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~~that unforgettable joint birthday. There they all were, our child selves and these long-gone animals, together in the old albums that passed into my hands when my parents died.~~

Animals were so *there* as part of the woof and web of childhood, including my own, that I had never noticed them. Neither had most other scholars, I discovered, while searching in vain through child development textbooks for an index entry under “pets” or “animals: relationships with.” A trek through the abstracts of research studies yielded little more pay dirt.

A handful of psychologists, veterinarians, animal behavior specialists, and therapists was turning to what they called “the human-animal bond” and its effects on adjustment and well-being, but their focus was mainly on the second half of life, not the first few decades. The results of that work, however, were startling. An animal behaviorist, Alan Beck, and a child psychiatrist, Aaron Katcher, had teamed up to demonstrate that “the touch-talk dialogue we establish with pets” reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and promotes relaxation. Even passive observation of animals had stress-reducing benefits. Simply watching, for no more than ten minutes, tropical fish swimming in an aquarium proved to be as effective as hypnosis in reducing the anxiety and discomfort of adult patients about to undergo dental surgery. Other studies documented decreased cardiovascular reactivity among adult women in the presence of their pets and improved survival following a heart attack for pet owners, compared to non-pet-owning adults.¹ Contact with companion animals was emerging as a significant source of support and well-being for adults.

These findings raised questions about children’s development. Might these benefits apply to children as well? Could animals be even more important for children’s lives than for those of adults? Are animals significant for children only when kids are stressed? What other roles might they play? These questions prompted others, opening a new terrain of exploration, the animal world of children.

My goal in the following pages is to chart this new terrain in the study of children. I propose a “biocentric” view of development, one

that recognizes the pervasiveness of real and symbolic animals in children’s lives.² I argue that the study of children has been largely “humanocentric,” assuming that only human relationships—with parents, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers, other children—are consequential for development.³ This humanocentric perspective on development is at best a seriously incomplete portrait of the ecology of children. At worst, it misses potentially significant influences on children’s development. By contrast, the biocentric view assumes that animal presence in all its forms merits neither facile sentimentalizing nor quick dismissal, but serious investigation. Because scholars are just now venturing into this new terrain, many fundamental questions remain unanswered. Even basic descriptive information about children’s daily lives with their pets or contacts with other animals is incomplete. The terrain of a biocentric account of childhood is largely unmapped, with only a few landmarks sketched in. This book, I hope, will raise questions, stimulate research, and thus begin to fill in the map. As befits a new area of inquiry, I see my task as hypothesis generating rather than hypothesis testing.

Chapter 1 documents how theory and research on children’s development have ignored animals and suggests ways in which attention to children’s animal connections recasts many issues in social and cognitive development, among them the formation of attachments to others, the development of ideas about the social and nonsocial world, and moral reasoning. Chapter 2 traces the evolution of petkeeping, domestication of animals, and changes in the family that together have made children intimate partners with the animals who reside with them. Chapter 3 focuses on the emotional bond between child and pet. I suggest that this bond shares many of the same features as children’s significant ties with humans—reassurance, support, and the “contact comfort” of touch, for example. I also explore those qualities of children’s relationships with their pets that are distinctive—an emphasis on sensory, nonverbal communication, the experience of nurturing a dependent being different from oneself, a nonevaluative, in-the-present availability. Chapter 4 goes into the classroom, home, yard, park, and zoo to ask what children might

be absorbing from observing and interacting with living animals. From this perspective, animals are rich lodes of information for children about fundamental cognitive puzzles—how living beings and inanimate objects differ, how one can try to know other minds, how one is connected to other species. These issues carry moral and ethical urgency as well. Chapter 5 considers therapies for troubled children that incorporate contact with animals and nature. I assess the potential of—and the unanswered questions about—using animals to treat a wide range of problems, from extreme shyness to hyperactivity, to learning disabilities. Chapter 6 considers animals as symbols, both as offered up by adults for children and as products of children’s imagination. I suggest that young children use monsters, dragons, teddy bears, and creatures great and small to explore, clarify, and reflect different facets of the child’s sense of self. Chapter 7 examines the troubled side of the child-animal relationship—children’s mistreatment of animals; possible links between animal abuse and family violence, and animal neglect and abandonment. These issues illustrate that, notwithstanding popular imagery of mutual devotion between child and creature, there is no single master narrative that can capture the complexity of children’s relationships to other species, whether pets, wild animals, or domestic farm animals. Children often reflect society’s ambivalent and contradictory messages about human and humane treatment of other species. Finally, Chapter 8 sketches a research, teaching, and program agenda based on a biocentric perspective for studying children’s development and enriching their lives. It focuses on deepening and shaping rather than discouraging children’s intuitive affinity for other forms of life.

1

Animals and the Study of Children



Scholars of child development have traditionally had little to say about animals’ presence in children’s lives and what that might mean for their development. Many of the more influential accounts simply ignore the issue. Consider cognitive development. Jean Piaget, the great Swiss observer of children, wrote voluminously about how children come to understand the world around them. Early childhood, before age seven, lay in the grip of what Piaget called *animism*, the belief that inanimate objects are as alive as animate things. Therefore, in his view, distinctive experiences with animals were impossible until children’s thought processes matured and became more rational and logical.

Relationship-focused scholars of child development might have been expected to provide more insight into the child-animal connection, yet influential theorists in this area have likewise ignored it. A good example is John Bowlby, the British psychiatrist who developed attachment theory. More than fifty years ago, his observations of the grief, withdrawal, depression, and even death of hospitalized infants who had been separated from their mothers sensitized psychologists to the importance of early bonds. When young children can rely on a responsive caregiver for reassurance when upset or stressed, they derive a sense of security and well-being that is essential to the ability to thrive.

Freud and some other psychoanalytically oriented scholars at least took note of children's fascination with animals. Freud himself was struck by how frequently animals appeared in the dreams of children. For him, animal figures represented projections of powerful adults, usually parents, who were too threatening to the child to pop up undisguised in the dream world. From a psychoanalytic point of view, children and animals shared a natural kinship, since biological urges not subject to human reason held sway over both of them.⁶ Even more than Freud, Jung stressed that animal symbols often expressed facets of the self, an insight that self psychologists missed. One Jungian psychologist stated: "The Self is often symbolized as an animal, representing our instinctive nature and its connectedness with one's surroundings. (That is why there are so many helpful animals in myths and fairy tales.)"⁷

Such was the frequency of animal imagery in children's dreams and associations that psychoanalytically oriented psychologists developed projective tests using animal images for children and even for the purported "inner child" of adult patients. The psychoanalytic gloss of animals as instinct was overly narrow, however. It cut off investigation into a wider range of developmental needs, serving ego and superego, not just id, that animal themes and characters in dreams, play, fantasies, and stories might address. Curiously, psychoanalytic emphasis on animal symbolism did not lead to any attempts to decipher the multiple meanings of real pets and other living animals for children.

In short, children's ties to animals seem to have slipped below the radar screens of almost all scholars of child development. At the same time, a few pioneering therapists were reporting startling results about the power of animals to affect emotionally troubled children. Boris Levinson, in his 1969 classic, *Pet-Oriented Psychotherapy*, and a few years later, in *Pets and Human Development*, described how the presence of a friendly dog in a therapy session helped create a safe environment within which highly withdrawn children began to respond to someone outside themselves. The nascent field of therapeutic horseback riding was showing how children with disabilities improved balance and coordination and gained feelings of self-confidence and mastery behind

the reins of a horse. Testimonials were proliferating attesting to the dramatic benefits of assistance dogs for children with hearing, sight, or mobility impairments.

A few researchers, impressed with these accounts and with findings on the power of animals to be stress reducers for adults, set out to demonstrate that animals could calm children. In a series of studies, Erika Friedmann, James Lynch, Aaron Katcher, and Alan Beck showed that, as with adults, children's blood pressure decreased in the company of a friendly dog.⁸ Such intriguing results inspired a small band of scholars to explore the child-pet relationship more broadly. Their work began to appear in academic journals, conference proceedings, and therapists' case reports.

Meanwhile, new perspectives on children's development were creating more fertile ground for considering the significance of animals. Cognitive psychology was challenging Piaget's account of animism by uncovering a child's "naïve biology," a core domain of knowledge about living things. Its first glimmers are discernible in infancy, and by the preschool years, far earlier than Piaget had thought, this knowledge base, particularly about animals, already is well established.⁹ From ages four to ten, children continue to refine their reasoning about the biological processes underlying "alive" versus "dead" and "inanimate" (never alive), "animal" versus "human" and nonanimal thing. This early and progressively more accurate cognitive mapping of animals raises further questions: Besides cognitive maturation, what influences children's "naïve biology"? How does children's involvement with real animals—observing, touching, caring for, talking to them—contribute to biological knowledge? How do children use their "naïve biology" to make sense not only of animals, but of their own aliveness? And conversely, how do children apply understanding of themselves and other humans as living entities to the puzzle of distinguishing and understanding other species?

In recent years, evolutionary biology has been prompting psychologists to ask about the evolutionary basis for human behavior. The co-evolution of modern humans, not just alongside but interdependently with animal and plant species, makes it probable that built into the hu-

man psyche are interest in, use of, and feelings about animals. From this perspective, interspecies relations may be just as fundamental a building-block of human development as intraspecies ties. Petkeeping, apparently universal among human groups and so old it coevolved with modern humans, is intriguing. While the reproductive advantages that pets enjoy from the arrangement seem clear—protection from predators, diseases, and the elements—the payoffs for humans are less obvious. Might pets provide children with experiences that would benefit them developmentally? As we shall see, children show strong interest not just in their pets but in domesticated farm animals, wild animals, and animal representations as well. What might be the evolutionary basis for such behavior?

New computer-aided technologies are joining with robotics to make us rethink fundamental assumptions about human-nonhuman interactions. Plush animals with sophisticated computers embedded in them, called *personal embodied agents* or *relational artifacts*, are capable of remarkable responsiveness. ActiMates Barney, the Furby, Tama, AIBO, and Tamagotchi are likely to be joined by ever more sophisticated “agents” that further blur the lines between animate beings and inanimate things. Virtual pets are proliferating, and children are developing relationships with these “creatures.” Research has yet to catch up with this exploding market. However, early findings make clear that children form emotional attachments to their virtual pets. One five-year-old said about her Furby: “Well, I love it. It’s more alive . . . because it sleeps with me. It likes to sleep with me.”¹⁰ If we learn more about children’s interactions with real pets and other real animals, as well as children’s use of animal symbols, we should be better able to understand this emerging domain of robotic pets. We then may have the tools to influence the development of this technology in directions that benefit children.

About a decade ago, with colleagues and students I began to study children’s ties to their pets and the meaning of those relationships for their development. Over the ensuing years we interviewed children and their parents, queried teachers, and observed children and their pets at

home, in parks, and at playgrounds. We scanned national surveys of parents and children for overlooked information about pets and their significance for families. The search took us back to earlier psychological studies for hints of animals’ impact on the lives of children. We also began to examine evidence of how children were responding to the wide range of “up close” animal contacts in their daily lives—bees circling a picnic lunch, squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, and birds in the backyard, spiders spinning by the back door. We considered children’s ideas about animals. For example, how do children develop an understanding of “animal” as a category, of mammals versus reptiles, and of species of mammals? How are children framing the moral claims of animals (or lack thereof)? Does the development of moral reasoning about others encompass nonhumans?

Decoding the symbolic roles that animal characters play required a fresh look at children’s picture books, stories, and school readers, many of which are tales told by and about animal characters. Folklorists have long viewed animal tales as vehicles to convey a culture’s ideas about relationships, both among humans and between humans and animals. Anthropologists—notably the French scholar Claude Lévi-Strauss—have documented animal symbolism permeating traditional cultures of North and South America, Australia, Africa, and Asia. In a landmark study of totemism, Lévi-Strauss claimed that for traditional cultures around the world, “animals are good to think.”¹¹ By this he meant that animal species and behaviors functioned as a symbol system that mapped onto human actions and emotions and made them intelligible. This insight, if applied to children’s development, suggests that animals may function as a meaning system through which children make sense of both themselves and their surrounding environments.

Therapists have been exploring the healing potential of animals for children with emotional and physical problems. Treatment programs like Green Chimneys Children’s Services, in New York State, and the Devereux Foundation, in Pennsylvania, are models for infusing animals throughout the therapeutic process. A close examination of animals as healing “partners,” however, reveals a complex, as yet poorly

understood dynamic. Animals in the therapeutic milieu, like children's "naïve biology," family bonds with pets, or animal storybook characters, raise further questions about animals as significant developmental influences.

