Biophilia and the Wonder of Picture Books

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FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD, picture books have captivated us with a spectrum of characters playing out plot lines in places both far and near. According to Cullinan (1989), "The content may be realistic, fanciful, or factual, but the format of text and illustration combined defines it as a picture book" (p. 29). More specifically, many of these books, with their aesthetic and efferent elements of words and images, have come together to evoke and inspire our love of Nature and respect for the potential role Nature can play in our daily lives—formally known as biophilia (Wilson, 1994). A poetic phrase describing a darkened sky, the grass lawn beneath the leap of a child's feet, the flashlights of fireflies illuminating the evening air, and much more have all provided us with possibilities of reflecting and connecting to the natural settings around us. In a back-and-forth sequence within the pages that follow, each of us presents and responds with both word and image to three picture books that have all played roles in reaffirming our love and respect of the natural world. English (2000) posits that children's literature enables significant adult learning through experience, and furthermore states, "Writers of this literature are often resolving adult dilemmas when writing and, more specifically, they are seeking to understand and explain their own relationships and interpersonal issues when they write" (p. 14).

It is our hope that this form of personal transaction will be useful to educators, within and without the classroom, who wish to delve into their own texts as sources of biophilia. Teachers who want students to engage meaningfully with Nature in relation to children's literature relationships will be better equipped for the journey if their own teacher experiences are well understood to themselves. While our written journeys are quite personal, it is our hope that we join James Joyce (as quoted in Ellmann, 1983) who, in defending his particular love for writing about Dublin said, "In the particular is contained the universal" (p. 505). So, in this spirit we offer our particulars below. We couple these particulars with a few key questions that educators can use as they navigate either the children's literature texts we have chosen or, more likely, their own experiences as they relate to ours. Our work is theoretically grounded in Rosenblatt's reader response, methodologically supported by auto-bibliography as a form of narrative inquiry, and

grounded in biophilia. As Mackey (2016) posits, the mingling of the texts and places that we encounter every day emerge in the perspectives and actions we use to make sense of our worlds.

Biophilia

Georgia O'Keefe "used to sleep on the roof in a sleeping bag in order to awaken under the vast multitude of desert stars, to watch the pale, cold moon shadows on the cliffs and see the first morning light touch what she called 'my wonderful world'" (Lisle, 1980, p. 236). One day, off the Atlantic coast of Florida, standing on a shallow beach at low tide, Annie Dillard saw what appeared to be a hundred ravenous sharks passing the beach near the mouth of a tidal river. Dillard (1974) stated, "The sight held awesome wonders: power and beauty, grace tangled in a rapture with violence" (p. 10). The experiences that both authors encountered would be considered examples of biophilia. According to Wilson (1994), biophilia, the word he coined in 1974, is "the inborn affinity human beings have for other forms of life, an affiliation evoked, according to circumstance, by pleasure, or a sense of security, or awe, or even fascination blended with revulsion" (p. 360). If given the choice, people often prefer natural environments or human made ones accented with trees, water, and other vegetation (Kahn, 1997). People will even travel, sometimes at great distances and at their own expense, to encounter such natural worlds as beaches, mountains, and even deserts.

Focusing on the effects of making a school yard into a school garden, Stravrianos (2016) reported that people's connections to nature can be facilitated by an education program that supports such an activity. More specifically, a school garden can be a complex reality, but it can also provide a framework that "provides opportunities for exploration of and connection to the natural, cultural, historical and social inheritance of the community" (p. 424). In particular, it also has the potential to foster self-esteem and a happier outlook on school, as well as develop positive relationships among both students and staff. As part of a four-part series, Hall and Knuth (2019) reviewed a substantial body of peer-reviewed research regarding the emotional and health benefits of incorporating plants into biophilic design for built environments, from homes to businesses. Benefits range from anxiety and stress reduction to decreased depression and enhanced productivity and attention. Hall and Knuth posit that, by bringing the benefits of plants to people's attention, they would be in a better position to consider the important role that plants play in the psychological and physical well-being of their lives.

In a quest to make collective meaning of their own familial relationships with the natural world, Bai et al. (2010) came to consider visual art, storytelling and poetry-making as navigational devices that have the capacity to lead us home to biophilia—the heart of environmental education. Using these vehicles of expression, together they wrestled with the concept of biophilia and the struggles they encountered on how it came to be situated among their lives. All four authors commented that "ecology is the art of homecoming for the souls lost, not in wilderness, but in the senseless discursivity of the mind fed on abstract and fragmented information that often passes as knowledge in schools" (p. 362). Their essential message centers on the need to find ways to connect with the biophilia that resides within each one of us. Narrative inquiry via auto-bibliography is one such means to encourage us to make those biophilia connections.

