance to the main character” (235). The transformations from sickness to health at the core of my primary texts serve to highlight the significance of the green world, as does the fact that the girls do not permanently return to urban environments: Mary’s home is indefinitely to be Misselthwaite, Betsy chooses to stay with the Putneys, and Jane secures Lantern Hill as a summer home.

The healing nature of the green space in my primary texts is rooted in the pastoral tradition. In deliberately transforming the girls on these green sites, the authors emphasize the significance and value of that space. From a contemporary perspective, “people are born and die in clinical settings, and in between spend much of their time shuttling about through offices, malls, clubs, and transport designed as neutrally benign and predictability interchangeable spaces” (Buell 69). Illness and ontological discomfort abound; urban lives offer limited exposure to green space. While Jones argues that the “urban can offer green spaces and contact with nature, but also a range of environments beyond that available in rural settings” (28), it is the quality of the experience and the immersion in nature that truly heals, as my primary texts illustrate. Green patches and

parks are not enough. The girls are not just visitors sent to rural places for a country cure; their lives take root in these green spaces. And interestingly, though the girls do not regard their environments as utopian or ideal at first, their adoration grows as their health strengthens in connection to the land.

Pastoral children's literature from the Edwardian era has the power of "metaphor, or symbolizing in general ... [that] helps us explore the *possibilities* of experience, [and] suggests that we might, on a highly conscious level, call into play once more our evolutionary adaptive ability to create and re-create our own images of reality" (Kolodny 178). In this light, whether they are viewed as fairytales, as products of nostalgia, or as literal worlds is unimportant to define. What matters is that these texts offer a chance to explore possibilities for ways of living in harmony.

In attempting to understand the mythical appeal of gardens, Stigsdotter and Grahn write, "Perhaps it can be described as a yearning for devotion and beauty, or for a place without sin" (67). This idea is perhaps at the root of all attachment to the green spaces of pastoral literature: knowing that somewhere, nature has not been meddled with, to know it exists, even if only in books.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE NATURE OF THE TRANSFORMATIONS

At the beginnings of their stories, Mary, Betsy and Jane are ill-at-ease with themselves and at odds with their environments. At the outset of the novels in which these characters appear, authors Burnett, Fisher and Montgomery clearly define the parameters of their protagonists' urban, or in Mary's case, unnatural, settings: Mary is shuttered by India's climate; Betsy's urban life is circumscribed by her aunt's home and by school; and Jane's life, like Betsy's, is largely confined to her grandmother's house and to school. At the time these novels were written, the Industrial Age had altered Western society's relationship to land, and in *The Power of Place*, Winifred Gallagher observes that in "one of the least remarked of these transformations, the Industrial Revolution drew the West indoors" (13). Apart from taking walks, the main action of the girls' lives at the start of their stories occurs in largely interior environments.

In a study of detachment from the natural world in North American culture, Kellert notes that "a society so estranged from its natural origins ... has failed to recognize our species' basic dependence on nature as a condition of growth and development" (118). Failure to acknowledge the ecology of human and environmental health leads to a disconnect illustrated by Harold Fromm in his ecocritical essay, "From Transcendence to Obsolescence." In telling of a woman who regards potential solutions to pollution as a threat to her preferred lifestyle, he writes, "*Somehow*, she is alive: she eats food, drinks water, breathes air, but she does not see these actions as *grounds of life*; rather, they are acts that coincide with her life" (37). Living in urban environments, the protagonists of my primary texts are as disconnected from human reliance on natural processes for survival as the woman in Fromm's essay. But through deliberate relocation

and transformation of the protagonists, my primary authors offer an antidote to this disease. *Jane of Lantern Hill*, *The Secret Garden* and *Understood Betsy* each “[acknowledge] and [promote] our biological connection with nature as a therapeutic recovery from our misguided detachment from the earth” (Henderson 137). Arguably, it is detachment from the natural world that causes the girls’ ill states of being, and likewise, engagement with the earth leads to their recovery.