In open-ended, in-depth interviews, many pet-owning children spoke with deep feeling about what animals mean in their lives. We also talked to parents and teachers, to child therapists, social workers, animal shelter workers, veterinarians, pet store owners, children's zoo directors—all those whose work and lives make them keen observers of what animals mean to children.

These sources—interviews, research studies, therapists' reports, stories for and by children provide the basis for this book and its simple argument that expanding our understanding of children to encompass their contacts with nonhuman living forms, especially animals, can illuminate important questions about development. Although we do not have the answers to most of these questions, asking them is a crucial first step toward a broader and more accurate picture of children. How do children understand different ways of being alive? How do their encounters with distinct forms of life affect their comprehension of what life is, what being human is, and what comprises their own selves? How do encounters with animals affect developing capacities for empathy and sympathy? Does moral reasoning reach across species lines? Does that reach affect judgments about morality toward humans? Are the ties that children form with pets reducible to proxies for human relationships, like sibling, friend, or parent? Do ties with animals complement, substitute for, or amplify human bonds? Might animals provide children unique experiences not readily available from fellow humans?

The ties that children forge with their pets are often among the most significant bonds of childhood, as deeply affecting as those with parents, siblings, and friends. Like parents or grandparents, children's pets can give them feelings of being loved, reassure them in times of stress, counteract loneliness, and provide emotional support. Like siblings, animals can be at-home play companions, or afterschool company in an empty house. Like friends, pets can be confidants, keepers of secrets, and

members in good standing of what psychologist William Corsaro calls "children's peer culture."¹²

In other respects, of course, children's experiences with animals differ from those with humans. Animals enact the dramas of birth and death in a visible, accessible way at a time when these human events are hidden from children. Unlike humans, familiar, friendly pets are social partners who tend to induce physiological relaxation, making new situations less stressful and more approachable. Animals are especially effective bridges to other children and to adults. Since cross-species communication is nonverbal, at least in one direction, children face particular challenges in decoding body motion, gesture, and sound. An animal pushes a child to recognize the distinct subjectivity of a being who moves and communicates in ways very different from those of the child.

Because pets live in at least 75 percent of all American households with children and are the only family members who never grow up, they function as a potential training ground for learning about nurturing others. Unlike caregiving to babies, young children, or dependent adults, pet care is gender-neutral, not associated with what males versus females should do. As Alan Beck and Aaron Katcher put it, "A pet may be the only being that a man, trained in the macho code, can touch with affection."¹³

As the only household members usually smaller and less powerful than the child, pets can also provide a context for playing out themes of power and domination. The "one-down" position of a pet as the only family member whom a child owns, coupled with the animal's constant presence and apparent responsiveness, makes it an ideal "transitional object," a being who can represent a child's wishes without fear of contradiction.¹⁴ If, as Karl Menninger argued, all relationships are ambivalent, then children's ties to their pets will reflect the same rich stew of emotions served up in children's relationships with parents, siblings, or friends. Pets challenge children to temper the role of master with kindness, to blend domination with solicitude. Few relationships of childhood require this same balancing act; perhaps the role of older sibling comes closest.

Kindness—or cruelty—toward animals has long been seen as a litmus test of a child's character. Contemporary research, however, has failed to turn up evidence that kindness or cruelty to animals *causes* children to act in parallel fashion toward other people. Rather, psychologists like Frank Ascione, of Utah State University, an authority on children's cruelty toward animals, view repeated, extreme, and intentional cruelty—seen in only a small percentage of those who ever mistreat an animal—as an early warning of psychological disturbance. The far more common casual mistreatment, indifference, or occasional neglect does not seem to be diagnostic. Equally unclear, and in urgent need of research, is the connection, if any, between children's concern for animal well-being—their active doing of good for animals, as distinct from refraining from harming them—and their prosocial behavior toward humans.¹⁵

The links between treatment of animals and other people emerge, on closer examination, as far from simple and linear. In many countries, institutionalized cruelty toward animals—bullfights, cockfights—coexists with relatively low rates of violence toward humans. Similarly, culturally mandated kindness toward animals can be paired with vicious destruction of fellow humans, as the stringent Nazi animal protection laws attest.¹⁶

In stories, television, movies, video games, and ads, not to mention children's dreams and fantasies, animals are a ready cast of characters through which children explore facets of themselves—the wild beast, the cunning fox, the faithful dog, the huge and toothsome dinosaur. Because adults create them, these symbolic images are also a window into a culture's ideas about children and animals and how they are related. The subtext of animal images is replete with “boundary issues” about human-animal distinctiveness, with ethical implications for animal welfare, animal rights, and ecological consciousness.¹⁷

For at least the last hundred years, American cultural images weave together child and animal into the same cloth. Like animals, children represent the wild and unsocialized in the midst of the “civilized” family. Like pets, who are unbridled by social conventions, babies' messy

instinctual life of ingestion and elimination is on public display. From the vantage point of the verbal adult, babies and pets share the same vocabulary of nonverbal communication, the language of gesture, grunt, and howl. Like the puppy to be housebroken and trained, the human baby must rein in unchecked impulses to learn the rules of human society and earn a place at (or, in the dog's case, under) the family dinner table.

Historically, relationships between adults and children and between adults and pets have changed in similar ways.¹⁸ Both have lost their utilitarian functions to become sentimental objects of affection. Both (often juxtaposed) have become shorthand markers of warmth, domesticity, and approachability. Inserted into ads and movies, they say “cute,” “small,” “needy,” and “safe.” In 1999, when Mercedes-Benz wanted a visual image to convey the loyalty and devotion the car company inspired in its customers, it enlarged a photograph of a young boy cradling his puppy, slapped a single-word caption—loyalty—under it and took out full-page ads in major publications like the *New York Times*.

Is the link between children and animals solely a cultural creation? Are adults imposing their fantasies of the childlike pet and the animal-like child? Because we associate children with pets and other small animals, are we imagining a special kinship and then making it real by filling children's lives with pets, stuffed animals, animal picture books, and trips to the zoo? Is the apparent fascination of many children with all things animal simply proof of their cultural conditioning?

I argue that many cultures, including our own, are elaborating a natural attraction children have to animals. The biophilia hypothesis, first advanced by the biologist E. O. Wilson, suggests that a predisposition to attune to animals and other living things is part of the human evolutionary heritage, a product of our coevolution as omnivores with the animals and plants on which our survival depends.¹⁹ Biophilia depicts children as born assuming a connection with other living things. The emotions and personalities of animals, real and symbolic, are immediate to children in the same way that the emotions and personalities of people are. Because of this, animals enter the drama of a child's life in direct and powerful

ways. Children readily access animals as material in the development of a sense of self. Every human child begins life situated in what adults call "the animal world." As Freud put it in his 1913 essay, *Totem and Taboo*, denying human bonds with animals "is still as foreign to the child as it is to the savage or to primitive man."²⁰

Many cultures recognize the affinity of children for animals and build on it images that link children to animals. At the same time, children in Western cultures gradually absorb a worldview of humans as radically distinct from and superior to other species, the human as "top dog" on the evolutionary chain of being. What one scholar calls "the categorically human self" emerges—a strict division between human attributes and often negatively valued animal characteristics.²¹

This belief is nowhere better articulated than by Sarah Trimmer, whose school text, *Fabulous Histories: Designed for the Instruction of Children Respecting Their Treatment of Animals*, was in every classroom in England throughout the nineteenth century:

The world we live in seems to have been principally designed for the use and comfort of mankind, who, by the Divine appointment, have dominion over the inferior creatures . . . Some creatures have nothing to give us but their own bodies; these have been expressly destined by the Supreme Governor as food for mankind . . . These we have an undoubted right to kill, but should make their short lives as comfortable as possible. Other creatures seem to be of no particular use to mankind, but . . . serve to furnish our minds with contemplations on the wisdom, power and goodness of God, and to exhilarate our spirits by their cheerfulness.²²

Cultural messages are considerably more complex than an initial fusion of child with animal, followed by a simple assertion of human superiority at the pinnacle of the evolutionary ladder. Children grapple with a complicated, often contradictory, mix of social codes governing animals and their treatment. There are creatures incorporated as family

members, stamped out as pests, saved from extinction, and ground into Big Macs. The result is that children often mirror societal unease with culturally sanctioned uses of animals. If we wish to redefine those uses and recast them in more ecologically responsible terms, children's relationships with animals may be the place to begin.

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Piecing together an accurate picture of pet ownership rates and the factors that influence them is difficult. A range of hard-to-pin-down attitudes comes into play in predicting if, when, and which pets are acquired: parents' feelings about their own childhood experiences, their assessments of what they think their children need, the balance of their other responsibilities, and costs. Nonetheless, despite variations stemming from many family and child characteristics, existing demographic data on pet ownership translate into a single startling fact: *for many children in contemporary America, pets are more likely to be part of growing up than are siblings or fathers.* The percentage of children likely to be living with one or more pets sometime between birth and adulthood is estimated to be as high as 90 percent.⁴⁸

These astonishingly high rates become less surprising when we consider parents' motives for getting pets. Mothers and fathers typically report getting a pet "for the children." Most parents, including those who do not have animals, believe that pets are good for children. Sometimes it sounds as if parents are enlisting pets as fur-clad nannies. Surveys offer up recurring themes: pets teach responsibility, provide companionship and love, and help teach a child how to care for others. Many parents view pets as linking their child to the natural environment and teaching them ecological awareness and sensitivity. One father of two wistfully recounted to me his own childhood visits to his grandparents' farm: "I think there is something about this circle of life that we miss out on in being away and isolated from animals, and so having a pet doesn't replace country life, in terms of being closer to nature, but at least it brings a little back; so, in a way, it is a connection."

Parents believe that the lessons pets teach grow more relevant as young children toddle out of infancy toward greater independence and higher expectations.⁴⁹ This feeling is most deeply held by adults who themselves had pets as children.⁵⁰ In general, petkeeping tends to reproduce itself; children who have pets grow up to be adults who become pet owners.⁵¹ Yet even those with no childhood history of petkeeping often subscribe to the belief that pets are part of the optimal environment for children that the "good parent" should aim to provide. Popular opin-

ion and popular culture conjoin to reinforce the linkage between children and pets, especially dogs and cats. The iconography of advertising pairs a towheaded, freckled young tyke with a Golden Retriever or Lab, as talisman of safety, security, and allrightness.

Pets as Children, Children as Pets

Neoteny brings about a physiological and behavioral resemblance between children and domesticated animals. The association of children and pets has strong historical and intellectual underpinnings as well. The term "pet" itself first applied to the indulged, spoiled child. By the sixteenth century, the word had migrated to other small, childlike creatures such as cats, dogs, and young farm animals.⁵² In a worldview that radically separates humans from nonhumans, and rationality from animality, both children and pets straddle this great divide. Each is seen as not quite human and not quite animal. Pets are the humanized animals, the tame ones bracketed off from the wild, bred over generations to exist only in a human milieu. Children are the animal human, the instinctual, untamed substrate that humanity shares with other species. As Leslie Fielder remarked, "Children are uncertain whether they are beasts or men: little animals more like their pets than their parents."⁵³

Children's essential animality has sometimes been viewed as problematic; at other times the animal nature of children has been idealized. The equation of child with animal remains.⁵⁴ From Freud's perspective, animality governs the infant and young child through the insistent drumbeat of id. The core challenge of socialization is to channel these "animal" urges toward human, civilizing ends. As Georges Bataille asked: "What are children if not animals becoming human?"⁵⁵ The Romantic era's notion of children as noble savages put a different cultural spin on the child as animal. As expressed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the child is in a state of nature and thereby innocent and good, as are other creatures of the wild, untainted by the selfishness and competition of civilization. Young children initially exist with beasts in a natural harmony. The strictures of human society inevitably wean them from this

0139 Eden. This view saturates Romantic era paintings, which portray plump, ripe children with equally scrumptious young mammals as the bounty of a beneficent nature. A good example is John Thomas Peele's *The Pet* (1853), which features a pampered, ribbon-bedecked cat snuggled in the arms of an angelic little girl, while another cat laps milk at her feet. Another favorite Romantic theme, with echoes that reverberate today, was the exuberant roughhousing that young male humans were assumed to share naturally with animals. In the painting *Children at Play in a Barn*, by Platt Powell Rider (undated), a horse and spotted dog look on as four boys romp around a haycart.⁵⁶

All I Want for Christmas

0139 Although assumptions of children's animality and pets' humanity swirl in the cultural backdrop, parents also react to the messages they get from children themselves. Children put pets high on their wish lists, almost from the age when they can make one. Interviews with children who don't have pets, from preschoolers through adolescents in Montreal, in the Greater San Francisco Bay area, and around Syracuse, New York, reveal a nearly universal yearning for one.⁵⁷ Many children report variations on my own childhood experience. When I was about eight and my younger sister five and a half, she took to loud public prayer sessions in the middle of the driveway, a narrow strip of blacktop hemmed in with modest two-family "doubledeckers." She would call upon the Almighty Deity to grant us the little dog that our heartless parents steadfastly refused to get. I was mildly embarrassed but not yet the cynic; a small part of me thought the strategy just might work. We all became true believers when, a few days later, a small blonde creature named Trixie (exactly what we had wordlessly ordered) wandered into the driveway, just as my sister was winding up for another appeal. (Yes, we did get to keep her.)