Auto-bibliography

Margaret Mackey (2016) begins her book, *One Child Reading*, with her recollections of being relegated to porridge duty as a child. Once she learned to read, she was unable to lift her eyes from her book in the morning; thus, her parents moved her to stirring duty to be "out of the line of general traffic" (p. 3). Here, we have the seed of what grows up to be auto-bibliography. She has crafted, from her particulars of becoming a reader, a universal look at the embodied literacy that children move through. More than this,

> Mackey's auto-bibliography is also a testimony to the physicality of literacy. None of us learns to read without a body; none of us learns to read isolated from the environment in which we are living. As she puts it, all reading is "earthed"—reading always happens with a body that is always located somewhere. (Mackey, 2016, p. VIII)

We, two teacher-researchers, join Mackey's work, tracing literacy and embodiment, tracing literacy and environment, tracing our *specific* literacies through *particular* environments. Mackey herself calls on the reader to bring forth their own specifics, "other readers will have to bring their own private and internal sense of what it means to maintain focus on an act of reading through an assortment of ordinary, daily distractions" (p. 4), in order to properly understand both her auto-bibliography, as well as our own.

Buzbee (2006) writes, "to remember a book is to remember the child who read that book," which auto-bibliography seeks (p. 32). But more than returning to the child who first encountered and learned a text, auto-bibliography seeks to uncover the materiality of the text and approach it through the lens of the current reader looking again. In other words, for Mackey (2016), auto-bibliography does not want to reencounter text as the child who once did so, but to re-examine a text through the literate and embodied eyes of the socialized and situated adults we are.

Auto-bibliography, relying so heavily on our memories of reading, is necessarily a fragmented process. By re-encountering the texts themselves, as a literate adult, Mackey underscores the nature of fractured memory, while surpassing it through the re-encountered text today. For the most part, we are aware that memory is elusive and unreliable (Nikolajeva, 2014). Thus, a retelling of a remembered literacy experience is, at best, just that: a re-memory. But, by returning to the physical texts, Mackey (2016) returns to her childhood experience through the experience of specific and physical text. She can, to some extent, circumvent the ambiguities of memory by adding the physical back:

> My re-exploration of these materials offers potential to develop a deeper understanding of the complex internal world of reading. Trying not to make a falsely "choate" picture of the narrative of my own youth, I have focused as carefully as I can on the available materials. (p. 7)

Place, time and physical text are paramount to the auto-bibliographic process for Mackey (2016). In her childhood bedroom, where she first encounters books alone, "This room was the first place in the world that I remember coming to know" (p. 51), she equally encounters dolls and clothing as texts that form the first literate steps in her current literate identity. What is necessary in this early journey for us as teacher-researchers delving into Mackey's work is the idea that early physicality can be re-examined through environmental text (here, the bedroom and its contents).

Mackey (2016), writing as an adult, uses photos of her home and one of her bedroom dormer window as current textual sources. *One Child Reading* is deeper than a simple re-examination of a literate childhood through particular texts (albeit eleven shelves full!); it does illuminate that a "singular sense of literate development is actually misleading, and that crossovers, intertextual and intermedial, actually complicate any reasonably full picture of a reading life" (p. 289). Thus, we can join in Mackey's work of auto-bibliography by reminding ourselves to seek the complications and connections. For Mackey, and for us as teacher-researchers, these rife interconnections between text (physical), text (imagined), and memory can lead to insight into literacy. By returning to texts through the lens of a current experience, a necessarily embodied and particular experience, we can reimagine the literacy event by the eyes of today. Said differently, while it might "be possible to consider rereading as a way of re-achieving something. … my experience in rereading so many materials from my own past is that, sooner or later, the story opens up to uncertainty all over again" (Mackey, 2016, p. 481). So here we are: opening ourselves to uncertainty all over again. And, it is Rosenblatt's (1982) transactional theory of reader response that can provide a framework from which to reexperience these lived through experiences.