A number of critics have commented on the nature of the transformations in all three texts. In discussing Jane’s burgeoning abilities, Theodore Sheckels states that “it is difficult to read Jane’s immersion in household tasks as exemplifying female freedom or independence” (529). He limits the scope of her transformation to simple domestic indoctrination. But Jane’s growing capabilities centre on more than household tasks. During her summers at Lantern Hill, she learns to swim in the ocean, catch fish from a pond, conquer her fear of cows, drive a load of hay behind a horse, and use a plane to fix a stuck door. While she takes pride in and enjoys household activities, she is observant, self-reliant, and resourceful, not mindlessly domestic, as is evident when she watches her father start a fire. The narrator writes, “Dad had kindled a fire in the stove and fed it with some of Aunt Matilda Jollie’s wood, Jane keeping a watchful eye on him as he did it. She had never seen a fire made in a stove before, but she meant to know how to do it herself next time” (81). In her new environment, Jane’s determination to rise to any challenge transcends normative gender roles.

Other critics focus on the politics of the texts. Using nationality as her point of argument, June Cummins believes that “Betsy’s transformation is linked to her becoming an American” (15). This critical tack is shared by Danielle Price in her discussion of

Mary's transformation: "This metamorphosis is accompanied by – in fact, is inseparable from – the Indian-born Mary's inculcation in English ways and values" (4). But apart from the physical transformations, the bulk of the critical material on transformations in my primary texts centres on spirituality, particularly with regard to *The Secret Garden*. Foster and Simons point to a Christian reading of the novel, stating that as "a version of the Edenic world of innocence, the garden is also the site of Mary's transfiguration from moral ugliness to spiritual beauty" (187). Likewise, Gwyneth Evans makes no mention of Mary's physical transformation in her essay on the feminine pastoral. Instead, she focuses on "the stories of gardens in which children work with nature, creating beauty through growing things and at the same time experiencing spiritual and emotional growth in their lives" (20). Jane Darcy extends Evans' discussion by including the physical aspect of Burnett's story, noting that "[s]trong beliefs about the role of the natural world in developing a healthy mind and body and ensuring spiritual peace inform *The Secret Garden*" (216).

While the spiritual value of green spaces is clearly worth considering, especially in light of ecopsychologist Ralph Metzner's comment on "the West's fixation on the life-destroying dissociation between spirit and nature" (67), including a discussion of the spiritual nature of the transformations in my primary texts would take me beyond the core of my study. Instead, I align my discussion with Kaplan's observation of "the sense of being 'at one,' a feeling that often ... occurs in natural environments. Although the spiritual does not hold a prominent place in the writings of most psychologists, the concern for meaning, for tranquility, and for relatedness has not gone unnoticed" (197). In my study, then, I focus on the physical and psychological nature of the transformation:



I take note of the serenity that green spaces offer the girls rather than the spirituality. After a period of stress, “Jane went out and up and sat on the hill ... ‘to get back into herself,’ as she expressed it” (Montgomery 99). Likewise, when Betsy must make a life-changing decision, she goes “straight away from the house and the barn, straight up in the hill pasture toward her favourite place by the brook, the shady pool under the big maple tree” (Fisher 188). These spaces soothe and restore the girls in a way urban spaces cannot. The reason lies in the chance for quiet and solitude, in freedom and connection to a land where natural rhythms have been undisturbed by technology. When Jane and her father first move into their Lantern Hill home and are getting acquainted with the place, Jane takes stock of the things she loves about her new life on the island. Lying in bed, she notices “how quiet it all was ... no honking, no glaring lights” (83).

I am interested in the aspects of the girls’ transformations that involve proximity to and activity in green space. The pastoral depiction of the rural world in all three novels reflects the Romantic tradition in which they were written, but in his introduction to Ward’s *The Child in the Country*, Richard Mabey brings the real world to the justification of a country childhood, noting that “recent history is full of examples of the growing and learning that happens when children, regardless of whether they are from a rural or urban background, live for a while in close contact with the land and other living things” (9). Both fiction and nonfiction effectively depict how “our connection with the natural world depends on how we inhabit our bodies in the world” (Chawla 221). In their urban environments, the protagonists of my primary texts are removed from their physical lives and have no connection to the natural world, which in turn limits their inner lives and psychological growth. In rural spaces, they engage with the land as they

engage with their bodies, through such activities as swimming, farming, skipping, and gardening. The result is a growing comfort with both their environments and themselves.

With one short statement, Jane gets to the root of why her time at Lantern Hill changes her so completely: “It was nice to live where you could show how capable you were,” she realizes after being on PEI just a short while (85). In Toronto, not only is there no place for her to test her independence, she is also discouraged by her grandmother from testing her abilities. Mary is likewise discouraged from engaging with her environment by India’s climate, and Aunt Frances’ overprotection of Betsy keeps her from developing her abilities. The transformations apparent in all three novels are rooted in experience. But it is not until the girls get to rural places that they move from being spectators to participants. Francis’s distinction between being in nature, and being active in a natural environment, relates directly to my core argument, as he believes that “when children become involved as gardeners or farmers rather than as passive observers of gardens, a deeper significance and meaning is established” (8). Arguably, in terms of my key narratives, a deeper healing is established, too.