0139 Children's pleas and parents' conviction that pets are naturally beneficial for their children's development converge to produce disproportionately high rates of pet ownership in families with children. Un-

0139 fortunately, cute and fluffy baby animals tend to be impulse gifts for children. On the heels of the popular Disney movie *A Hundred and One Dalmatians*, Dalmatian puppies—unsuitable as pets for most young children—appeared in thousands of U.S. households, prompting humane societies to launch a public-relations campaign to discourage the purchases. Bunny rabbits and chicks pop up in families each Easter as regularly as daffodils and with about as long a season. According to many of the humane society professionals I've talked with, a few weeks later, unwanted animals appear at the doorstep of humane shelters.

We Are Family

0139 What happens once pets become part of a human household with children? Given the wide range of species kept as pets, the varied circumstances under which they are kept, and, most of all, the unique dynamics of each family, there is no single or simple answer to this question. One family may keep a guard dog chained outside; another may set a place at the dinner table for their parakeet; a third might decorate the living room with a few goldfish swimming in a bowl. Considering such variability, it's striking that so many children and adults affirm that pets are full-fledged family members. Typical are the responses from a random sample of households in Providence, Rhode Island, contacted in 1985: 80 percent of the pet owners identified their pet as a "very important" member of the household.⁵⁸ Many families celebrated the animal's birthday, displayed its picture framed next to those of the human family members, carried the pet's photo in their wallets, and took their pets along to visit relatives and friends. In a 1997 national survey, 66 percent of U.S. dog owners, 54 percent of cat owners, 54 percent of bird owners, and nearly half of all owners of "pocket pets" such as gerbils and guinea pigs gave birthday, Christmas, or "just because I love you" presents to their animals. (One quarter of all fish owners and reptile owners did the same.)

0139 In my interviews with children and their parents, the term "part of the family" is a familiar refrain. In fact most children I've talked with

tend to look surprised and somewhat offended at the question, as if I were raising the scandalous possibility that their pet was *not* “family.” Children, no less than their elders, use the language of family relationships to talk about their pets. Unlike many adults who sheepishly refer to their pets as “my baby” or “my child,” as if confessing to a social failure, children employ the lexicon of family with matter-of-fact aplomb to describe their pets. When we ask children to draw pictures of their family, they invariably color in their pets, often front and center.

When we tune our ears to the pet leitmotif running through families we hear both bits and pieces of familiar melodies and strains of new music. Pets readily get drafted as players in the drama of family dynamics, reflecting within the microcosm of the individual family the human tendency to treat animals as kin. At the same time, bonds with pets are not simply substitutes for human relationships. Pets bring something new into the fabric of the family. This mixture of sameness and difference makes the relationship with pets unique, one that may compensate for a missing or inadequate social tie, may augment qualities already existing in human relationships, or may affect children’s development in ways not reducible to the impact of human bonds.

Babyface Pets as Babies

Even before there are offspring, a pet may become the indulged child of a young couple, the practice baby before the real thing comes. Neoteny ensures that the most common pets—dogs, cats, guinea pigs, gerbils, hamsters, birds—retain the same “babyface” cuteness that human babies and young children exude. According to ethologists, this eternal childlike quality is an “innate releasing mechanism,” bred by evolution to pull our heartstrings, make us smile, and jump-start our caregiving impulses. In this way, many pets share with human babies and young children the same physiological signals that push “parenting” buttons, and buttress our association of pets with children.

Like older children, animals can feel displaced and jealous (while their owners feel guilty) when the arrival of a human baby abruptly

ratchets pets down a notch in the parents’ affection hierarchy. As one young mother confessed: “After Mandy was born, I’d say I spend about one tenth as much time with the dog. Before she was born, Foxy was our baby. I do think it’s hard for him to accept.”⁵⁹

When our first child, Sara, arrived, our large black cat, Max, eloquently played out a similar displacement drama. During the months of my pregnancy, Max’s feet seldom touched the ground. With every surge of maternal hormones, I carried, cuddled, and stroked him. Then my husband and I transmogrified overnight into shaky, sleep-deprived new parents, totally absorbed in the new baby. We were grateful for the magic quieting that pacifiers wrought in the middle of the night, but we never seemed to be able to find the wrinkled plastic nipple by the next day. Drowning in disposable baby gear, we shrugged each pacifier off as lost and, every few days, replaced it. Several months later, behind a jumble of boxes in the basement, my husband unearthed a mound of chewed pacifiers, evidence of Max’s guerrilla campaign against the intruder. From the first, even before a child is born, pets are sometimes placeholders for “child.” Pets can figure in the opening act of family alignment dramas when a couple becomes three, or a trio expands to four.

The Model Kid Brother or Sister

One precociously perceptive ten-year-old girl, Erica, the daughter of a family therapist, clarified the tiers of her family ties to me this way: “First, of course, there’s my mother and father. Next comes Igor [her hamster] and Philip [her brother]. And then comes Mozart [the family dog] and Felix [the cat]. Igor is like a sibling, so I put him on the same level as my brother.” Many children cast their pets in sibling roles, especially if they have dogs, cats, birds, or other interactive species as pets. In interview studies, seven- and ten-year-olds use the same vocabulary to describe both their pets and their siblings as playmates—“They keep me company; they play games with me.”⁶⁰ For children without younger brothers or sisters, a pet often serves as the functional equivalent. Eng-

lish eight-to-sixteen-year-olds who are only children or the youngest sibling report owning more pets than their schoolmates.⁶¹ We asked pet-owning parents—90 percent owned dogs, cats, or both—to estimate how much time their five-to-twelve-year-olds regularly spent playing with or caring for family pets. According to these parents, “only” or youngest children, who lacked younger siblings, spent significantly more time playing with and caring for their pets than did children who had younger sibs.⁶² In-depth interviews with children suggest that those without siblings or with only older ones often seek out their pets as substitute younger brothers or sisters. At the same time, some animals are eliciting this attention as well; pet dogs themselves direct more of their attention toward a particular child when there are fewer other children in the household.⁶³

Studies of siblings depict a leader-follower, teacher-learner pattern, with older children setting the pace for their younger brothers and sisters.⁶⁴ Children’s play with their pets has qualities in common with this older-younger sib dynamic, as the child becomes the leader, the more mature and accomplished one, in relation to the pet. One mother discerned this dynamic as she mused on their five-year-old dog Holly’s relationship with Laura, the younger of two daughters. When Holly was a puppy, she “was Laura’s little sister . . . we thought that maybe Holly served a role in our family of being the bad child or the naughty child or the youngest child who doesn’t know how to do something. That made Laura feel like she was more competent. There was someone younger than her.”

In some ways, however, the quasi-sibling relationship of child and pet is an idealized one for the child. The pet is the younger brother or sister, declawed and defanged of challenge and competition; the relationship is stripped of the tensions and rivalries inherent when two or more human offspring jockey for limited parental time and attention. The pet as younger sibling stakes no claims for reciprocity or privilege. A dog as kid brother or sister distills a sibling substrate of worshipful attention, companionship on demand, and retreat in the face of challenge. Even the youngest child has a one-up position to the animal in the fam-

ily’s hierarchy of power. Perhaps this is one reason why mutual affection and love dominate children’s descriptions of their relationships with their pets—“He wants to be with me”; “She purrs when I’m there”—but appear less frequently as themes when children talk about their siblings.⁶⁵

Pets in the Family Drama

Over the last several decades, scholars viewing families under the lens of systems have made new strides in understanding family dynamics. From a systems perspective, families are organic wholes, more than the sum of their constituent individual personalities. Each family member influences and is in turn influenced by every other, as if the family unit were a giant tuning fork, with each individual’s movement and feeling reverberating through it. Within each family system nest subsystems based on age and role—the parental subsystem, the sibling subsystem—as well as shifting alliances. Although family systems scholars, with a few exceptions, fail to recognize it, pets, as family members, typically are part of these complex family systems.

Given that a family system is a dense circuitry of emotional currents connecting each family member, pets can, and often do, occupy nodes in that web of connections. In one study, women—usually tapped as reporters on family dynamics—described how their pets, especially dogs, raised family morale. The women endorsed statements like “Our pet helps family members communicate” and “Our pet helps family members relax and unwind at the end of the day.”⁶⁶ Pets may become part of “triangling,” a process in which intense emotions between two persons deflect onto a third person, issue, or, in this case, animal.⁶⁷ From interviews with pet-owning military families, Ann Cain describes numerous examples of both adults and children “triangling” pets: a mother is angry at her daughter but yells at the dog instead; a mother talks to her cat so her daughter can overhear, saying things she would not tell her daughter directly; a father is friendlier to the dog than to his son.⁶⁸ Parents depict their pets as sensing family tension and actively shifting attention to

0142 themselves, by coming up to be petted, even by doing something “silly,” to defuse tension. To be sure, dogs, cats, birds, and horses are finely tuned barometers of human feelings, readily reflecting and reacting to the emotional climate. There are even clinical accounts of pets mirroring anorexia, depression, and other disorders in their human owners.⁶⁹ Yet the way that some pet owners frame their stories, reading into their pets intentional strategies for peacemaking, attests to the human proclivity for casting pets in the family drama.

Because pets are players on the family stage, human distress easily maps onto them. A scattering of clinical descriptions of adolescent and adult patients describes pathological expressions of displacement of emotion onto pets—intense but anxious caregiving as a substitute for human attachments, and nervous breakdowns after the death of a beloved dog.⁷⁰ More typical are expressions of deep emotion—sudden panic when a cat or dog seems to be lost, genuine bereavement and despair when a pet dies, elation at reuniting after time apart.

0222 Pets also can be the coin to express “mine,” “hers,” “his,” and “ours” within the family. As ten-year-old Erica explained to me: “The cat, we don’t interact with him as much. He is more with my parents. He jumps on their lap, he sleeps in their bed at night. And then, the guinea pig, he sleeps in my room. I pick him up, I pet him.” Her six-year-old brother was adamant that the dog, Mozart, be labeled “ours.” When I asked him to describe how he could tell what “your pet Mozart is feeling,” he looked stonily back and replied: “Mozart is *not* my pet.” Erica rolled her eyes at this and said, “Oh, c’mon, Philip.” “No,” he explained, “Mozart is *everybody’s* pet.” It was crucial to get it right—the family dog, embodiment of family cohesion.

0142 Although nearly all families with children and pets incorporate their animals into the dynamics of the family, the precise quality of children’s relationships with pets remains elusive. Because research attention has been elsewhere until quite recently, much of children’s emotional life with animals is hidden to us. We observe children with their pets, we talk to them about these animals, but we are squinting through a lens adapted to see only human-human bonds. We borrow the vocabulary of

0142 human kinship terms—mother, father, brother, sister, grandparent, uncle, aunt—and attempt to map them onto pets. We grope to describe these relationships in terms of “as if” and “like,” circling around them with analogy, never quite making contact. The more we listen to children and their parents tell us about their pets, the more we observe the texture of these relationships, the more the simple analogies seem inadequate. A multilayered, complex, and sometimes contradictory love emerges, similar to other family bonds or friendships in some ways, distinct in others.

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jects as training grounds to produce future killers, although there is no evidence for this claim. Activist groups such as Maryland-based Friends of the Pig “rescue” 4-H animals from the chopping block by purchasing them at fairs. PETA organizes information booths at 4-H fairs to win over hearts and minds to vegetarianism and, in their view, to save children’s souls. Predictably, 4-H participants, veterans, and leaders adamantly disagree. In surveys conducted by 4-H organizations, the overwhelming majority of youngsters who complete what 4-H prefers to call “animal science” projects report greater, not less, understanding of and respect for animals.⁵⁵

These 4-H projects do not steel young hearts with a callous “love for sale” message. Neither are the projects simply animal science learning in a fun package of friendly competition and family togetherness. These youngsters shower loving attention on sheep, heifers, pigs, and goats for the day of both a blue ribbon and the animals’ slaughter.