Rosenblatt and Transactional Theory of Reading

Since the publication of Rosenblatt's (1933) major book entitled, *Literature as Exploration*, she has played a major role in redefining the study of literature, especially with her theory of reader response. Rosenblatt (1978) asserts that the reading of literature centers on the reader's integral contribution as a two-way transaction or lived-through experience with the text. She acknowledges that no two readers come to a reading with the same background, store of knowledge, values, temperaments, experiences, and rationales (Dooley et al., 2014). In addition, Sipe (1999) states, "It is possible that a reader may manifest a matrix of responses that are specific and unique to him or her" (p. 123). Furthermore, Cullinan (1989), discussing Rosenblatt's reader response theory states,

> It is a circular process in which the reader responds to the words on the page and at the same time draws upon personal experiences in order to create individual meaning. Such a flexible position leaves room for a wide range of responses—all valid. (p. 46)

And Mackey (2010) asserts,

> In some ways it is fair to say that we are taking the space of a book as printed on the page, and turning it into the place of our own reading, invested with our own understanding of the world. (p. 331)

Figured prominently within this transactional experience are the concepts of efferent—what knowledge is carried away—and aesthetic—what is personally activated (Rosenblatt 1985). That is, during a reading of a text, the reader moves back and forth along a continuum with efferent at one end and aesthetic at the other. For example, the reading of a textbook would usually generate more efferent responses—information that is needed for practical purposes—while the reading of a historical novel might require both efferent to learn about the background of the setting and aesthetic for engaging in such responses to characterization or conflicts. That is, according to

Rosenblatt (1978), "Many texts are susceptible of being experienced at different points of the continuum by different readers, or even by the same reader under different circumstances" (p. 36).

Delving further into Rosenblatt's reader response theory and its efferent-aesthetic continuum, a much fuller and deeper meaning behind the relationship between these concepts emerges. In particular, Rosenblatt (1982) emphasized that the reading of literature has the potential "for aiding us to understand ourselves and others, for widening our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own, for helping us to clarify our conflicts in values, for illuminating the world" (p. 276). That is, the purpose of efferent reading is to acquire and maintain information while reading for meaning-making and action, while aesthetic is both personal and political because it involves questioning one's own responses (Cai, 2008). In the aesthetic and efferent reading of our own auto-bibliographic transactions with the three picture books, we come to the process as two individuals, each bringing our own past memories of experiences threaded with our personal backgrounds, life events, perspectives, and ways of making meaning.

In the pages that follow, we invite you, the reader, to come with us as we share our own lived-through memories of Nature, evoked by three selected picture books that hold a special place in our adult lives. We hope that as we recount our memories, you will be encouraged to actively reflect on your own recollections. In doing so you might ask: Do they reflect Nature's restorative and aesthetically engaging side associated with such places as forests, beaches, grasslands, snow-covered mountains, and local gardens? Or, do your recollections turn to the more unpredictable, turbulent, and even violent possibilities of Nature, such as derechos, wild fires, avalanches, and typhoons, all leaving you with feelings of powerlessness and great respect. Where did the encounters take place? What role did Nature play? What was your reaction to the event? Was there a particular part in the picture book that evoked your response? Were you prompted to think of your own picture book? Did the encounter have any impact on your current daily life, or your classroom practices as an educator? We now begin with our first selection.

The First Book: *Time of Wonder* (McCloskey, 1957/1985)

The first book entitled *Time of Wonder* (McCloskey, 1957/1985) tells the story of a family vacationing on an island in Maine one summer. Special attention is given to their adventures during and after a hurricane. Soft pastel-like watercolors capture the natural beauty of the island featured in the various scenes, from exploring a rocky beach in the fog to tending sunflowers as they face the sun under a clear blue sky.

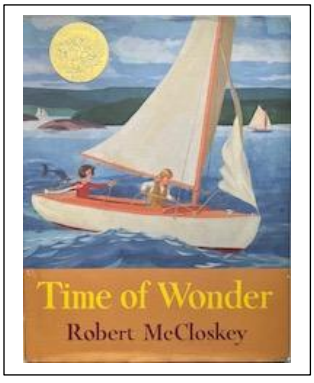

Figure 1: Time of Wonder

Hurricane: A Time of Wonder (Author 1)

I was three years old when I encountered my first hurricane, a category four. Since that time, I have become fascinated by the weather, especially those events that provide opportunities for us to garner respect for Nature's capacity to chart the course of our lives.