The firsthand experience granted the girls in their rural locations is the key factor in their transformations. Betsy’s early days on the Putney farm parallel Jane’s experiences at Lantern Hill, though hers is a slower growing confidence. After protesting numerous times that she does not know how to do certain things, a “dim notion was growing in her mind that the fact that she had never done a thing was no proof that she couldn’t” (102). In a rural environment, Betsy wakes up to the fact that she can learn to be capable, a phenomenon confirmed by Louv’s research on nature as “a place to use all the senses – and to learn by doing” (84). Mary’s awakening is directly aligned with the

recovery of the garden. Her activity there brings the garden to its full potential. In *Take Up Thy Bed and Walk*, her book on disability in classic children's fiction, Lois Keith writes, "*The Secret Garden* deals centrally with faith and healing ... the psychological dimension is more important than the religious one. Trust and belief in God are largely replaced with confidence in the self"(96). There is more behind the ideologies of healing landscapes than simply being in them; the key factor in why the rural landscapes are healing for Mary, Betsy, and Jane is what I call the necessity of doing, an idea that is supported by Edward Reed in his belief in the connection between dis-ease and lack of primary experience in an increasingly virtual world (133).

As a means of determining the ecocritical value of an experience, Glen Love asks if the activity "adapts us better to the world or ... estranges us from it" ("Revaluing" 228). Nearly all the skills the girls develop in their respective rural environments are purposeful -- gardening, herding cows, making butter, driving a wagon, fishing -- enriching their understanding of the connection between their lives and the natural world. Writing about the contemporary world, Robert Pyle hypothesizes that "the extinction of experience [is] sucking life from the land" (qtd in Kellert 141). This idea is supported by Wendell Berry's belief that "without a complex knowledge of one's place, and without the faithfulness to one's place on which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed" (qtd in Buell 78). The lack of primary experience within the natural world today is causing a connection deficit, and the consequences are entangled: as physical and psychological human health is affected adversely, so is the land. A professor of landscape architecture "charted the shrinkage of natural play spaces in urban England, a transformation of the landscape of childhood that

occurred within a space of fifteen years” (Louv 33). With the rapidly altering landscapes of the twenty-first century come fewer opportunities for first-hand knowledge and experience of the land. My primary novels highlight the value of this space and this experience, just as they highlight the ill effects of losing or being denied them.

Child psychologist Roger Barker conducted a study in the 1960s that concluded “settings were more important determinants of his subjects’ behavior than their personalities” (qtd. in Gallagher 127). He believed that culturally constructed places such as offices, restaurants, and schools “encourage us to maintain the status quo” (128), meaning there are expected and appropriate modes of behavior in given environments. Following the idea that social settings have the most prescribed expectations of conduct attached to them, green space provides some relief from these prescriptions and allow more authentic aspects of personalities to appear. In the city, Jane is restrained in her role as granddaughter and student, just as Betsy is confined by an over-caring aunt. In India, Mary has issues of race and class affecting aspects of her nature. The girls all undergo marked changes in personality with their relocations to green spaces; they have more freedom to explore who they are beyond the trappings of social expectation. Writer Barry Lopez’s belief that “the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes” supports these transformations (qtd in Buell 83): in the country, Jane’s awkwardness is replaced with self-assurance, Betsy sheds her timidity, and Mary’s contrariness fades.

These transformations occur because of engagement with natural spaces. But in contemporary society, as our attachment to technology advances and our detachment from the earth increases, so grows the danger of “thinking that the dimension of nature

[holds] no path of communication or consequence to the human body” (Flanagan 55). Flanagan’s exploration of Susanne Antonetta’s *The Body Toxic* proves that a “sort of ‘mutuality’ that exists between organisms and their normal environment has become a requirement for physiological and psychological well-being” (Dubos qtd. in Cobb 75). Cobb calls this mutuality ‘ecology’; inherent in the term is the idea that all things are interconnected, all reacting to each other and causing reactions. Living in cities and places where natural life cannot affect them, the girls live wan half-lives. In country settings, surrounded by living things, they, too, come to life.

