



English Studies in Latin America

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Source: *White Rabbit: English Studies in Latin America*, No. 4 (December 2012)

ISSN: 0719-0921

Published by: Facultad de Letras, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

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Green Books and Fun

Andrea Casals Hill¹

The aim of this article is to make evident the opportunity that global concerns about the condition of life on our planet and the flourishing of reading perspectives such as *ecocriticism* or *green studies* offer with regards to the study, understanding and promotion of young readers' literature and literacy in English. We will begin by briefly stating what conventionally has been associated with a complex category such as children's literature. Once this has been framed, we will summarize what is currently understood as *ecocriticism* or *green studies* in order to further present an overview of texts for children and young readers within the Anglophone literary tradition that may be read through this perspective.

KEYWORDS: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, ECOCRITICISM, GREEN STUDIES

The books we read at an early age make an impression on us for better or for worse. The images present in a text stay with us through time and somehow structure our perception, framing our capacity to see certain things, and dismiss others. In the introduction to *Memory and Landscape* Simon Schama argues that our concept or image of nature is formed in childhood, and it is strongly influenced by the books we read. Later in life these images find their counterpart in the real world, sometimes in nature, sometimes in the city. Schama acknowledges how the Thames River became a line of space and time as a tradition he received from reading Kipling and Conrad. For Schama, "[t]o go upstream was ... to go backward: from metropolitan din to ancient silence; westward toward the

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sources of the waters, the beginnings of Britain in the Celtic limestone" (5). Schama's words are filled with nostalgia, not only for the landscape evoked, but also for the space² when these images—his concept of the river--were originated; that is, the space of the child reader actually reading about remote places and time, in this case, reading about the places Kipling wished to present to the British living miles away in Europe. In this sense, Schama acknowledges the strong influence of the books he read as a child not only because of what was written, but precisely because he read such texts as a child.

Schama is using a personal experience in order to support his hypothesis--that our concept or image of nature is formed in childhood, and it is strongly influenced by the books we read--. In order to understand what he is actually stating, it seems adequate to stop and discuss the kind of books children read and what childhood is. Once children's literature and 'the child reader' have been framed, we will attempt to do a general green reading of books in the English tradition that may influence young readers in the way Schama suggests. The books discussed in this article are an arbitrary variety of books written in English, that go from the Victorian period to present. These books may have an impact on the way young readers respond to nature and the environment--as a child and later in life--, because of elements such as the representation of the nature as a soothing paradise in secret gardens and faraway islands, or the need to escape from the social urban environment into a wonderland or the place of the wild things; the tension between human interests against animal needs (rabbits, piglets and foxes in farmyard fantasies); human greediness and consumerism against survival or extinction of certain species (the Lorax, gorillas in the South Pacific, wolves in Alaska); wilderness versus civilization, among other topics.

Defining children's literature is not an easy task because both notions involved, that of children and that of literature, are not fixed categories. On the one hand, the concept of literature may move from any story told by means of printed text, whether it is narrative, dramatic or poetic, and from fiction to stories that rely on facts. Literature, particularly if it is meant for children, may include pictures or prints, whether it is monochromatic or full color, realistic or totally imaginative, from complementary illustrations, almost dispensable drawings, to graphic novels and picture books that

² Timothy Morton calls this space 'ambience', which refers to the physical environment, but also to the time and circumstances evoked: "[a]mbience denotes a sense of circumambient, surrounding, world. It suggests something material and physical, though somewhat intangible... as if space itself had a material aspect" (33). Morton also uses this concept to refer to the time and space of the actual writing act, which particularly nature writers tend to evoke, but it may also suggest the time and space of the reading experience.

tell the story through visual images. In Peter Hunt's *Children's Literature* he concedes that at present, almost anything meant to amuse may be regarded children's literature, and that would include printed written texts to graphic art, to stories existing on a wide variety of physical and technological devices, which may also involve different degrees of interaction, such as video clips and games. Consequently, Hunt acknowledges a slow shift from the traditionally pedagogical function assigned to children's literature towards timidly admitting it as a mere source of entertainment (3). In this article, however, we will explore literature for children that comes in the format of a book, whether it is printed on paper or a digital book.