Figure 3: Sailing on the Sound ©C.M. Morawski

TV and radio reports, makeshift weather stations, stories of hurricane hunters and nonfiction texts were among some of the sources of information that I consulted to track hurricanes and learn about their histories and characteristics. I was already an adult when I came upon another reference in the form of a picture book entitled *Time of Wonder* (McCloskey, 1957/1985). With the author's depiction of the early morning fog as warm and mysterious in concert with the sudden short and jerky sentences that prepare the reader for the approaching hurricane (Johnson, 2015), I was immediately captivated by McCloskey's book. As I read and reread each page, my own encounters with hurricanes emerged and re-emerged as lived-through transactions placed along Nature's continuum of expressions. According to Painter (1968), McCloskey has "the ability to portray facets of ordinary but real living which are familiar to all of us, creating a kind of magnet that draws us together" (p. 145), prompting me to compose the following.

Figure 2: Weather-worn ©C.M. Morawski

My Narration. The last few days of summer had been preoccupied with denim blue skies, occasional puffs of white clouds, and enough of a sea breeze for sailing. However, Nature's plans for us would soon be changing. The Eastern Seaboard was on high alert. A weather system had been brewing off the coast, now heading toward New England cities and towns. It started out as a momentary breeze that nudged the blades of the pinwheel stuck in the front yard gate. Day light suddenly dimmed into the greys of evening without the prelude of colored striations. The congregation of bees that tended the hollyhocks along the old stone wall had disappeared. Butterflies no longer lingered on the ropes attached to clothesline pulleys. The intermittent trills of red-winged blackbirds suddenly faded, leaving a lull in the early morning air. By noon, the wind began to toss the tv aerial against the flashing of the gabled roof. An unexpected gust lifted a row of shingles sending them into the boughs of the nearby blue spruce. Storm windows rattled and clattered. One eventually became unhinged, smashing on the sidewalk below. Tree trunks thicker than telephone poles buckled temporarily as their branches brushed against the ground already drenched in rain. The water from the Sound churned around in the turbulence of endless whirlpools, inching into the land in the neighboring marsh. Businesses

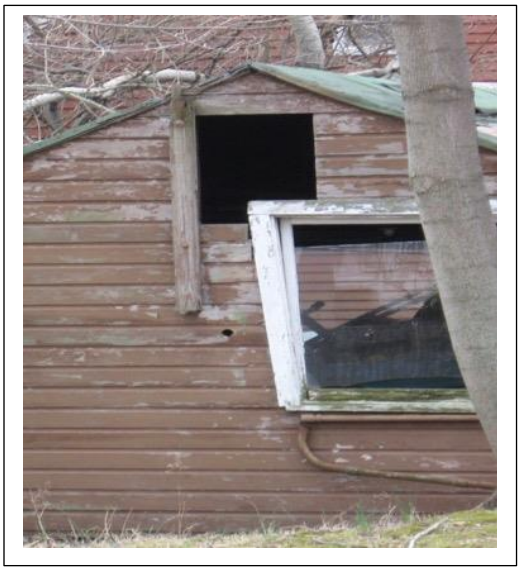

Figure 4: Unhinged ©C.M. Morawski

closed their doors and shuttered their windows. School buses remained locked in place. The weather warning issued on the radio was no longer needed. The hurricane had finally arrived.

By morning, the aftermath of the storm revealed itself in shadows of boats submerged under the froth of murky water. The local beach, now littered with a mixture of debris, could no longer act as the destination for picnics, sandcastles, and dunks in the saltwater surf. Seaweed, rumpled and tangled, the kind popped as a child, had gathered in clumps. Wooden planks, broken bottles, remnants of canvas, pieces of netting, and a lobster pot were all laid out in the disarray of an impending tag sale. Further inland, landscapes once familiar and settled had changed course. Roads remained impassable. Wires slung down in the street. A roof stood lopsided hanging off a porch. A branch, having fallen during the night, punctured a gash in the side of a neighbor's home. A skiff, anchored in the harbor, had managed to land on someone's front lawn. A community landmark—the vintage candy store where children always gathered to buy their inflatable tubes and snacks—had now been reduced to a cement foundation. A tree down the street, once a canopy of maple leaves where bird houses hung from its seemingly sturdy branches, had been uprooted during the storm, no longer there to remind residents of the passing seasons.

Eventually, weeks passed, "from the rise and fall of the tide, to the come and go of the school bus" (McCloskey, 1957/1985, p. 60). Roads reopened. Shingles were replaced. Debris was removed. Boats now cut through the water, enjoying the cooler Autumn air under a cloudless sky. Although the candy store foundation remained the same, the maple tree was replaced by a sapling, and the town beach once again became a retreat for its residents. Curiously, further down the Sound on a small rocky island, a cottage was being built on stilts. According to Massee (as cited in Painter, 1968), children who read and look at *Time of Wonder* "will be very subtly taught to love and wonder at the world we live in" (p. 154) and might even come to ask, "Where do hummingbirds go in a hurricane?" (McCloskey, 1957/1985, p. 62).