In *Practical Ecocriticism*, Love calls for “ecological, naturalist, scientifically grounded arguments that recognize human connection with nature and the rest of organic life (8). My primary texts recognize this connection from a narrative point of view. In *The Secret Garden*, for example, Mary realizes that

[f]our good things had happened to her, in fact, since she came to Misselthwaite Manor. She had felt as if she had understood a robin and that he had understood her; she had run in the wind until her blood had grown warm; she had been healthily hungry for the first time in her life; and she had found out what it was to be sorry for some one. (52)

In listing the good things brought about by Mary’s relocation, Burnetts’ narrator acknowledges that physical engagement with the world changes Mary mentally and physically. Kahn’s assertion that “nature is not a mere cultural convention or artifact ... but part of a physical and biological reality that bounds children’s cognition” confirms the mind-body connection (7). As noted by Keith, when “Mary finds psychological health [she] simultaneously regains physical strength” (126). While the garden is the

main factor in providing the “spatial agency for her psychic and bodily transformation” (Wilkie 79), it is the overall nature of her environment that restores her. At the story’s end, the narrator comments that when

[Mary’s] mind gradually filled itself with robins, and moorland cottages crowded with children, with queer crabbed old gardeners and common little Yorkshire maids, with springtime and with secret gardens coming alive day by day, and also with a moor boy and his ‘creatures,’ there was so room left for the disagreeable thoughts which affected her liver and her digestion and made her yellow and tired. (294)

Mary’s close contact with living things gradually changes her outlook on life and her interactions with others. Her transformation aligns with Kahn’s research, which supports the belief that “people who affiliate positively with nature tend to be happier, more relaxed, more productive, more satisfied with their homes and jobs, and healthier” (110). And as stated in a Welsh government report from 1949,

the men and women who live most closely to the great rhythms of the natural world possess a greater integration within themselves than is common among those who live in cities. They are more serene and inwardly poised, less susceptible to fluctuations of spiritual moods and depression of material resources, because their roots are deeper, their primary necessities are assured and their characters have been steadily formed by the influences of nature and the unhurried circuit of changeable seasonal occupations. (Ward 97)

My primary texts illustrate that time spent in rural spaces changes the girls because the transformations are synchronous with the rhythms of the seasons.

The most seasonal and grounding of all the activities the three girls experience in their rural environments centres on food production: growing, harvesting, cooking, and consumption. All three girls tend gardens of some kind and live off the land in some way. In tending the earth, they gain a direct relationship with it, growing the food they eat and engaging with growing seasons and lifecycles. Food links the girls to the land; it becomes a part of them, sustains them. In contrast, Jane's and Mary's bodies do not seem to assimilate the food they eat in the city; there, food is too detached, too unnatural, too severed from the land. And for Mary, because India is a foreign place, its food cannot become part of her. The authors' portrayal of urban food reflects the contemporary "severance of the public and private mind from our food's origin" that concerns Louv (19). He sees this severance as a major source of disconnection between people and the environment. Food can only be sustaining, in other words, if people participate in and understand the processes of production.

Phyllis Bixler explicitly states how much of "the mind-body connection in the early chapters of *The Secret Garden* is expressed through Mary's relationship to food, which often reflects her psychosocial situation" (32). During Mary's early days at Misselthwaite Manor, she does not feel hunger. Food is tasteless to her, and she has no interest in eating. Bixler notes how Mary's "lack of appetite suggests her lack of interest in herself and her own fate" (32). Each girl suffers a lack of appetite at the beginning of her story. For Betsy and Jane, the lack of appetite is linked to restraint, as well as a lack of interest in food. Jane's grandmother, with her constant judgement, paralyses the girl at mealtimes (12). Her appetite is restored to her on the island, where she is free from her grandmother's influence. In Betsy's case, Aunt Frances promotes the idea of Betsy's

frailty through her constant concern, and the suggestible girl lives up to these expectations. But when Betsy arrives at Putney farm, she is stunned to discover she is allowed to eat “all she wanted. ... Nobody here knew that she ‘only ate enough to keep a bird alive’ and that her ‘appetite was *so* capricious!’”(58). Food and appetite are normalized at the Putney farm, and just as Jane can eat freely without her grandmother passing judgement on her, so Betsy has the freedom to eat all she wants.