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Intimate dialogue, here-and-now presence, nurturance, reassurance, and loss: these aspects of children’s bonds with their pets do not exhaust their complexity. Each aspect highlights a distinct facet of pets as loved ones. Intimate dialogue with pets, like children’s friendships with their peers, reflects a sense of partnership and companionship. “Here-and-now” signals the immediate, in-the-present, time-out quality of engagement with animals, a feature increasingly absent from human ties. Nurturance casts children as “proto-parents” or caregivers of pets, while reassurance shifts the feeling of being cared for to the child. Unique among the array of children’s ties to others, loving an animal is a “flexible alliance,” within which children can alternately—or even simultaneously—experience sharing, caring, giving, receiving, being, and losing, even destroying.⁵⁶

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Learning from Animals



The Pine Village Elementary School hugs the ragged edge of cornfields hunkered down in drifts of snow. Wind whips across the squat 1970s brick building to the water tower across the road and the ramshackle post office, café, and general store clustered at the intersection. Inside, there’s a warm, musty school smell tinged, as I approach the first-grade classroom, with aromas of cat, gerbil, and guinea pig. I’ve come to observe a classroom infused with animal presence. A row of small cages lines one wall—a newt, two guinea pigs balled together in a furry lump, two gerbils, a turtle, and a pair of hamsters. In the middle of the room under a desk, a floppy-eared black and white rabbit pads about an ample cage. Two goldfish circle in a large aquarium propped against the opposite wall. A mottled gray cat wanders in and out, and around the children.

These animals are what Linda Stillabower, the teacher, calls the classroom “critters,” and she organizes virtually all the children’s learning around them. On the day I’m there, each child is choosing an animal species to be the subject of a report. The room bustles with purposeful activity as the fifteen six-year-olds jump up and rummage through stacks of picture books about animals. The children have only five minutes to gather up materials on the animals they’ve chosen. At the same time, several of the children are eager to show me the living animals in their

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~~the coinage of safety and danger. Hawks drawing lazy patterns in the sunlit air signaled that all was well, the sudden squawking flight of birds in a dark, lowering sky threatened peril. In this way, calm, friendly animal presence became associated with safety and induced relaxation in humans.~~ To Aaron Katcher, there are two key properties of benign animals in nature scenes: Heraclitean motion, always changing yet always the same, and an association with psychological comfort and safety.⁵⁰ Horses and cows grazing in a field, waterfowl swimming in a pond, even waves lapping the shore or fire flickering in the fireplace capture our attention, while reassuring us that all is right with the world.

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Biophilia addresses the calm that distressed and out-of-control children report as well as the focused attention seen in children with emotional and cognitive impairments. Watching animals at peace may create a coupling of decreased arousal with sustained attention and alertness, opening the troubled child to new possibilities of learning and growth. The child can then experience unconditional love and models of good nurturing, practice caring sensitively for another, and assume mastery tempered with respect. The biophilia hypothesis also helps clarify the phenomenon of social lubrication. Friendly animal presence, because of its evolutionary association with safety, bathes in a warmer glow the ambiguous, the unfamiliar, and the potentially disturbing impact that individuals with disabilities may have on first encounter.

However, evidence for social lubrication, halo effects, relaxation response, and heightened attention all appear to depend upon the continued presence of animals. There is little evidence that these effects persist for more than a short time in the absence of the animals. If therapeutic benefits of animal contact require “maintenance doses,” children’s ready access to animals and natural settings becomes more important.⁵¹

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Biophilia may shed light on why certain animals seem to trigger speech in autistic children, such as Bethsabee and Kevin. Even as we insist that language is uniquely human, we are drawn to share our language with animals. Our evolutionary heritage of attunement to animals led early humans to place themselves imaginatively within animal skins

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and animal minds. The hunter-gatherer world of the African savannah, the environment of evolutionary adaptedness, is long gone; but if the biophilia hypothesis is correct, children and adults retain the “old ways” engraved in their genes. We are all predisposed to respond to friendly animals as sentinels of safety and as partners in dialogue.

The biophilia instinct is an amorphous one, shaped by culture and socialization into diverse forms. Coupled with the biophilia instinct is an equal emphasis on how human environments shape our engagement with animals. Our natures tend us toward biophilia, as heightened interest in animals, while our environments shape the forms this interest takes. For example, some of the boys at the Companionable Zoo had histories of cruelty toward animals, but what they learned redirected a destructive fascination with animals toward desire to care for them.

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Therapeutic programs like Green Chimneys and the Companionable Zoo may work because they build on the foundation of biophilia— intrinsic interest in animals and the calming effect of animal presence. Upon this foundation they overlay a structure of moral lessons in nurturing and being nurtured, to direct this interest into positive regard for animals and, through such regard, to the child’s own ability to heal.

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0145 first encounters with books. Historically, as English-language children's literature shifted, in the late nineteenth century, from didactic moral instruction, with heavy doses of biblical quotations, to stories designed to entertain, not just instruct youngsters, both children and animals moved from the periphery to center stage.²² Today, seven of the top ten all-time best-selling children's books in the United States are about animals; *The Pokey Little Puppy* (1942) and *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) top the list.²³ When Kathryn Norcross Black, a psychologist at Purdue University, examined 100 randomly selected picture books published from 1988 to 1992, she could find only 11 that did *not* mention animals. Most featured animals as central characters, with over fifteen species playing major roles. In more than 40 percent of these books, the nonhuman protagonists lived thoroughly human lives; they sported dresses and suits, ate porridge, and slept under snug comforters.²⁴ Animals are the topic of three out of five picture books, according to a 1994 survey of preschools in and around Pretoria, South Africa. When the teachers in those preschools chose their young charges' ten favorite books, all ten featured animals, usually humanized or fantasy creatures, as main characters.²⁵

0245 Inventories of early readers, school textbooks, and literature for children show a similar pattern. In a random sample of U.S. children's books published between 1916 and 1950, three-quarters had animal characters.²⁶ As the reading level gets more difficult and the target audience older, animals appear more realistically, and overall their presence slightly declines. Even so, nearly a third of the stories in fourth-grade school readers published in the United States from 1900 to 1970 have animal characters, and half of them are the main protagonists.²⁷ The most widely used third-grade reading texts feature stories about children's relationships with animals, usually pets, nearly as often as children's ties with parents.²⁸ When third-graders heard stories with animal characters and identical stories with human characters substituted for the animals, three-quarters of the children preferred the animal stories.²⁹

0145 In a random scan of books garnering the Newbery Medal, the most prestigious award in children's literature, animal themes crop up most

0145 of the time. There is the 1927 best book, a paean to the eponymous *Smoky the Cowhorse*, whose cowpoke author, Will James, leads off with: "To my way of thinking there's something wrong, or missing, with any person who hasn't got a soft spot in their heart for an animal of some kind."³⁰ Marguerite Henry's *King of the Wind*, the winner in 1949, retells the legend of a great Arabian stallion. *It's Like This, Cat*, the 1964 choice, describes a New York City boy's coming-of-age through his bond with an adopted stray tomcat named Cat. (As the boy, Dave, says, "I know he's a cat, he knows he's a cat, and his name is Cat. Even if you call him Admiral John Paul Jones, he won't come when you call, and he won't lick your hand, see?")³¹ In 1970 the award went to *Sounder*, the story of a great coon dog with a booming voice who shares the travails of a African-American boy and his poor sharecropper family. In *Julie of the Wolves*, the 1973 winner, a young Inuit girl, lost on the vast North Slope of Alaska, is adopted by wolves whom she comes to love as a family.³² *The Midwife's Apprentice*, the 1996 winner, tells of Beetle, a homeless waif in fourteenth-century England, who saves a cat from drowning, and girl and cat find solace in each other's company.³³

A survey of Caldecott Medal books, the most honored picture books for young children, gives the impression that prereaders yearn for, if they don't already inhabit, an animal world. In little Johnny's rescue and rearing of a bear cub, *The Biggest Bear* (1953) inveighs against hunting. In *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* (1967), the animals of little Samantha's overripe imagination, what her father calls her "moonshine"—a fierce lion and a baby kangaroo—endanger her real, old, wise cat, Bangs. *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses* was the 1979 selection, and *Fables*, a humorous update of Aesop, took the prize in 1981. *Smoky Night*, the 1995 winner, depicts the terror of Los Angeles racial rioting through the eyes of little Daniel, whose beloved yellow tabbycat, Jasmine, may be lost in the fires raging around them.³⁴

0145 Over the last hundred years, with few exceptions, the best-selling, best-loved children's books feature animal characters, from *Black Beauty* (1877) to *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), to *Winnie the Pooh* (1926), to *Stuart Little* (1945), to *Charlotte's Web* (1952), to *Old Yeller*

(1956). Today a gaggle of anthropomorphized, neotenous animal stand-ins for children, what one critic decried as “the bubonic plague of children’s publishing,” join these animal literary heroes.³⁵ There are Russell Hoban’s Frances, the irrepressible badger; Arthur the aardvark; Curious George, the monkey always getting into mischief; the rabbit of *Good Night Moon*; Clifford, the big red dog; Franklin the turtle; and many more. Children’s books now come packaged with matching stuffed animals and ancillary *tchotchkes*, like notebooks, keychains, pocket-books and party goods. Consumer products for children, from McDonald’s Happy Meals to Saturday morning cartoons, are awash in animalia. As we’ve already seen, children’s own imaginations—in dreams, play, stories, and fears—teem with animal life, particularly in early childhood. Are the media responding to children’s “natural” interest in animals? Or are kids unwitting consumers being manipulated by savvy marketing?

Popular culture and media clearly shape children’s (as well as adults’) symbolic life. The Mouseketeers of my childhood are no longer around to keep Mickey’s name on the lips of today’s children. The advertising juggernaut of movie-book-toy-game-funmeal tie-ins spurs cravings for Ninja Turtles one year, Pokémon the next. Stuffed animals, now ubiquitous “archetypal toys,” landed on children’s beds only after the teddy bear craze started in 1906 and edged out the drums, popguns, trumpets, and rocking horses emblematic of nineteenth-century childhood.³⁶

Stuffed bears first appeared as a Christmas novelty item that Morris Michtom, a toy manufacturer, concocted after seeing a 1902 *Washington Post* cartoon of then President Teddy Roosevelt, an avid hunter, sparing a black grizzly. (After an unsuccessful hunting expedition in Mississippi, local hosts tried to ensure the president his kill by presenting him with a tied-up, rather mangy black bear. The president refused to dispatch the captive animal, deeming such an act unsportsmanlike.) “Teddy” bears swiftly became an icon of childhood. In 1907 Steiff, the German toy manufacturer, sold over a million in Europe. Parents adopted the custom of photographing their children holding teddies.

Within a few decades, a Garden of Eden full of soft, plush creatures proliferated.³⁷

This animalization of children’s culture has deepened over the last century. It parallels changing societal views of nature and animals—from wild threats against civilizing humanity to carriers of humanity’s better nature. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, the bear was the largest and fiercest creature of the North American and western European forests. Along with wolves, they posed real danger, as Peter, of Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*, is repeatedly warned. By the beginning of the twentieth century, with the danger of the wild in retreat, Teddy and his stuffed animal compatriots became, like children, the last innocents, signifying what one writer called “the goodness of the wild in human nature.”³⁸

Signifying Animals

Animal symbols have become synonymous with childhood as both adults and children have lost intimate daily contact with actual domestic and wild animals. As the transformation of bears from grizzlies to teddies illustrates, domination and elimination of wild creatures have domesticated and infantilized their images, which then migrate from adult to child culture. Animal fables and fairy tales, originally serious entertainment for grownups—Socrates spent his prison days putting Aesop’s fables into verse form—are now part of the juvenile canon. As one writer put it: “Once we stopped knowing animals as a direct matter of survival—as partners in work, as quarry to hunt, as predators to evade—fables could be read as stories about cute animals that could be safely given to children.”³⁹

Surrounding children with lovable creatures may also signal a collective disquiet with the scientific, detached, institutionalized treatment of animals in an age when genetically engineered animals are patented and sheep are cloned.⁴⁰ There may be whiffs of a Romantic idealization of “pure” Nature lost to the inroads of “cold” urbanization and industrialization. Cuddly creatures may be a reassuring way to underscore a child-

hood innocence in which we no longer believe. These social undercurrents have rendered children's culture more animal-saturated than ever.