Following the preceding statement that defining children's literature is not an easy task because neither literature nor childhood are fixed categories, let us now discuss childhood. What we understand and value as infancy has changed over the years and changes from one culture to another, and the concept of children, childhood and the value a given society assigns it at a certain time, influences what adults in that society offer their children to read. Following Hunt, childhood seems to be what grownups in society want it to be, it is also related to what adults in society have lost and long for, such as a period of non-responsibility, but also a state that can be manipulated and that accounts for the major pedagogical function of literature for children.

Seth Lerer, in *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*, argues that the Edwardian period is relevant in children's literature for its profuse production and major influence and "[i]n many ways, modern children's literature remains an Edwardian phenomenon. This period defined the ways in which we still think of children's books and of the child's imagination. During its few years, the age produced a canon of authors" (Lerer, 253), such as J. M. Barrie, Rudyard Kipling, Edith Nesbit and Beatrix Potter. Moreover, says Lerer, childhood and the Edwardian period share common traits, and authors who grew up reading the stories produced in that period echo, in their own prose, their longing for such period of innocence and merry garden parties. Lerer elaborates on this argument with the example of C. S. Lewis who was a child growing up and reading in the Edwardian era. According to Brian Sibley, when Lewis started thinking about writing for children, he "told a friend that he was thinking of writing a children's book in the tradition of E. Nesbit" (21). Therefore, as a grown up, Lewis portrays the Pevensie children who escape the city and the war towards the countryside, and further escape into the land of fantasy. In his novel, the children not only explore other geographic areas, real and urban or magical and natural, but they also move back in time, in remembrance of the good old days.

Texts for children, however, are not only about nostalgia, they also involve pedagogical functions such as enhancing literacy, teaching values and ways of socializing. Hunt notes that Canadian critic Perry Nodelman is surprised that texts for children are valued for the effect they produce in the reader, whereas in other academic fields critics do not judge books for how they affect the audience (2); that is, texts for adults do not comply with these pedagogical functions. In the *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956), for example, the narrator systematically and explicitly comments to the reader on what good boys and girls should know and do. However, there is a gap from stories told, performed or read equally to children and adults, to texts written specifically for children. These go from legends, epics and myths, and traditional fairy tales passed on orally from generation to generation at family and social gatherings, to penny-and-dime novels and chapbooks shared in Britain by adults and children regardless of the content. In other words, there is a great leap in terms of the content of stories told by means of oral tradition to that of printed texts. Hunt suggests that as British society and its middle class evolved, together with the decline of child mortality plus families having less children, childhood became more protected; from then on, the contents of the texts children were exposed to, differed from that of the books adults read. Together with this, as literacy levels increased and children became valued and respected as an audience, editors noticed the commercial potential of this age group, and consequently requested authors to begin writing specifically for children.

The identification of this target age group helps explain the progression of children's literature as a specific genre and frames the scope of this article. At present, in Western society children begin to read and write at around age 7, though they are exposed to books and stories from a much earlier age. Young readers, on the other end of the spectrum framed by what we are trying to define as children's literature, include teen-age readers, though the boundaries that set young adults as a category apart from late teens, is not clear. In this article, however, we will assume as readers of children's literature teenagers still living under parental care.

Before we move on to *green books*, let's look at Dr Seuss' *Green Eggs and Ham* which helps illustrate the changes children's literature has experienced. While *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960) is written with only 50 words in very simple, rhythmical and rhyming language meant to teach children how to read, avoiding difficult words, helping learners to foretell what's coming up next, enhancing their confidence in their own reading competence, *Green Eggs* is mostly entertaining. Yet, *Green Eggs* allows the reader to think about a specific situation, prompting him/her to accept new and diverse

experiences, like finally eating green eggs and green ham. In other words, though the book is amusing, it still complies with the traditional pedagogical functions of children's literature: "to educate children into the discipline of reading" (Hunt 62) and to encourage valued behavior (in this case, daring to experience new situations). Moreover, Dr Seuss pushes the traditional realistic prints found in Victorian and Edwardian children's books to playful non-realistic illustrations similar to those of cartoons, broadening the possibilities of what had been included in a book for children (realistic prints) until mid 20th century.