In her exploration of food in children’s literature, Holly Blackford discusses “eating [as] a means of self-reproduction: consuming food is what the individual does in order to reproduce himself” (41). Considering that each of the three protagonists suffers from a marked lack of appetite at her story’s start, Blackford’s concept of self-reproduction can be linked to a discussion of environment. In unnatural and/or urban environments, the girls lack the capacity to thrive. When they are relocated to rural places, this capacity grows unconsciously as their engagement with the land increases, and they become more in tune with their physical environments and their bodies. In her essay, “Trials of Taste: Ideological ‘Food Fights’ in Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*,” Elizabeth Gargano discusses how L’Engle, in her works, “grounds individual sensibility firmly in the body and physical existence, in acts of touching and tasting, in the sensations of appetite and mutual sustenance” (217). This connection between engagement with the land and appetite is particularly emphasized in *The Secret Garden*. When, after a month of running and skipping outdoors, Mary begins to enjoy her food, Martha exclaims, “Two pieces o’ meat an’ two helps o’ rice puddin! Eh! Mother will be pleased when I tell her what th’ skippin’-rope’s done for thee” (86). And after a morning spent in the garden, Mary says to Colin, “I sometimes feel as if I could eat three [muffins]



when those nice fresh heather and gorse smells from the moor come pouring in at the open window” (267). The time Mary spends outdoors directly affects her desire for food.

Gargano notes that “L’Engle links food and its pleasure with an appreciation for nature” (211). In my primary texts, food is likewise connected to seasons and the land. Eating maple sugar, Betsy tastes the “[c]oncentrated sweetness of summer days ... in that mouthful, part of it still hot and aromatic, part of it icy and wet with melting snow” (113). And food is a major factor in the girls’ restoration. After a demoralizing day at school, Betsy is outside eating “the last of her sugar, looking up at the quiet giant there, towering grandly above her ... there was no lump in her throat now” (114). In this scene, food is recuperative and soothing, and attached to the land from whence it grew. Mary and Colin’s secret food cache behind the rosebush is an especially rich example of sustenance: the bushes are rooted in the land, the cache acts as a hidden nest, and it is the motherly Susan Sowerby who supplies the children with their extra food.

Embracing their appetites is part of the girls’ healing. As they grow sturdier in body, so they grow in their capabilities. Jane and Betsy in particular participate in growing, harvesting, and cooking. They take pride in developing their skills, and they enjoy eating and sharing their creations. Jane regards cooking as a challenge, and buys herself a copy of *Cookery for Beginners*. She is fearless, inventive and not entirely successful in her creations, experiencing for the first time the “joy of achievement” (84) that is denied her at her grandmother’s house. Nearly all the food she works with, from saltfish to berries, is the product of her immediate environment. And Betsy’s first cooking venture produces applesauce that is in her “own private opinion ... the very best applesauce ever made” (96). Their new environments give the girls the chance to gain

confidence in their abilities and in their place in the world, and to become familiar with the harvests of the seasons.

Seasons are clearly delineated in all three novels. In *Understood Betsy* and *The Secret Garden*, the girls arrive in their new locations in winter when the land is still brown and bare. For Jane, her father's letter requesting her visit arrives at "the shabby end of winter" (41). Winter represents dormancy and death, and in her exploration of cyclical time in Burnett's novel, Nikolajeva discusses the "sleepy" quality of winter (33). All three girls are dormant in their respective states of being ill at ease. At the beginning of their stories, they are inactive and disengaged from life. As the seasons pass, Mary and Betsy come to life in conjunction with spring, and Jane arrives on the island in spring. This is the archetypal season of rebirth, a "time of renewal, of clearing out the past" (Lerer 264). For the girls, it marks a fresh beginning, and an awakening. For Mary, her winter dormancy is chased off when "the big boughs of rough fresh air blown over the heather filled her lungs ... and whipped some red colour into her cheeks and brightened her dull eyes" (46). The two summers that Jane spends at Lantern Hill transform her enough to sustain her through winters back in Toronto, and Betsy's story ends in the fall, during harvest time. Her spring and summer on the Putney farm leave her as rosy and strong as the fruit in the apple trees she loves.

Claudia Nelson observes that "under the influence of her farming relatives, Betsy becomes another crop to be cultivated into thriving sturdiness" (64). In essence, she becomes a part of the land, and with this identification comes a shift in her attitude towards her new settings. While she is eating maple sugar and gazing up at the landscape around her, she remembers that "Uncle Henry had promised to take her up to the top as

soon as the snow went off. She wondered what the top of a mountain would be like” (113). As she becomes curious about and engaged with her environment, she grows at ease with herself and comfortable with the rural landscape.