On the other hand, the appeal of animal symbols antedates today's media blitzes. The propensity to refract human experience through an animal prism is older than recorded history. The earliest deliberately produced human work of art in existence, a 30,000-year-old statuette carved from a mammoth's tusk, depicts a man with a lion's head. Dating from about the same time are more than 300 animal figures—lifelike bulls, bison, rhinos, lions, and horses—as well as human-animal fusions, such as the head and torso of a bison on human legs, that gallop across the walls of the Chauvet cave, in the Ardèche region of France.

A universal human urge turns to animal beings as a means of reflecting upon and understanding human emotions and social organization. Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss saw the forms of human cultures as modeled on observations of wild animals, "nature as a language and guide to human life." For him, totemism, universal among hunter-gatherer groups, and pervasive in human societies for at least 60,000 years, was the emblematic human belief system. Clans or other groups identified with their totem animals—for Ojibwas, for example, they were catfish, cranes, loon, bears, and martens—and these different animal species represented by analogy different forms of human society. "Because man originally felt himself identical to all those like him (among which we must include animals) that he came to acquire the capacity to distinguish *himself* as he distinguishes *them*, i.e., to use the diversity of species as conceptual support for social differentiation."⁴¹

Creation stories across varied cultures tell of original human-animal bonds, often describing a fall from the unity of all beings. For example, the Aztec myth of origin describes the union of the jaguar and a humanlike creature, the "jaguarman," out of which both humans and animals emerged. According to Hopi beliefs, humans were first ants, then became other animals in the "second world," and humanlike but with long tails in the "third world." Mircea Eliade identified humans living in harmony and communion with animals as the core feature common to all depictions of paradise: "Animals are charged with a symbolism and a

mythology of great importance for the religious life; so that to communicate with animals, to speak their language and become their friend and master is to appropriate a spiritual life much richer than the merely human life of ordinary mortals."⁴² Only shamans have the ability to reenter this lost world, to appeal to animal spirits by talking to them in their own language.

In the myths of many cultures, gods take animal forms—Jupiter appears as a bull, Arachne becomes a spider, Buddha is born as an elephant, Vishnu is incarnated as a tortoise.⁴³ Belief in the shape-shifting of humans into animals and animals into humans, visible in Paleolithic drawings and sculptures and universal among early hunter-gatherers, took root in ancient Egypt, spread to Greece, and by the sixth century B.C.E. entered the teachings of Buddha and the fables of Aesop. By then the iconography of animals was so elaborate that animal symbols could represent the full panoply of human relationships. Poking fun at human frailties via talking animals decked out in human attire—the animal burlesque—is one of the oldest of literary conventions. In the ancient Greek mock epic *Batrachomyomachia*, the battles between the "frog people" and the "mice people" satirized the Trojan War. The animal-filled European fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault trace their roots to oral traditions that may date back to Ice Age hunter societies.⁴⁴ The oldest toys so far discovered—Bronze Age clay rattles with the heads of foxes, birds, and dogs, and wooden crocodiles and lions from 1000 B.C.E. Egypt—depict animals.⁴⁵

Humans have always invested animals with moral urgency and emotional power. Medieval bestiaries praised turtle doves for their chastity but condemned wolves as vicious and pigs as lazy.⁴⁶ Animals carry the weight of every human failing and accomplishment. Because animal symbols project our deepest fears, wishes, and conflicts, "when we look at animals, we see ourselves," as writer Boria Sax says.⁴⁷ Modern metaphors continue to sketch humans in animal hues—"hogging the road," "wolfing down food," "chickening out"—even though living hogs, wolves, and chickens are long gone from daily life. The bulls and bears of the stock market, the MGM lion, ~~the Republican elephant and Dem-~~

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Harnessing Animal Powers

A slight, shy eight-year-old boy I know hurries home after school each day to go back to the age when dinosaurs roamed the Earth. A walking encyclopedia of dinosaur lore, he never tires of playing out battles between Brontosaurus and Tyrannosaurus Rex, using his six-inch-high replicas. Unlike the power of adults or other bigger, more assertive peers, dinosaur power is, literally, under his thumb. As he moves his dinosaur kingdom around the table, like chess pieces on a large board, he is the supreme deity of his miniature kingdom of terrifying beasts. Is his fascination with dinosaurs, and the remarkable knowledge he's accumulated as a result, just a redirection of unacceptable sexual and aggressive urges? While these may be elements in his play, his life among the dinosaurs primarily serves other functions. In that life is an interplay of power and powerlessness—the small child as master of larger, rampaging forces, the dinosaur creatures miniaturized. No matter that the dinosaur expert's handwriting is nearly illegible, and that the teacher keeps telling him to sit still.

Scary creatures—Godzilla, King Kong, the dinosaurs of *Jurassic Park* and *The Land before Time*—mix a frisson of fear into children's exhilaration at the sight of even grownups getting stomped. At the same time, dinosaur and monster tales read as parables of the small and dependent ultimately outwitting, taming, or destroying overwhelming beasts. Another variation on animal stories as power plays is the "reluctant dragon." Like the Kenneth Grahame story of the same name (1899), reluctant dragons—Barney is the latest incarnation of the breed—reveal soft centers that render them as harmless as floppy dogs.⁶⁹

Animal Guides

In some children's stories, the special gifts of animals shepherd the child on a perilous adventure. This theme of animal guides, deeply resonant

in Native American tales and the legends of many other cultures, gets a modern reworking in "dangerous survivor" stories.⁷⁰ For example, in *The Grey King*, a 1976 Newbery Award book based on Welsh legends, a boy searches for a golden harp, guided by a magical white dog with silver eyes who can see the wind.⁷¹ The thirteen-year-old Inuit heroine of *Julie of the Wolves* survives in the Arctic wilderness because a pack of wolves adopts her, showing her how to track game and protecting her from bear attack. In *The Music of Dolphins*, dolphins raise Mila from the age of four until her "rescue" as a teenager off an unpopulated Florida island.⁷² Karana, the Indian heroine of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, survives Robinson Crusoe style on a deserted island by taming wild dogs, birds, and even otters as companions.⁷³

Such adventures echo the "wild child," the ancient theme of children suckled by wolves, as were Romulus and Remus, the traditional founders of Rome, or raised in the forest by bears, as was Orson, in the fourteenth-century English tale, "Valentine and Orson," of twin brothers separated at birth.⁷⁴ Like the "wild boy" of Aveyron, the wild child grows up in the animal world, never knowing human society. In modern animal guide stories, the child—often a young girl—owes more than her survival to her animal saviors. She enters the world of the wolves (or dolphins) not as a human observer but as one of them. The child parts the curtain that separates animal societies from human experience. Because the child truly understands the animals, from inside their world, she can become their intermediary with often hostile, uncomprehending adult humans. There comes a moment when the child, so long protected by her animal guides, in turn saves them from human predation, as Julie saves one of her wolf "family" from sporthunters gunning down wolves from a plane.

The animal guide stories tell of a protective Mother Nature, literally mothering the lost child. Here, wild animals signify a purity of acceptance and care, in contrast to the confusing mixed signals of human hypocrisy and deceit. The animal guide erases the barrier between the young human and the surrounding animal world.

0149 abuse. ~~The two organizations set up crosstraining for humane officers, on how to recognize signs of child abuse; for social workers, on how to spot "the battered pet syndrome" as well as other forms of animal abuse and neglect. In Toledo, Ohio, the Animal Advocates for Children program gives animal welfare agents training in crisis intervention and in detecting child abuse and neglect, as well as elder abuse.~~

02129 In ~~Colorado Springs, DVERT, the Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team, brings together the local police, humane society, child protective services, district attorney, center for prevention of domestic violence, and social service agency, among others fifteen groups in all to identify the county's most lethal perpetrators. The agencies do crosstraining, share records, and coordinate their investigations. Donna Straub, assistant director of the Pike's Peak Humane Society and a member of the DVERT team, explained to me how this approach is uncovering hidden abuse: "The hammer case that's what we call it is a perfect example." Three children, ages ten, eight, and six, had written on the back of their father's business card "Call my Dad, the dog is in the garage" and thrown it onto a neighbor's lawn. (The parents were divorced, and the father was living in California.) The neighbor alerted the humane society, and when animal control officers arrived, they found a dog beaten almost to death and in the garage, a hammer with blood and dog hairs on it. The children's mother soon confessed to the beating. When veterinarians examined the dog, they found numerous fractures in various stages of healing, indicating a long history of vicious abuse. "Our people thought something was not right about the kids," Donna recalled, "even though we couldn't see anything. Sure enough, it turned out the children were being abused, too. Because of DVERT, we could immediately bring in Child Protection."⁵² DVERT has become a national model for a coordinated rapid response to all forms of abuse, animal as well as human.~~

0149 Nationwide, there are calls to legally require veterinarians to report suspected child abuse or neglect and social workers to report suspected animal abuse. (Currently only a few states even require veterinarians to

0149 report suspected animal cruelty.)⁵³ State groups are organizing to toughen penalties for animal cruelty; currently twenty-one states made some form of animal cruelty a felony, while forty-three states classified organized dogfighting as a felony. Other proposals include federal legislation, modeled after the 1974 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, to establish national standards for defining and prosecuting animal abuse, and a national registry to track the incidence of animal abuse.⁵⁴ The American Humane Association and other organizations are lobbying for more federally funded research on the link between violence against animals and humans. In 1997 the Humane Society of the United States launched the "First Strike" campaign, a coordinated effort to increase public awareness of the connection between cruelty to animals and violence against humans.⁵⁵

02349 Humane education is a relatively recent front opened in the battle for the hearts and minds of children. Formal programs to foster children's compassion and respect toward animals and, through a process of generalization, toward other humans date back only about one hundred years. G. Stanley Hall, in his classic 1904 text, *Adolescence*, expressed the rationale behind such programs in this way: "If pedagogy is ever to become adequate to the needs of the soul, the time will come when animals will play a far larger educational role than has yet been conceived, that they will be curriculized, will acquire a new and higher humanistic or cultural value in the future compared with their utility in the past."⁵⁶

0149 Current examples of curricula include "Pets and Me," from the University of Pennsylvania; the People and Animals program, developed by the National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (NAHEE); the Operation Outreach-USA program of the American Humane Education Society; and Project Wild, developed by the Western Regional Environmental Council. Each curriculum has a slightly different focus. The "Pets and Me" curriculum, for preschool through grade five, centers on promoting responsible pet ownership and "personalizing" animal welfare and environmental conservation issues through the pet connection. Project Wild, on the other hand, focuses on

0150 wildlife appreciation through nature study. Both Operation Outreach-USA and the People and Animals programs have the broad goal of fostering respect for all living things.⁵⁷

Do these classroom humane education curricula work? There are few evaluations, and their results are inconclusive. After a yearlong exposure to the People and Animals curriculum, first- and fourth-graders in Utah reported more humane attitudes—for example, answering no to questions like “Should you spank a cat to teach it to mind you?” and “Do you think it’s fun to break up a spider’s web?”—than did other children from the same schools who had not received the program. A year after the fourth-graders had completed the program, they continued to express more humane attitudes than the control group. Second- and fifth-graders at the same schools showed no change in humane attitudes as a result of the curriculum. Regardless of grade level, however, children who received the humane curriculum expressed more empathy toward other children, at least on a questionnaire.

02490 It’s not clear how much or what kind of humane education is most beneficial in shaping attitudes toward the treatment of animals; in this study, teachers devoted only forty hours, on average, over the entire school year, the equivalent of barely a week of children’s television viewing.⁵⁸ Another question is why the intervention “took” with fourth-graders and not with younger or older children. Humane education certainly needs testing with a wider diversity of children as well; in this study, they were overwhelmingly white and Mormon. Finally, documenting changes in attitudes immediately after an educational “treatment” is a far cry from showing long-term changes in behavior.

0150 Formal programs may be less important than a general classroom climate extending respect and care across species. However fine-tuned humane education becomes, it’s likely to take only a small fraction of classroom time and reach a limited number of students, given the many competing demands on instruction. Another persistent issue is generalization to human relationships. Why should we expect exhortations to treat animals kindly, or at least without unnecessary cruelty, to “rub off” on children’s behavior toward their classmates, particularly when hu-

0150 mane education does not address interpersonal violence directly? Would humane education focused on animal welfare necessarily promote tolerance of vulnerable humans, such as persons with disabilities or minorities?