Though we cannot argue that Dr Seuss' choice of color for Sam's fancy dish is intended for any other reason than making it unappealing, it is a happy coincidence for the purpose of this article. *Green studies* or *ecocriticism* is the academic response in the field of literature to current concerns for the health of our planet. In very simple terms, what *green critics* do is ask texts questions such as: how does the text portray the cultural idea of the environment and nature? What values with regards to nature does the text represent? Is the setting just a background that serves the plot or does the environment influence the outcome of the story? Is the setting only a metaphor of the emotions of the characters, or does the environment reveal a mood of its own (which plays a role in the development of the story)? What status is the non-human world given in the text? How have natural tropes represented in literature influenced the way society perceives nature?, and so on. *Ecocritics* also give a canonic status to texts that haven't been traditionally included in the literary canon such as nature writing and travel journals. Furthermore, some critics try to identify texts that may be defined as *ecoliterature*, that is, texts that are *eco centered*, and try to speak up for nature or are written from the point of view of nature or non-human creatures, for example, Jack London's *White Fang* (1906). Within environmental criticism there are very specific areas as well. There are academics exploring the connections expressed in literature between: feminism and ecology under the name of ecofeminism; between colonialism and the depletion of natural resources; between poverty and polluted, deprived or overcrowded habitats, called environmental justice; academics exploring the possibility to give voice in literature to nature and animals, and the possibility to produce texts from an eco-centered perspective. In more philosophical terms, ecocritics reflect on the implications of language understood as ontological and nature as an objective or subjective reality; the implications of language in our understanding of nature; the possibility to regard language as an environment in itself; the human sense of language as a dwelling place, and so on.

By now it is likely that you--our reader--are mentally skimming through your memories of childhood books, thinking how the setting here, the animal character there, a story of a big storm or your favorite character lost in the dark forest influence your perception of the natural world. Some texts seem very obvious: Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903), Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), Seuss' *The Lorax* (1971), Craighead George's *Julie of the Wolves* (1972), and so on. But the status of nature, the relation of the civilized society towards native groups, the natural versus the urban conflict, how the environment is foregrounded or not, change radically from one text to another, and the message is not always as *ecocentered* as it may seem. In Kipling's "Rikki tikki tavi", for example, an initial guess that *The Jungle Book* must be an *ecocentered* text is confronted. The little mongoose expresses colonial thought, saying his mom had told him that if he ever ran into humans, he'd better impress them positively so that he would be taken into their household, which would be the best kind of life a mongoose could hope for. There is an obvious imperialist message: *civilized is better than barbaric*, which also implies that indoors and urban is better than the wild, plus the fact that the setting where most of the conflict among the native animals takes place is only a simulacra of the natural environment, since it is located within a garden which is a cultivated space.

In a different way, Beatrix Potter does not include personified animal characters only as a means to address the young audience of which she was very much aware--*small books for tiny hands*--, but rather she presents the animal world and its natural laws in a realistic manner, which is a characteristic that differentiates her work from the traditional children's animal stories and fables; that is, though Peter Rabbit (1902) and siblings dress up and play as naughty human kids, the mother does not conceal that their father became a meal for humans. Similarly, though Jeremy Fisher (1906) is dressed like a man, he is no less vulnerable to a hungry trout, making an explicit reference to the food chain in nature.

In *The Poetics of Childhood* Roni Natov discusses literature of childhood and the green world. In this merge (child/nature) there is a double retreat or sense of nostalgia, for the lost innocence of childhood, and the lost pastoral state:

[t]he green world suggests loss, and the longing for the return to an earlier state, real or imagined ... The movement associated with pastoral, a retreat from and a return to the world ... The child begins in innocence; the story of her maturation may be

seen as a retreat from the origins, and the movement to the green world may represent the return, the resting place of the story. (91-2)

To support this statement, Natov discusses Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1910), which she regards as a book "about the healing power of the green world in which the darkest secrets ... can emerge and begin the restoration of the unity to all fractures created by civilization" (93)³. Natov argues that in this book, nature is presented as "the holding environment for all children" (95). That is, in this story the garden is a physical, actual environment where children are safe to move about, where community recovers, not because the garden represents the lost Eden but because it is an actual paradise. It is interesting to note, though, that as in "Rikki tikki tavi", the healing outdoors space in Burnett's text is not actual nature, but a human-organized and cultivated area that imitates a natural environment.

Following Natov's idea of nature as "the holding environment for all children" (95), in Michael Morpurgo's *Kensuke's Kingdom* (1999), a teenager is swept off his parents' yacht. The boy is rescued by a Japanese elderly man who has been living alone on an island since the atomic bombs—the man retreats from the civilized world in order to escape its atrocities—. It is a story of friendship and respect that encourages the reader to learn to listen to the other side of the story, but it also stimulates the reader to learn to observe and respect the natural world, like Kensuke has done living on the island. As in *The Secret Garden*, this little island in the South Pacific is a protective environment for its creatures while menace comes from overseas: it is human greediness that threatens natural life and harmony on the island.