The more time the girls spend in rural places, the stronger their connection to the land becomes. Their transformations are entwined with the seasons and growing cycles of the green spaces they inhabit. The close association of the girls with nature is an example of the biocentrism found at the core of much ecocritical discussion. Sigler identifies this biocentrism as allowing “writers and critics to explore the interconnectedness of all nature, human and nonhuman, rather than merely looking at nonhuman nature as setting and/or metaphor for the human condition” (148). The girls begin to take on qualities of the natural world. Colin notices that Mary has a “nice smell of leaves” about her after being in the garden. Betsy and her charge Molly are described as a couple of “wild creatures, careering through the air like bright blown autumn leaves” (201). And Jane’s hair is described as russet; in the city, the colour of her hair is not noteworthy, but after time spent on the island, she begins to take on the tints of her landscape. In their identification of the girls as part of nature, Montgomery, Fisher, and Burnett illustrate the facet of biocentric writing that, as Sigler defines it, lends “a perception of the self as part of a larger, unified natural world” (148).

As the girls become more at ease with themselves, their attitude towards the land changes. Mary in particular feels animosity for her new environment when she first arrives at Misselthwaite, but after a month or so, she “was beginning to like to be out of doors; she no longer hated the wind, but enjoyed it. She could run faster, and longer, and she could skip up to a hundred. The bulbs in the secret garden must have been much

astonished” (94). The pathetic fallacy at the end of this quote is especially interesting from an ecocritical perspective: in considering the bulbs’ reaction to Mary’s growing health, Burnett steps away from an anthropocentric viewpoint and instead offers an ecocentric one. A similar moment occurs in Montgomery’s text when upon Jane’s return to the island, her father says to her, “Come out and see the garden, Jane ... it burst into bloom as soon as it heard you were coming” (170).

The authors’ consideration of the natural world’s point of view highlights the growing relationship the girls have with their environments. Mary’s identification with the garden grounds her transformation: both are neglected for ten years, and both come alive together. Jane’s connection to the island is more biological than symbolic, as the roads there “seemed to be running through her veins like quicksilver” (66) and the “song the sea-wind was singing was music native to her ears” (76). Neighbour Timothy Salt tells her, “The island’s got into your blood. It does that to some folks” (141). And even after she leaves, the place stays with her. When she returns to Toronto after her first summer on Prince Edward Island, her grandmother says, “She will soon forget everything about Lantern Hill.” But Jane’s Mother isn’t so sure. “She felt the change in Jane, as did everybody”(146). Time spent in a place where she feels a kinship with the land grants her a stronger body and a stronger mind.

The obvious physical transformations of the girls, along with the changes in their self-confidence, are confirmed by the alterations of their respective names. In her discussion of Montgomery’s text, Jean Little observes that “Jane’s position at the outset of the book is shown clearly in the names by which she is called” (79). The same can be said of all three girls. Their names change as their experiences in the country change

them: Mistress Mary outgrows and sheds the ‘contrary’ aspect of her name, Victoria Jane, whom her mother calls Jane Victoria, unshackles her name from her grandmother’s and sticks to the name she has preferred all along: just Jane; and Elizabeth Ann, prim and timid, becomes the more comfortable Betsy. The act of renaming reflects new lives and new ways of identifying with the world.

Watching the stars from her Toronto window and picturing Lantern Hill, “Jane knew she would never be the least bit afraid of grandmother again” (199). Elizabeth Epperly recognizes that though Jane is “[b]ack in the prison of Gay Street she can still be refreshed by Lantern Hill because she herself has been strengthened by self-knowledge” (225). Her time in the countryside of Prince Edward Island gives her what Chawla calls “a fund of internal strength ... a fund of calm that [she] could later draw on”(214-5). Betsy’s time in Vermont grants her the same strength. When she must find a way to navigate a difficult situation, the answer comes to her “up by the brook under the big red maple tree” (190). There she finds the certainty she needs to make the right decision. As for Mary, it is Dickon who shares with her the belief that there “doesn’t seem to be no need for no one to be contrary when there’s flowers an’ such like, an’ such lots o’ friendly wild things runnin’ about makin’ homes for themselves, or buildin’ nests an’ singin’ an whistlin’” (115). She seems to take his words to heart, for after this dialogue, she becomes increasingly more at ease with herself and others.

In all three novels, the environment is central to the girls’ development, both emotional and physical. The transformations are active, not magical and not incidental, meaning the girls participate in their individual metamorphoses. Their transformations centre on gaining experience, not maintaining innocence. Childhood is, by nature, a time

of massive growth and transformation. But childhood is not the state they must recover from. They are children who become at ease with themselves, and they do not have to wait until they grow up to achieve this self-confidence.