A more fundamental birthing ground for humane attitudes lies within the family. Families are the primary context in which children watch birds at a feeder, go camping, hunt and fish, protect, or endanger animals. Children’s first outings to the zoo, aquarium, or nature park are usually family ones. The first lessons in responsible pet ownership or messages of neglect take place at home. Even at first grade, humane education works not on a “blank slate,” but on an already developing ethic of animal treatment. As one humane educator told me: “You sometimes hear things [on kindergarten visits] like ‘Dad kicks the dog on purpose, to make him mean.’ Some children seem aware that this is not right; they’ll say, ‘You shouldn’t do that,’ but more often the child thinks, ‘This is the way it’s done; they’re just animals.’”⁵⁹

02450 When children feel safe and protected at home, they can practice role-taking skills under parental guidance. Research documents that children are more empathic toward other children when parents routinely direct their attention to others’ feelings, using the disciplinary strategy called *induction*, with questions like “How do you think that makes her feel?” Such children may also be more likely to extend protection to others, including animals. Supporting this idea, a study of eight-to-thirteen-year-olds in California found that children who felt that their parents were emotionally available and responsive also endorsed more humane attitudes toward animals. Those children who reported fathers and older siblings as punitive were less humane.⁶⁰

Kindness and Abuse

0150 We must be careful not to reach for family, community, or school programs as the sole explanation for childhood cruelty (or kindness) to animals. Not all abused children pass on the cycle of abuse to animals. ~~In fact many children bombarded by violence seek solace in their pets, are~~

Children and Animals

In *Totem and Taboo* Sigmund Freud looked at the ways in which what he termed 'primitive' peoples understood the world around them. He wrote:

There is a great deal of resemblance between the relations of children and of primitive men towards animals. Children show no trace of the arrogance which urges adult civilized men to draw a hard-and-fast line between their own nature and that of all other animals. Children have no scruples over allowing the avowal of their bodily needs, they no doubt feel themselves more akin to animals than their elders, who may well be a puzzle to them.³

For Freud this closeness between the child and animals was frequently breached by neurosis, by the appearance of fear in the child for one particular, often previously loved, species. But on a more immediate level, Freud's recognition that childhood is a time in which animals are of particular, and specific, value, is an important one, and is one that can be traced in the constant presence of animals in books written for children. As Karin Lesnik-Oberstein has estimated, 'at least two-thirds of the books [available in children's bookshops] are in some form or another linked with nature and the environment, and – specifically and most importantly – with animals'.⁴ The question of the child's lack of arrogance that Freud finds is certainly central to many of the classic children's books of the last century, and I will look at a few of them, and examine how they work, and what the representation of animals within them might mean. The different forms of anthropomorphism present in these books offer different possibilities for our relationship with animals.

The Wind in the Willows is, according to the jacket of my childhood edition, 'the best-loved children's book of the twentieth century'.⁵ Written by Kenneth Grahame, then Secretary of the Bank of England, the book was

based on stories told, and letters written, to Grahame's son, Alastair. First published in 1908, it tells the story of the riverbank community, but it is never clear whether the animals, Ratty, Mole, Toad, Badger, and the evil weasels, are, as Neil Philip notes, 'humanized animals – or animalized humans'.⁶ The story, with its mixture of animals of animal size and of human, offers no attempt at reality. One of E. H. Shepherd's illustrations shows actual-sized Mole and Ratty pulling on the harness of a, by comparison, massive full-sized horse while, a few pages later, Mr Toad is able to steal and drive away a human car. The book mixes the reality of its representation of the countryside with the fiction of a world of speaking animals. In literary terms, *The Wind in the Willows* fits into the genre of 'magic realism', 'a kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the "reliable" tone of objective realistic report'.⁷ Ultimately, however, the world of the riverbank is an idealized picture of human society. Toad's abandonment of the caravan for the motorcar – 'Glorious, stirring sight! . . . The *only* way to travel' – is represented as a disintegration of 'true' living. The car represents the overturning of rural ways of life, and the threatening arrival of modernity, and takes with it on its journey not only the true, natural order of time – 'Here to-day – in next week to-morrow!'⁸ – but also the true, natural order of community. It destroys the rural idyll: Toad Hall falls into the hands of weasels and stoats, and the Lord of the Manor is reduced to the status of a car thief, who is forced to dress as a laundry woman to escape from prison.

The disorder of the impact of modernity is, however, limited. By the end of the book the 'natural' order is reinstated, with the rebels kicked out of Toad Hall and its rightful owner reinstated. But what is clear is that we have not experienced a natural world at all, but a parable about the dangers of modernity, translated into the voices of animals. In this *The Wind in the Willows* is not unlike a collection like *Aesop's Fables*, in that the tale told is ultimately about 'us' and not 'them'. As well as this, Grahame's message,

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embedded in the adventures of Mole, Ratty and the others, is ultimately a deeply reactionary one. Toad, who clearly shows no merit as Lord of the Manor, is returned to his Hall anyway, because it is his rightful inheritance. He may be very poor at performing his social role, but his return is viewed as a return of stability, of the old ways of history. The animals are the vehicles for a conservative philosophy, just as, in *Aesop's Fables*, they were vehicles for moral teaching.

The anthropomorphism on display in *The Wind in the Willows* is an all-encompassing one. When humans do appear – the gaoler, the train driver, the bargewoman – they engage with the animals as if they were human. At Toad's trial the Chairman of the Bench of Magistrates refers to him as an 'incorrigible rogue and hardened ruffian'.⁹ The fact that he is also a toad appears to escape the magistrate's notice. Here we are immersed in Grahame's creation. We cannot enjoy the tale and simultaneously doubt the world in which it takes place: to do so would be to destroy the narrative altogether. Instead we are asked to, and most of us do, readily accept the world of the riverbank as a world we recognize. Animals are like us, in fact, the line between the bargewoman and the toad does not exist: the animals are us. This is anthropomorphism at its most extreme, and, paradoxically, at its most invisible. We forget that the animals are animals.

This is not, however, the only way in which animals are represented in children's books. Another classic, E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952), offers a very different picture of the animal world, and it is a picture that, in many ways, supports Freud's ideas about the relation between children and animals. In this book the farmyard, like Grahame's riverbank, is a pseudo-human society. The pig converses with a spider, a rat and geese. But rather than this being the only world that there is, we have, in *Charlotte's Web*, the sense of separation of human from animal: there is another world, another conversation going on among people. The intermediary between these two worlds is, of course, a child: Fern. *Charlotte's Web* tells the story of how a spider, Charlotte, contrives to save a piglet, Wilbur, from slaugh-

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ter, the usual fate of his species. Charlotte creates apparent miracles by writing various messages in her web: 'Some Pig', 'Terrific', 'Humble'. Because of these messages Wilbur becomes a celebrity, with crowds coming from miles around to see him. He becomes more valuable alive than dead, and so is saved from the knife.

In *Charlotte's Web* White simultaneously asks his readers to believe that animals can speak to each other, but also makes it clear that we, his readers, are privileged to hear them. Only Fern among all the humans in the book is able to understand what is going on in the animal world. None of the adults – Mr and Mrs Arable, Fern's parents, Mr and Mrs Zuckerman, Fern's aunt and uncle – and none of the other children can hear the conversation in the barn. As readers we share in Fern's access to the world of the farmyard. This leads to some interesting, and self-conscious, debates in the book. Mrs Arable says to her husband, 'I worry about Fern . . . Did you hear that way she rambled on about the animals, pretending that they talked?' Mr Arable's reply offers two interpretations of his daughter's belief that the animals talk (and, of course, we *know* that they do: we, the readers, 'hear' them too). First of all he blames it on his daughter's 'lively imagination' (something regarded as a typical and healthy part of childhood), but he also notes, 'Maybe our ears aren't as sharp as Fern's.'¹⁰ There is a sense of melancholy here, a sense of a recognition that adulthood brings with it a loss, a distance from the natural world that can never be bridged. Part of growing up, it seems, entails a growing away from animals. The fact that Wilbur was to be slaughtered, first by Mr Avery as the runt of the litter, and then by Mr Zuckerman for food, attests to the impact of this division between human and animal worlds. The communication across the species is only possible in a world where an equilibrium is perceived. Where dominion is in place such conversations cease to be possible. Only children lack, in Freud's terms, the 'arrogance' that upsets the natural peace.

So, there are two forms of anthropomorphism in place already here: one all-encompassing, where humans and animals are equal, and the other

where there is an equality that only the child (and the reader) can understand. The latter is a much more troubling version, as it offers us the possibility that we may lose, or may already have lost something, and because of this loss we may be living lives that are more directly destructive than we can imagine. If we could hear animals speak to each other, could we still do what we do to them?

In another children's classic, Eric Knight's *Lassie Come-Home*, we get a different version of anthropomorphism once again. In this book, as in the film, we are told the story of the bond between a collie and Joe Carraclough, the son of her original owner. When the dog is sold to help the Carraclough family weather the storm of the father's unemployment, Lassie keeps escaping from her new home and returning to the school gates to meet Joe. Each time the dog is returned to her new owner, The Duke of Rudling, but again and again, she contrives to escape and return 'home'. Eventually the Duke takes Lassie to his estate in the north of Scotland, but once again the dog escapes, and makes her way slowly back to North Yorkshire to Joe. The journey home is interspersed with events: Lassie is almost shot as a sheep-worrier, she is captured by dog-catchers, she spends some time with a travelling pedlar, but ultimately, it is the idea of home that drives her on.

Knight does not anthropomorphize the dog in the way that White anthropomorphizes the pig and the spider in *Charlotte's Web*. In a pseudo-documentary style, he tells a tale of a natural world new to both reader and dog. In this world the dog learns to fear men, to avoid them, and to survive without their help, and we learn to understand and share in the experience of this dog. When another animal is encountered our understanding comes through Knight's translation of their animal noises, rather than through their humanized conversation. On the first night of her journey Lassie encounters another dog: 'Perhaps he was friendly,' Knight notes.

But he was not. He came tearing up the path, his mane erect, his ears flat. Lassie crouched to meet him. As he sprang, she stepped aside. He turned, giving loud voice in hysterical rage. His tones were saying: 'This is my home – you are an intruder. It is my home and I will defend it.'¹¹

We get no conversation, as we get in the other books, we merely get a human interpretation of a canine situation. The dog's bark is roughly translated into human language by the narrator. This narrator sees inside the minds of the humans – Joe, Mr Carraclough, the Duke – but he also sees into the minds of the animals. In this sense the dog is given a thought process (although Knight makes it clear how different from the human thought process this is), but is also, like Nipper, given an innate love of mastery. Lassie wants to come home, wants to return to her true master; wants to be mastered.

But, again, as in *Charlotte's Web*, *Lassie Come-Home* offers us a melancholy sense of the loss of communication between adult and animal. Having travelled some way with Rowlie, a pedlar, Lassie goes her own way: Rowlie heads east, Lassie goes south. At their parting Rowlie notes the dog's intelligence – 'ye understand a lot, don't ye?' – and rues his own lack: 'Nay, that's the pity of it. Ye can understand some o' man's language, but man isn't bright enough to understand thine. And yet it's us that's supposed to be most intelligent!'¹² What this book gives us is a chance for some understanding, a chance to transcend some of the barriers that exist between human and animal. Just as the book and film offer what Marjorie Garber terms 'the "Lassie principle"' – 'the power of the lost-and-found, the lost-in-order-to-be-found, the found-only-to-be-lost-again'¹³ – the story of *Lassie Come-Home* also reminds us of the powerful desire of all humans – children and adults – to get into the minds of animals. The all-pervasive presence of animals in children's literature would seem to emphasize this point. What Knight's novel gives us, however, is a form of anthropomor-

phism that is limited in its scope. We do not fully comprehend Lassie, but we get some kind of insight. The narrator of the story notes: 'She was a dog, and she would not think in terms of thoughts such as we may put in words. There was only a growing desire that was at first vague . . .'¹⁴ The conversation that Lassie has with herself is lost to us forever in this book, it is untranslatable into our language: and yet we get something of her interior life. More realist than magic realism, *Lassie Come-Home* recognizes the difficulty of the world of animals, but still argues that communicating some of it is possible.

But, there is a question that all three texts (and many, many others) ask. Why is it that these other beings are so central to the child's engagement with the world? Animals in books speak to us, sometimes literally. The reason for this centrality of representations of animals in these books might be that they offer a fulfilment of one of the key desires of our lives. This is a desire that begins with ease in childhood and which becomes – as the adults in some of these books show – more and more complex and melancholy with age. We might argue that the desire to comprehend and communicate with animals is infantile, but if we do not have these narratives of communication (and not all of those narratives are written down, of course) then we will lose contact with a large part of our world. If I cannot say that a dog is sad, what can I say that it is? In a sense, without anthropomorphism we are unable to comprehend and represent the presence of an animal. This is one of the problems of anthropomorphism that needs to be explored. We may regard the humanization of animals that takes place in many narratives as sentimental, but without it the only relation we can have with animals is a very distant, and perhaps mechanistic one. As well as this, anthropomorphism might actually serve an ethical function: if we don't believe that in some way we can communicate with and understand animals, what is to make us stop and think as we experiment upon them, eat them, put them in cages? By gaining access to the world of animals, these books offer a way of thinking about human-animal

relations more generally, and potentially more positively.