But stories of childhood, Natov argues, may also present the green world as the antipastoral world of children's nightmare, the land of fear. Alice (1865), for example, reaches Wonderland in her dreams, and though the experience of reversal, Natov suggests, encourages disconnection and escape from the Victorian sense of order, at times Alice's life is threatened and she fears. At other times she wants to escape and there seems to be no way out. Though Wonderland is a place other than the 'civilized', and represents an escape, Wonderland is not a natural surrounding and the rules

³ Natov's argument assumes the romantic view that there was a time when humans were in unity with nature and that time is placed before civilization. However, there is no agreement among academics as to which is the limestone, the turning point that sets apart these two conditions, natural vs. civilized: either humans handling fire, humans settling from nomadic to agrarian lives, the development of writing, exaltation of the rational mind and awareness of our 'exceptional' features, the industrial revolution, the development of capitalism, etc.

that govern it contribute to the uncanny feeling of nightmares; Wonderland is not a comforting healing place, though it does seem to liberate Alice from her internal and social demands.

Almost 100 years later, in *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) Maurice Sendak explores the world of childhood dreams. As in Alice's adventure, Max reaches the place where the wild things are in a dream, but instead of a journey underground, he enters a forest and sails the sea until he reaches the wild things' island. He needs to go into his own wild side to escape social expectation, just like Alice, but what he finds are creatures and monsters born from wild imagination representing his own need to learn to cultivate his character. In this story we find a setting that is basically a location for the plot to develop, but does not contribute to the action, other than the fact that it is an island, away from social control, that may be reached travelling through a forest and the sea. The setting does not offer the protagonist or reader any insight into what it means to be literally out in the wilderness. Yet, the format of the book and the use of space do suggest that just as the illustrations overflow the limited space of the page to express Max's intense experience among the monsters, Max needs to run away from the limited space of expected behavior in the urban civilized environment. However, in another book Sendak does adventure into contemporary concerns for the green world, expanding the readers' ecological awareness in spite of its apparent nonsense. Natov argues that *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* (1967) "begins with an existential quest for meaning" which is transferred into action as "a search for what might lie beyond" the comfortable life that the main character has. With an intuition that ... "[t]here must be more to life than having everything", Jennie begins her journey (Natov 168). In a subtle manner, Sendak points at greediness and self-compliance as the causes of the exhaustion of the planet: ironically, the polite terrier that wonders about the meaning of life in a consumerist society, Jennie, voraciously eats everything she can get hold of, and never seems to be satisfied. Jennie not only needs to consume all the food that is offered to her or simply exposed in front of her, but she also becomes a collector of 'experiences'. More explicitly, in *The Lorax* Seuss caricatures depletion of natural resources for the sake of meaningless unlimited economic growth.

From a different perspective, still inviting the reader to reflect on our apparently civilized manners and motivations, Anthony Browne depicts gorillas. In their resemblance to humans, Browne's characters appear somewhat grotesque, and yet, the defamiliarization this feature offers, allows the readers to identify with the attitudes portrayed. In a story like *Voices in the Park* (2001) Browne plays with the setting, which evidently reflects the character's mood, yet—as in *The Secret*

Garden--it is outside, in the park, where communication happens and some comfort is found. Furthermore, Browne seems aware of what Simon Schama describes as our programming to see what we see: "it seems right to acknowledge that it is our shaping [or pre-formed] perception that makes the difference" (10), so each character in *Voices in the Park* experiences the park from his or her own perception code. Another example of Browne's awareness of the human capacity to see what we learn to sort out is the story *Little Beauty* (2009). This is a story about a gorilla in captivity who needs a friend; the zoo keepers offer the gorilla a kitten with the warning "don't eat it!", assuming the gorilla's brutal behavior against the delicate domestic pet, thus, portraying human incapacity to see beyond our expectations. Watching King Kong on TV being harassed by humans on airplanes elicits the gorilla's indignation. The keepers suppose it was the gorilla that broke the TV--yes he did--but they have no clue that it was a manmade production that triggered this violent reaction. They all laugh when the little kitten takes the blame, offering an unanticipated outcome where expectations are reversed: 'the beast' has been gentle all along the story, 'the beauty' pretends to have been brutal, and actual brutality comes from forcing a gorilla to live in a reduced space, limited to sitting on a couch to watch TV.