In moving toward a healthier world, Stephen Trimble writes, “We can wish for more ... women who glory in their accomplishments and independence, but before such growth is possible, the bedrock of self-esteem must stand solid. The land can help” (65). The novels of Fisher, Montgomery, and Burnett show us that land can help. By each story’s end, all three girls are sturdy, capable, and healthy after time spent in a rural environment. After a year of living on a Vermont farm, Betsy is startled by her reflection in a full-length mirror. She sees a “a dark-eyed, red-cheeked sturdy girl, standing straight on two strong legs, holding her head high and free, her dark eyes looking out brightly from her tanned face” (159). Likewise, a more confident Jane reflects that

it must be that the P.E. Islanders were nicer, or at least more neighbourly, than the Toronto people. She did not realise that the change was in herself. She was no longer rebuffed, frightened, awkward because she was frightened. Her foot was on her native heath and her name was Jane. (86)

After witnessing Jane’s newfound capabilities at Lantern Hill firsthand, Phyllis, Jane’s condescending cousin, thinks, “What had come over Victoria anyhow ... Victoria whom she used to think was so dumb? This tall, arms-and-legs girl, who had somehow ceased to be awkward in spite of arms and legs, was certainly not dumb” (175). And at the end of *The Secret Garden*, Mrs. Medlock responds to Dr. Craven’s comment that Colin is a “new creature” with the observation that

[s]o is the girl. ...She's begun to be downright pretty since she's filled out and lost her ugly little sour look. Her hair's grown thick and health looking and she's got a bright colour. The glummost, ill-natured little thing she used to be and now her and Master Colin laugh together like a pair of crazy young ones. (272).

Marina Warner notes that “[t]ransformations bring about a surprise ... The breaking of rules of natural law and verisimilitude creates the fictional world” (18). But in my primary texts, the rules of the natural world are sustained, and the surprise is not for the reader, but for the protagonists and the people in their lives, who can hardly believe how the girls have changed by their stories' ends.

## CONCLUSION

The green space of farms and gardens, where growth is deliberately encouraged, acts as a remedy for dis-ease in my primary novels. Transformation stories such as *Jane of Lantern Hill*, *Understood Betsy*, and *The Secret Garden* depict green space as a psychological resource rather than simply a physical or economic resource (Kaplan 198). The natural world has restorative powers, but that world is being progressively damaged, and human connection to it severed. Considering our dependence on the natural world for not only our well-being but also our survival, illness is a logical consequence of this severance. From this contemporary standpoint, the appeal of my primary texts lies in the portrayal of healthy green worlds in which sick children come back to health.

My decision to approach this thesis from an interdisciplinary perspective is, in part, a response to Glotfelty's belief that "the environmental crisis has been exacerbated by our fragmented, compartmentalized, and overly specialized way of knowing the world" (xxii). Grounding my work in theories that combine the social sciences with tenets of literature, feminism, ecological sciences, and political activism has both validated my beliefs surrounding landscape and literature, and deepened my understanding of the ecology inherent in my topic. As well, an interdisciplinary approach was invaluable in discussing both contemporary and historical understandings of the environment in fiction from the past from both a literal and a literary perspective.

Ecocriticism is often applied to pastoral literature from the past, and much current research is critical of the pastoral for lacking in realism. From a contemporary perspective, the traditional literary pastoral serves little purpose in its benign depiction of landscape. Certainly, in their respective novels, Montgomery, Fisher, and Burnett portray



an idealized vision of rural life, but by understanding the authors' work as a response to the brutally fast shift from rural to urban at the time they were writing, their texts hold cautionary value for contemporary readers facing brutal shifts of their own.

At the heart of the pastoral novels of Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery is the hope and power of metamorphosis. There is something encouraging about witnessing obvious change and recovery, which explains why the transformation trope is one of the most enduring in literature. Transformation narratives contain an element of the mythical, and the transformations of the protagonists in my primary texts, while grounded in real world settings, belong to the primal nature of myth. Phyllis Bixler recognizes that "its rich characterizations, mythic imagery and themes ... have allowed *The Secret Garden* to transcend its own era" (8). And Elizabeth Epperly proclaims *Jane of Lantern Hill* to be "wholly fairy tale" (221).