The different forms of anthropomorphism in these books, though, present problems for the status of humans. If, through whichever mode of anthropomorphism, an animal can be represented as being like us, then an important line between the species has been eroded. But this can be a double-edged sword. Just as a pet nearly always 'says' what we want it to say, so the fictionalized animals present a world in which we, humans, remain central: while Lassie may have a mind of her own, it is a mind that drives her back to her true 'master'. We can, though, read this in reverse: where the stories may represent an extension of a world that we can control, in our desire that animals should be for us, that we should have dominion, one that includes understanding, we might actually be undoing that dominion. In our desire to rectify the loss of communication with the non-human world we may in fact be upsetting the human one. This danger is something that has persisted across history. We can turn to the seventeenth century to see a version of this that sets out the difficulty very clearly.

In 1616 Ben Jonson wrote a conventional 'country house poem', 'To Penshurst'. A country house poem was traditionally written in celebration of the power and status of a poet's patrons, in this case, Sir Robert Sidney, Viscount Lisle. In 'To Penshurst' Jonson, following the convention, presents a world of perfect order, where humans are very clearly on top, with Sidney himself at the top of the human chain. This is a representation of an ideal world that does honour to its master. Here animals serve a clear function: they are for use by man. The pheasant, Jonson writes, is 'willing to be kill'd'.¹⁵ This is a representation of absolute dominion, of an animal offering itself for slaughter. It comes, however, at a price. If a pheasant is willing to be killed, doesn't that mean that it has a will? Such a suggestion undermines the assumption of the absolute difference between human and animal that the dominion appears to exhibit. Even as it serves (or is served on a plate) the animal upsets dominion. Anthropocentrism leads to anthropomorphism, which in turn upsets the possibility of *anthropos* as a

separate and distinct category.

A similar danger can be traced in the varied use of animals in writing for children. If animals are indistinguishable from humans, or equal to humans, where is the difference? This is a question raised by the representation of animals in children's books, but it is perhaps in film, in the visual representation of the animal, that greater dangers exist. Here, while we are still dealing in fiction, we are dealing in a fiction that looks real. Where Nipper may have crossed the border that says that only humans can imagine and engage with virtual worlds in his concentration on the bodiless sounds coming from the gramophone, humans cross a different border in a similar medium. Only we can engage with the worlds represented on the cinema screen as if they were real, but when those worlds depict animals it is often difficult to see how a boundary between human and animal can be maintained.

Filming Animals

In his book *The Story of Lassie* the wonderfully named Rudd B. Weatherwax, original trainer of Pal, the dog who played Lassie in a sequence of films in the 1940s and '50s, offers two intertwined histories: one of the history of the dog generally, and one of the history of dogs in films. I'll begin with the latter, as Weatherwax does, and then move on to the former, as, for Weatherwax, the appearance of the dog in the cinema is a crucial development in canine evolution.

There are, he argues, four eras of dogs in cinema. In the first, the early 1920s, dogs like Brownie, 'the original "wonder dog" of the movies', Jiggs, a Boston bulldog, and Pal, a black and white terrier were used for comic effect: 'dogs smoked cigars, they read books, they always were getting into mischief'. These comic dogs were replaced in the next era by German Shepherds: first was Strongheart, and then, in the mid to late 1920s, came

the reign of Rin-Tin-Tin.¹⁶ A synopsis of one of Rinty's silent films, *The Night Cry* (1926), from the dog's website gives a sense of the nature of his work. This dog is certainly not smoking a cigar. 'A giant condor is killing sheep and Rinty is unjustly accused and by the law of the range must be destroyed. Rinty's owner hides him from the other ranchers. The condor steals a child and Rinty tracks it to its lair and destroys the giant bird.' The synopsis goes on: 'All the stories of how Rin-Tin-Tin could really act are substantiated in this film.'¹⁷ As well as starring in 23 silent films, Rinty also crossed over into the talkies seven times. In his films we have moved from the comic potential of the dog as sub-human to the dramatic possibility of dog as truly 'man's best friend'.

For Weatherwax, the next stage of development in cinema, the 1930s and '40s, is the era of smaller dogs, such as Daisy and Asta, the pets in, respectively, the *Blondie* and *Thin Man* series. Asta, played by Skippy, a wire terrier, was trained by Weatherwax. In this era, however, he argues, 'film bypassed the genuine dog stories'. By implication, a film with a dog that merely helped its owners to sniff out clues (Asta), or followed its owners from room to room (Daisy), was not a genuine dog story, whereas, for Weatherwax, the *Lassie* films were. And it is these latter that represent Weatherwax's fourth era in dog-cinema. Lassie, he notes, had a huge impact. By 1947, within four years of Lassie's debut, 'there were approximately 250 trained dogs working in motion pictures . . . During this period it was estimated that Hollywood studios paid \$250,000 annually for their canine actors!¹⁸ We are still living in a post-Lassie world.

But the history of dogs in cinema does not only represent a development in film itself with the emergence of talkies seeing a decline for dog actors (writers, Weatherwax notes, 'couldn't write smart dialog for a non-human, so they left them out of the main action').¹⁹ The history of dogs in cinema also plays an important part in the history of dogs *per se*. Where there were four eras of dogs in cinema, there are, Weatherwax argues, six stages in the dog's development more generally. Moving through the

social structures that form human experience and presents them through the lens of ethical inquiry. Such books for young people invest in children as free individuals ready to engage in continuity with the world around them: 'Children are free *in themselves* and their life is only the immediate existence of this freedom. Consequently they are not things and cannot be the property of any of their parents or others' (Hegel, 2008/1821, p. 173).

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Midnight Philosophy and Environmental Ethics

*But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.*

Coleridge, 'Frost at Midnight', 1798,¹ 54–64

A land ethic in the making

Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' articulates an environmental ethics in which the 'eternal language' of nature is united with the being and expression of humanity. Ethical concern for human and environment is encapsulated in childhood reminisced and potentialized; hence the temporal shift between 'I dreamt of my sweet birth-place' and 'all seasons shall be sweet to thee'. In part a meditation on the process of philosophical thinking, 'Frost at Midnight' situates 'Abstruser musings' in the exchange between the natural world and human consciousness open to the solitude of a reflective moment; an exchange which for the philosopher involves retrospection – represented by the poet's

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spent childhood – and anticipation – figured in his infant's future and unified in the midnight present. The philosophical vision perceives a childly spirit, open to learning, who 'shalt wander like a breeze/ By lakes and sandy shores' and will be stimulated intellectually by a deep understanding of God and nature: 'Great Universal Teacher! he shall mould/ Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask'. Proximity to and learning through nature foster the interrogative spirit of the philosopher; the child who is stimulated by nature to ask will come to think deeply and reach for the workings of human being. Although 'Frost at Midnight' is not expressly concerned with moral philosophy, there is an ethical mandate in the paternal-philosophical care that draws together 'Dear babe' and 'ancient mountain' into a reciprocal relationship of deep understanding, 'so shalt thou see and hear'.

The environmental ethics expressed in 'Frost at Midnight' falls upon the ear as 'a wild pleasure', identifying a spiritual harmony in which nature and humanity care for each other. Human concern shapes 'Frost at Midnight' and it does not entirely counter Routley and Routley's charge – for charge it is in their view that 'human chauvinism' dominates ethics – that 'popular Western thought and most Western ethical theories assume that both value and morality can ultimately be reduced to matters of interest or concern to the class of humans' (1995/1979, p. 104). Nonetheless, although reflective emphasis rests on the (human) personal pronoun in 'me to that solitude', the ethical value in 'Frost at Midnight' does not privilege humanity with the dominance and colonialism typical of moral humanism. A mysterious nature – 'The frost performs its secret ministry' – enfolds humanity, and human consciousness is presented as one aspect of a much broader, deeper natural world. Limitless is the natural world that draws on eternity, where limited humanity is cradled by the temporal markers of child and fatherhood. Balance in the human-nature relationship is located in the poetic imagination though, for it is here that nature is *managed* and earthed. As Geoffrey Hartman puts it, 'poetry, like the world, can only house an imagination which is a borderer, which will not disdain earthly things. Whatever the imagination's source, its end as poetry is the nature all recognize, and still a nature that leads beyond itself' (2004, pp. 88–9).²

Considering the conditions of ethical environmentalism in children's literature and literary images of childhood – such as those rendered seminally in 'Frost at Midnight' and renovated in Barry Hines's *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1968) – in this chapter, I proceed from the idea that through the figurative expression of poetry and literature the human reader is offered a moral engagement (albeit uneasy and challenging) with the natural world that leads to and beyond her/himself. 'Frost

at Midnight' identifies something more than affinity between child and nature and is not especially interested in advocating a Rousseauian upbringing for children. Certainly there are echoes of Émile's (1762) invective on overcrowding in 'the foul air of the town', which eventually will 'devour' and 'degenerate' the human race, thus, 'it needs renewal, and it is always renewed from the country. Send your children to renew themselves, so to speak, send them to regain in the open fields the strength lost in the foul air of our crowded cities' (1911/1762, p. 26). However, Rousseau mounts a challenge to industrial development and urbanization not evident in 'Frost at Midnight', postulating an unlikely return to an arable society: 'Men are not made to be crowded together in ant-hills, but scattered over the earth to till it' (p. 26). This regressive philosophy seeks to reconstruct a 'lost' environment and is precisely the ethical vision articulated in Michael Foreman's 1972 picture book *Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish*.

Published three years after the first crewed moon landings, through under-lit and densely filled watercolour, *Dinosaurs* visualizes the ruin inflicted on Earth by the human desire for 'unnatural' advancement (and it is in Foreman's pictorial juxtaposition of drear, factory-lined landscapes against the lush colour splashes of a rediscovered paradise that philosophical potential is located). That such scientific endeavour is deemed unnatural is suggested by the proximal comparison of a bowler-hatted man in a tree with birds who can fly naturally: 'The trees filled with birds which flew still nearer the star. "I must fly," said the man' (Foreman, 1974/1972, p. 6³). For many young children of the early 1970s, this sort of challenge to a space race celebrated in *Airfix* models, and hyperbolic news commentaries must have been thought-provoking. *Dinosaurs* makes Joseph DesJardins's point that 'largely through human activity, life on Earth faces the greatest mass extinctions since the end of the dinosaur age sixty-five million years ago' (1997, p. ix), yet Foreman's text falls short of expressing a coherent environmental ethics, through muddled moralizing that resurrects dinosaurs as implausible saviours and guardians of an earthly paradise that is 'to be enjoyed and cared for' by everyone (p. 28); indeed its overbearing closing message is difficult to read against or beyond.

Dinosaurs takes Rousseau's concept of renewal to extremes, and this notion of renewal is common to Rousseau and Coleridge, though 'Frost at Midnight' bypasses a dichotomous battle between urban (adult) and rural (child) via an ethical endeavour that identifies and reinforces a conceptual alliance between childhood – growing into the philosophical maturity of adulthood – and environmental ethics; an alliance that unites the natural world and humanity in a communal vision. The community anticipated here is subtly different from the

humanist community – of which the Hegelian community is a particularly fluid and phenomenological version⁴ – described by J. Baird Callicott, with ‘duties and obligations to family and family members, to municipality and fellow-citizens, to country and countrymen, to humanity and human beings’ (1995/1980, p. 29). Rather, Coleridge’s poetic vision is philosophically compatible with Aldo Leopold’s land ethic, as proposed in the influential and eloquent *A Sand County Almanac* (1949): ‘In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conquerer of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for its fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such’ (Leopold, 1968/1949, p. 204). Just as Coleridge’s faltering poetic exertion reaches philosophical depths that bring him, and frail humanity, into communion with the natural world, so Leopold’s attention to ‘winds and sunsets’ weaves a living philosophy that combines (or more rightly communes) poetry, ethics, naturalism, and environmentalism. Furthermore, as Callicott points out, ‘The biotic community and its correlative land ethic *does not replace* our several human communities and their correlative ethics . . . Rather it *supplements* them’ (1995/1980, p. 29). Leopold recognizes, as does ‘Frost at Midnight’, that for those who cannot live without wild things, experience brings both ‘delights and dilemmas’ and, for Leopold, those dilemmas result in a forceful land ethic, arguing that ‘the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech’ (1968/1949, p. vii).