There is a fabulous contribution of animal picture books by Australian writers and illustrators enhancing Australia's unique fauna. In the work of authors such as Mem Fox and Sheena Knowles we find native Australian animal characters. *Possum Magic* (1983) by Mem Fox is the story of a possum named Hush that is magically made invisible as a way to protect her from her predators. The story is a catalogue of Australian animals and a gastronomic guide through different cities, enhanced by Julie Vivas' delicate illustrations. From an ecocritical perspective, the story elicits sympathy and curiosity for possums, particularly for their eating habits. It is interesting to note, however, that Hush's indivisibility is solved when the possums go to the city to eat typical Australian food, suggesting that this nocturnal tiny marsupial is non-existent if it has not been recorded by urban, civilized eyes. Yet, Fox's story, going back to Schama's argument that we learn to sort out things, pushing certain things forward and dismissing others, suggests that through this reading, young readers may become aware of the existence of these little mammals, which may be endangered if we ignore them, or protected if we acknowledge their needs.

Edwina the Emu (2007), illustrated by Rod Clement and written by Sheena Knowles, fantasizes about the best job for an emu. The story ridicules the emu pretending to perform human activities--as animals in many children's stories do--and though she is a captive emu at the zoo, it

turns out she discovers that the natural and instinctive activity, hatching her eggs, is her best job (a topic that could also be analyzed under an ecofeminist perspective). The moment of insight is when she is working as a waiter and a client asks for eggs. This scene humorously portrays the tension between ordinary widespread human habits like eating eggs and major survival behavior in the natural world like hatching eggs. As in Browne's books, this somewhat grotesque but sympathetic animal character allows the reader to identify such tension.

Other books for children have explored this tension before, for example, *Charlotte's Web* (E.B. White, 1952) and *Babe the Sheep-Pig* (Dick King-Smith, 1983) describe farm life, questioning the fate of farm animals on behalf of human interest. Yet another interesting aspect to take into account from an ecological perspective is the solution to these pigs' survival needs which is indeed a very anthropocentric resolution. What eventually saves these pigs from the same fate of Peter Rabbit's father—becoming a meal for humans—is language as we know it: Charlotte spins the right words in the right time, and Babe speaks the right words to the sheep.

Other texts that contribute to identifying the tension between animal interests versus human interests are Dahl's *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1970) and the fox in *The Little Prince* (1943). Both these foxes need to deal with farmers' vigilance in order to survive, arousing empathy from the readers towards them, putting our carnivorous hunger under the spotlight, though in a different style from Sendak's voracious dog, Jennie, who wonders *there must be more to life than eating up anything I can*. Funny enough, though these foxes seem lovable to the reader, they sneak into hen houses to fetch eggs, and just like they need to deceive the farmers' vigilance, they would need to put up with Edwina's fury if they messed up with *her* eggs!

Ursula Le Guin openly discusses this tension in the book *Gifts* (2004)⁴ where farmers of the Uplands in the Western Shore possess magic gifts that people from the city fear (revealing the civilized-barbaric tension as well). Gry has been granted her family ability to call for animals, but she refuses to use her talent to summon beasts for hunters' amusement. Similarly, Miyax, in *Julie of the Wolves* survives in the wilderness not only because a wolf pack adopts her (like Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*, though in Julie's case, after patient observation, she works her way to being adopted by them), but also because she can hunt for herself in the traditional Eskimo fashion, yet she is scandalized when *gussaks*--white men--come to hunt for the sake of killing, with no purpose at all other than the

⁴ *Gifts* is the first of three books in the cycle *Annals of the Western Shore* by Le Guin.

pleasure of hitting the target. In these two stories, as well as in *Kensuke's Kingdom*, when the gorilla hunters arrive, authors share Sendak's concern: *there must be more to life than complacent depleting consumerism.*

In the Introduction of the book *Environmentalism in the Realm of Science-Fiction and Fantasy Literature*⁵, Chris Baratta, following Patrick D. Murphy, discusses how fantasy literature and science fiction, especially dystopian futurist texts, offer a chance to become aware of possible scenarios on the future of our planet because of the estrangement science fiction allows, permitting the reader to ponder realities that otherwise would be overlooked or dismissed if they were perceived as too threatening, if they were too close to his/her reality. This detachment allows the reader to consider what the world may look like if we go on 'developing' as we do now. Likewise, this otherness of the worlds created in science fiction and fantasy allow the reader to contrast such scenarios with our current environment.