The satisfaction of wish fulfillment and a happy ending are inherent in all three novels, but in my research, I discovered a surprising rejection of social norms by Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery with respect to the nature of the recovery they each depict. While the authors maintain the status quo with regard to many elements of the dominant culture they were writing in, they are also resistant in many ways. At a time when it was fashionable in literature to depict girls as invalids, or as tomboys tamed by story's end, they instead create girls who simply become sturdy and capable. The authors deliberately relocate the girls from indoor places and release them into active outdoor life. In granting the girls freedom to explore green space, they also grant them strong bodies. Mary, Betsy and Jane begin their stories as typical early twentieth-century protagonists and are transformed through the course of their narratives into something entirely new.

Burnett, Fisher, and Montgomery write against the anxiety that Gilbert and Gubar associate with nineteenth-century female authors, who were “[e]nclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society” (xi). Burnett introduces Mary as “the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen” (3), and positioning her “as an unfeminine little girl emphasizes the transgressive aspects of her role”; Burnett’s description is “deliberately deflationary, deconstructing past fictional models of idealized childhood and of conventional heroism” (Foster 179). Betsy and Jane are both more conventionally domestic than Mary, and therefore more in keeping with the social ideals of the time, yet there are transgressive aspects to their roles, too. Midway through her time at Lantern Hill, Jane dons trousers and mends a roof. As well, she discovers a passion for the traditionally unfeminine pastime of fishing. And as June Cummins explores in her essay on the “queer” (15) aspects of Fisher’s text, Betsy’s role model, her Cousin Ann, is a remarkably atypical female character. In their respective novels, my primary authors achieve a balance between preserving social norms and pushing the boundaries of gender.

The preservation of landscape is also at the heart of these pastoral novels. Jane Urquhart, in her recent biography of Lucy Maud Montgomery, notes that Montgomery writes of the same places repeatedly, and “when certain features of the landscape are revisited so often ... the world achieves reassuring stability. Nothing in the landscape will ever change” (82). The natural and unchanging beauty of the green space in all three of my primary texts grants this stability, and particularly in light of the changing contemporary landscape, continues to resonate.

Potentially, recent theories such as ecocriticism will help keep texts from the past vital and valid by bridging past understandings of the environment in literature with current attitudes and perspectives. Ecocriticism's interdisciplinary nature tells us "we must not only turn to the human sciences but also to the species' ancient wisdom as it is preserved in myths, rituals, fairy tales and the traditions of the performing arts. Perhaps our soundest model will be the art of gardening" (Turner 49). As my primary texts illustrate, pastoral green space is not restorative because it is pretty; rather, the healing is found in participating with and becoming part of the land, as the girls do.

With diminishing green space comes the loss of firsthand experience. What are the implications of nature as an integral part of our lives becoming a foreign experience? Contemporary young readers are well-versed in the language of crisis surrounding environmental issues, but many only know green space in terms of crisis, and even then, many of them only know it through second-hand experience. In her *New York Times* review of the 1999 newly illustrated edition of *Understood Betsy*, Elizabeth Spires writes that this book "is sure to delight a new generation of very busy, over-scheduled children whose own chances for early independence and initiative are limited" (n.pag.). Delight, or confound? To what degree are the nature-based aspects of fiction from the past still accessible to modern readers?

Contemporary urban and degraded landscapes must be considered in the analysis of contemporary literature, but their precursors need to be understood for contemporary readers to recognize what they are responding to. Sheila Egoff refers to fiction from the past still popular today as the survivor texts (22). But there is an increasing disconnection between the contemporary world and the worlds depicted in literature from

prior centuries. From an environmental perspective, it is important these texts survive as they serve as a reference point for what was, what has been lost, and what has changed. Leavis and Thompson write, “If we forget the old order we shall not know what kind of thing to strive towards, and in the end there will be no striving, but a surrender to the ‘progress’ of the machine” (76).

In an essay on texts that have survived through the ages, Peter Dickinson writes of readers “to whom these survivals are permanent features in the landscape of the mind – trees, as it were, which were already full-grown when they themselves first opened their eyes and will still be there for the most part when they finally close them” (92). Such personal connection to fiction from the past needs fostering. Contemporary trends in literary theory tend to focus on the problems inherent in classic fiction, which negates the better story. The green spaces of *The Secret Garden*, *Understood Betsy* and *Jane of Lantern Hill* will stand when their issues of politics, race, class, and gender have faded. These transformation narratives make clear that in green space and in literature is the preservation of the world.

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