Notwithstanding the looming shadows of imperialist domination, the complex history of British children’s literature marks a trail heralding Leopold’s notion of a communal land ethic. Glimmerings of his ethical approach can be found in: Captain Frederick Marryat’s *The Children of the New Forest* (1847), wherein historical period is drawn through a naturalistic detail attending to and respecting an environment that reciprocally sustains and protects; or Richard Jefferies’s *Bevis* (1882), which though firmly marked by colonial enterprise builds the natural environment of Bevis’s existence with the same detailed care that styles Bevis’s urgent boat-building: ‘Where there were streaks of white sand sifted by the stream from the mud, he could see the bottom: under the high bank there was a swirl as if the water wrestled with something under the surface: a water-rat, which had watched him coming from a tiny terrace, dived with a sound like a stone dropped quietly in’ (Jefferies, 1989/1882, p. 12); and Arthur Ransome’s *Swallows and Amazons* (1930) in which the blurred borders of the imagined and actual lakeland reflect the children’s emotional, physical, and changing relationship with and perception of a landscape that their cultural traditions once taught them to colonize. The land ethic is ideologically and more visibly reflected in early twentieth-century books, such as *Tarka the Otter*

(1927) by Henry Williamson, Alison Uttley’s *The Country Child* (1931), and B.B.’s *Brendon Chase* (1944); although such books depict a natural history and environment filled with flora and fauna alien to the skunks and chipmunks of Leopold’s *Almanac*, they mirror an ethical enterprise that counters mechanization and desires accord and balance-shift between human and natural world.

British literary tradition heaves with books that draw children into a relationship with the natural world and many of these convey some sort of ecological message or imperative, yet the child-nature relationship is not necessarily a mark of ethical discourse, community, or harmony. The image of child in nature persists partly due to the conceptual affinity between childhood and a natural world imaginatively rendered as benign, instructive, inspirational, comedic, diverting, and physically nourishing, as manifest in poetry and literature written for children from *The Butterfly Ball and the Grasshopper’s Feast* (1807) by William Roscoe, to Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911), or to John Lawrence’s woodcut picture book for young children *This Little Chick* (2002). This Rousseauian and quasi-Romantic affinity⁵ between child and natural world retains its influence in children’s literature of the twenty-first century and it can also be detected in a social environmentalism that draws on this conceptual relationship between child and nature. From the mid-twentieth century, the child-nature alliance took on an increasingly politicized⁶ aspect as momentum grew to highlight environmental issues through propaganda that specifically targeted young people. For example, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) – first established in 1889 to protest against the fashion for wearing feathers in hats – founded the Junior Bird Recorder’s Club (JBRC) in 1943, to be replaced by the Young Ornithologists Club (YOC) with its magazine *Bird Life* in 1965; the British group of Friends of the Earth was established in 1971; and the Young People’s Trust for the Environment was founded in 1982. Of course, international movements also had an impact on British youth culture during this period and most environmental groups – such as the World Wildlife Fund established in 1961; and Greenpeace founded in the early 1970s – have active youth sections. It seems reasonable to suggest that many charities and movements have found their way into the culture of childhood because they appear to validate prevailing concepts of childhood; if children have an affinity to the natural world then they have a vested interest in preserving it and appeals to their ‘nature’ are likely to have impact even on immature humans not widely recognized as moral agents. Furthermore, appealing to a protectionist paradigm of childhood, such sociopolitical interventions promote ‘safe’ ways of alerting children to the conditions of the world in which they live; thus adults are

encouraged to buy stuffed toys, or to 'adopt' creatures under threat of extinction for their children.

Tucking up children with plush pandas though can be seen as a manipulative evasion, working against the impulse of conservation and environmentalism. The conceptual alliance between child and nature can make it difficult honestly to deal with the issues concerning key thinkers in environmental ethics; most obviously the rapacious and barbarous human treatment of the natural world. Recalling the profound relationship between child and land envisioned in 'Frost at Midnight', John Passmore's cautionary response to the Romantic perception of nature is worth sounding:

It is the great importance of Romanticism that it . . . encouraged us to look at nature, to see it otherwise than as a mere instrument. But we do not need to accept the Romantic identification of God with nature in order to accept this way of looking at the world. Indeed, the divinization of nature, even apart from the philosophical problems it raises, dangerously underestimates the fragility of so many natural processes and relationships, a fragility to which the ecological movement has drawn such forcible attention. (1995/1975, p. 141)

Fragility then can be located in the natural world and also in the child's relationship to it, a point powerfully made in *A Kestrel for a Knave* when Billy finds the kestrel hawk he has trained with such care "in 'tbin'" (Hines, 1969/1968, p. 150). When Billy changes his mother with a lack of concern over the demise of Kes, her response expresses a sociocultural negation of the child-nature trope that also underscores its impossibility: "Course I'm bothered. But it's only a bird. You can get another can't you?" (p. 151). Running to escape from the horror of this moment, Billy dives into a narrative rewind, reeling through the violent memories that define his short life until, abruptly and finally: "He buried the hawk in the field just behind the shed; went in, and went to bed" (p. 160). A complex web of moral responsibility weaves around the kestrel's death and Billy's brutal upbringing; yet it is clear that child and bird are fiercely savage and easily damaged by the desires of humanity that tether them. Ideals embedded in pastorals of childhood⁷ can mislead and adult memories of childhood lost are forged frequently in the union of child and landscape or creature, erasing (though not truly forgetting) the knowledge that nature is not always benign; hence the concept of natural evil discussed by Mary Midgley and Lars Svendsen in their investigations of evil. Robert Elliot takes this idea a step further, conceding that not 'all natural phenomena have value in virtue of being natural'; he points out that disease is 'natural in a straightforward sense' and 'is certainly not good', and that 'Natural phenomena such as fires, hurricanes,

volcanic eruptions can totally alter landscapes and alter them for the worse' (1995/1982, p. 82). Elliot stresses that environmental ethics is not grounded in an idealization of nature which would undermine its pursuit of a right consideration of the natural world and this emphasis forges links between environmental positions that might seem opposed.

In his deft piece of philosophical (re)positioning that situates Leopold's land ethic between the concerns of animal liberationists and moral humanists, Callcott points out that animal liberation/rights seemed to overshadow environmental ethics 'in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when 'many people seemed to conflate the two' (1995/1980, p. 29). I shall go on to reveal through contemplation of moral questions posed in novels such as *Watership Down* (1972) by Richard Adams and *The Cry of the Wolf* (1990) by Melvin Burgess that it is possible to trace alliances and distinctions between these movements. Before moving on to explore ethically aware books for children though, I pause to consider one of the most persuasive voices calling for animal rights in the 1970s, since many writers for children from Captain Marryat to John Burningham respond to related concerns. In his confrontational *Animal Liberation* (1975), Peter Singer makes his case with an ethical force that is difficult to ignore:

The tyranny of human over non-human animals . . . has caused and today is still causing an amount of pain and suffering that can only be compared with that which resulted from the centuries of tyranny by white humans over black humans. The struggle against this tyranny is a struggle as important as any of the moral and social issues that have been fought over in recent years. (1991/1975, p. 1)

Singer's comparative use of an ongoing human struggle – which has brought about ideological and social change – draws the implied reader to his position from a point that s/he can relate to as a human 'speciesist';⁸ for *Animal Liberation* asks its reader seriously to reconsider the very foundations of moral goodness (which for Singer precludes any practice that involves animal cruelty, whether it be eating meat or wearing fur coats). Singer's thorough evaluation of the animal rights movement and of human processes that involve animals, such as farming and scientific experimentation, leads him to an ethical model in which non-humans are accorded the same rights as humans. Accordingly, "We ought to consider the interests of animals because they have interests and it is unjustifiable to exclude them from the sphere of moral concern" (p. 244). Of particular relevance here, Singer discusses the childhood influences directing 'our attitudes to animals'; that 'begin to form when we are very young, and . . . are

dominated by the fact that we begin to eat meat at an early age' (p. 213). Singer asserts that any aversion that children might feel to eating meat is typically quashed by parental persuasion, additionally pointing to cultural shifts that are increasingly evasive about the animals we eat.

Singer argues that 'not so long ago' in a literary diet of nursery rhymes such as 'Three Blind Mice' 'there was no inconsistency between what [children] were taught and what they ate' (p. 214). Whether nursery rhymes are received in the literal manner suggested by Singer is debatable, yet his point seems valid in relation to a book such as *The Children of the New Forest*, involving detailed descriptions of deer hunting and preparing venison for the table: '“This is a fine beast, and the venison is now getting very good. Now you must see me do the work of my craft.” Jacob then cut the throat of the animal, and afterwards cut off its head, and took out its bowels' (Marryat, 1994/1847, p. 43). In common with many early works of children's literature in tune with the natural world, *The Children of the New Forest* advocates a hunting ethic based on human sustenance and requirement, although there is a colonial pleasure taken in hunting game discordant with Singer's notions of species equality. Marryat's historical novel is precise and practical in the details of survival, serving the conventions of its historical endeavour. *Bevis* also belongs to a hunting history of children's literature, although the relish, regularity, and brutality with which the boys dispatch waterfowl, rabbits, and an otter far exceeds their requirements for survival on New Formosa. Alternatively, B.B.'s *Brendon Chase* presents the natural world into which the boys escape through a philosophical poeticism that encourages deeper reflection on the human relationship with the environment. B.B.'s paean to a vanishing landscape and changing human-nature relations accords with Leopold's land ethic which allows for the respectful hunting of game. Leopold's 'sketches here and there' in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) contain a sustained eulogy on fly fishing, for example, in which 'I sit in happy meditation on my rock, pondering, while my line dries again, upon the ways of trout and men' (1968/1949, p. 39). Callicott accepts that Leopold's validation of hunting could seem contradictory in a communal land ethic (1995/1980, pp. 33–4), but careful examination of Leopold's ethic (and the 'sketches here and there' that lead into the ethical proposal) reveals that hunting can be necessary to the sustenance of a healthy biosphere concerned with communal health, rather than the requirements of human or non-human individuals, though hunting is only permitted with reservations related to safeguarding the balance of species in the preservation of the biosphere. So, although Singer's moral vision does not allow for the hunter's communion with nature espoused by B.B. and Leopold,

there is an ethical integrity in their approach that Singer claims is not typical of books for the youngest readers:

British books, like *The Farm* in the best-selling Ladybird series, convey [an] impression of rural simplicity, showing the hen running freely in an orchard with her chicks, and all the other animals living with their offspring in spacious quarters. With this kind of early reading it is not surprising that children grow up believing that even if animals 'must' die to provide human beings with food, they live happily until that time comes. [. . .] To alter the stories about animals that we read to our children will not be so easy, since cruelty is not an ideal subject for children's stories. (1991/1975, p. 215)

Singer was writing in 1975, and similar books have replaced Ladybird's *The Farm* (now a collectable piece of childhood nostalgia), John Lawrence's *Little Chick* among them; Lawrence's beautifully rendered woodcuts are unlikely to escape Singer's accusation of dishonesty. In the United States, the Humane Farm Association produces books for children that seek to demonstrate how animals *should* be treated and to show that not all farms are idyllic, though books that deal with the realities of animal slaughter for the youngest readers are rare.

A range of books published recently target the child as conservationist, taking a pedagogic approach, such as David Bellamy's *101 Ways to Save the Earth?* (2008), Charlotte Voake's *A Little Guide to Trees* (2009), and *Carbon Monster* by Katherine Wheatley (2011). Informative publications such as this fit within a wider paradigm of environmental education that has found its way onto the UK National Curriculum via Key Stage 2 Science and Geography and they link to 'Sustainable Schools', initially a government initiative following the first 'Education Sustainable Development Action Plan' published in 2003. These books emphasize prominent environmental issues, but still they lack the philosophical impetus of picture books for young children that seek to highlight and challenge the cultural evasion described by Singer, such as Anthony Browne's *Zoo* (1992) or Alexis Deacon's *Slow Loris* (2002). Both deal with zoological captivity, echoing Singer's ethical concern that animals should be treated as individuals; Browne and Deacon propose in different ways that the rights accorded to humans to live outside cages should also be conferred upon animals. In *Practical Ethics*, Singer's problem with Leopold's land ethic and the deep ecology¹⁰ that values ecosystems 'as a whole' is grounded in the fact that these ethical systems do not allow for or recognize individual rights: in Singer's view 'ethics of deep ecology thus fail to yield persuasive answers to questions about the value of the lives of individual living beings' (1993, p. 282). In his subtly powerful observation of zoo