Very briefly, let us look at two examples of this in literature read by teenagers. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's portrayal of Mordor's depletion of forests in preparation for war, exhibits criticism against nature's devastation as a consequence, in this case, of the war industry. The Ents, ancient gigantic talking trees, respond to this violence by the way of an alliance with the Free Peoples of the Middle-earth (1954, 1955). From an environmental justice perspective, a more contemporary text for young adults like Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008) discusses the tension between the 'developed civilized', indulging and sophisticated urban society that nevertheless depends on--and exploits--the underdeveloped and undermined villagers who work the land.

The books mentioned above are an arbitrary yet open list of texts for children and young readers that allow a *green reading* which we have very briefly hinted. Summing up, Dr Seuss' texts enhance literacy as well as values, in *Green Eggs* be it diversity, in *The Lorax*, and in Sendak's *Higglety...* greediness and never ending consumerism are being criticized. In beautiful prose, Kipling presents foreign lands, peoples and fauna, and though the talking animals are an all-time children's favorite that certainly enables children to become fond of natural life, Kipling cannot avoid an underlying colonialist perspective that stresses the binary oppositions civilized versus wild. In her naturalistic aesthetics and evolutionary perspective, Potter portrays the chain of life as it is. Later, the

⁵ At the 2011 NeMLA Annual Convention Chris Baratta chaired a panel named "Environmentalism in the Realm of Science-Fiction and Fantasy Literature". This panel later led into the book by the same name (2012). In this article, I am referring to the introduction of the book and my own conclusions from what I heard in the panel.

Australian authors mentioned above, together with Le Guin, present the tension between human eating habits and the natural chain of life. Yet, Le Guin, like Craighead George, explore, among other topics, the meaning of hunting as a sport for personal satisfaction rather than as a means for survival. Closer to the pastoral tradition, as Natov points out, authors like Burnett and Morpurgo present nature as a holding and healing environment. And stemming from close observation of animal life, Browne ‘gorillizes’ humans in order to show us traits present in gorillas, like the balance between tenderness and strength, that we, self-confident humans, seem to lack.

Without much effort, we could add many other texts and authors such as Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* books (1926) and Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* for the soothing pastoral environment, though *The Wind in the Willows* may be put under the spotlight for the apparent nostalgia of the pastoral that is strained by the advancement of technology and comfortable bourgeois life; Eric Carle’s books depicting a hungry caterpillar, a tiny seed, a busy spider, which foster child-animal bond (1969, 1970, 1984); novels on children striving to survive in nature as in *Island of Blue Dolphin* (1960); stories about children, or adults, actually bonding to animals as in farmyard fantasies, and so many other texts that we invite you to explore and question from an eco-centered perspective. Our suggestion is for you to explore the green potential of texts for children and young readers not included in the overviews above.

As we discussed previously, the tradition of texts for children has always had a pedagogical intention, not only in terms of enhancing literacy, but also as a means to socialize and teach values. Entertainment as an objective hardly stands on its own. Within this tradition and given the fact that from the 1970s on, after the awakening of the modern ecological movements in the US and the UK⁶, school curricula started to include issues such as the effects of pollution or deforestation, biodiversity and planet friendly habits, among others. Since then, young generations have increasingly become more sensitive to these topics. Children are already enthusiastic ecologists, so introducing a green reading perspective or offering a variety of eco-friendly texts and activities is sound with their ecologic sensitivity and may capture further interest in reading. As all books read in childhood, they contribute to promoting values and attitudes and from our ecologic perspective, we hope that they help to increase active awareness for the well-being of our planet and all our fellow creatures. Offering young readers a large variety of *green books* seems a wise decision, not only

⁶ Rachel Carson’s book *The Silent Spring* (1967) and James Lovelock’s *Gaia* theory (1972) are regarded as the milestones in this awakening.

because reading about topics that interest them is more likely to hook them to good reading habits, but also because more eco-centered texts are expected to reinforce planet friendly choices once these books have provided the images young readers will carry into adulthood, as Schama says.

Hope you will try reading through *green eyes*... could you? would you?... try it, try it and you may... like reading green books for fun!⁷

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⁷ Taken and adapted from Dr Seuss' *Green Eggs and Ham*.

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