Figure 5: Cottage on stilts ©C.M. Morawski

Time of Wonder **(Author 2)**

It occurs to me now, through the newly informed glasses I am wearing as an auto-bibliograph(er), that *Time of Wonder* might be read as Robert McCloskey's own auto-bibliography, re-experiencing the texts of his time on an island in Penobscot Bay in Maine. For in *Time of Wonder*, what we have, textually, is a poetic reimagining of summers on a Maine island, bumbling and wondering, and closing with a climactic hurricane. Indeed, McCloskey has created a picture book that evokes a "mixed reality information space" (Nardi, 2008, n.p.), where readers poetically encounter his island. Factually, of course, we know that it was *his* island, purchased in 1946 with his wife Margaret. But as readers, we are invited in, for there is neither character nor true narrator in this text. Indeed, "You can watch a cloud … until you, on your island, are standing

in the shadow, watching the rain begin to spill down way across the bay" (p. 7-8). Here "you" are; you are on the island; this book is yours.

English was not my first language. I cannot remember understanding the cryptic reading lessons at school until about third grade. My mother complained to the librarian that I was choosing "inappropriate" books, those chosen for their imagery, not their content. Every year teachers reported I read with fluency yet lacked comprehension. Simply: I couldn't *get* it. "Recapturing distant childhood as far back as I can trust my memory, trying to understand my act of reading the particular world in which I moved, was absolutely significant for me," (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 30). When I join Freire, and reach back into own particular early literacy world, those years most suffused with print, they are blurry with incomprehension. So, I follow with Mackey and get my hands on the texts. Then, I follow her further and look for the body; for my body—my body as an island, blurred in a sea of school.

My Narration. And here is the memory: I am seven, and I am singing. The dress my mother has bought me is dark teal with an embroidered basket of flowers on the chest. I remember the embroidery because the back of it scratched my ribs uncomfortably. I cannot find a record of the song we sang. In my own cryptic memory version, it is about Suzy Snowflake and Robert Raindrop falling and covering the ground. I can find the words to a Rosemary Clooney (1978) song called "Suzy Snowflake," but no Robert Raindrop. We will have to assume the memory is flawed but useful. There were lovely little song books printed for us, computer-generated snowflakes pasted to the front. We held them up with music stands that, to me, felt quite professional. What is so poignant about this memory is that it swallows up all the earlier memories of garbled reading comprehension. This is the text I remember understanding first—lyrics of a snowflake and raindrop, likely misremembered lyrics, and the embodied experience of reading and performing text on stage shining through. McCloskey (1957/1985) writes:

> the fog has lifted!
> And suddenly
> You find that you are singing too,
> With the blue water sparkling
> all around, all around
> With the blue water sparkling
> all around! (p. 18)

So, the fog lifted, and some esoteric storm passed over my reading woes. Like a final click in the Rubix Cube®, all the other previous clicks led to this one moment of solved puzzle. I sang about rain and snowflakes, and the fog had lifted! Yet, it could not have been that simple, neither cognitively nor viscerally.

Roger Duvoisin (1973) wrote that a children's book illustrator takes from his childhood "the things, impressions, attitudes which impressed him most. He remembers his childhood conception of people, of animals, of scenes, and of books which were part of his world" (p. 177). So, a child takes the world they have, their specific environment(s), and brings it with them to adulthood to inform the evolving literate self. I have been carrying this specific idea of weather, this specific concept of snow and rain, as character to inform my adult literate identity. I find this to be so. I have re-read text with weather, here and below, in order to re-collect on my relationship to environment. "The cross-section of trajectories that marks each child's place in the literate world is dynamic, idiosyncratic, and local, and we need to pay better attention to all its rich possibilities."

(Mackey, 2011, p. 305). And here I turn back to McCloskey's work, though specifically to his paintings. The beginning of the storm is illustrated in whirling brush strokes that cut the page horizontally over and over (pp. 44–45). The blues and greens become intentionally muddy against one another—a far cry from my cheerful Suzy and Robert, harbingers of reading comprehension and softly covered ground. As I turn from *Time of Wonder* and this specific moment of remembered literacy, I move forward to imagery of storm and conflict portrayed by McCloskey. What he also paints is one island home, lost in the storm colors, save for its bright yellow light, burning through the night.

The Second Book: *Window* (Baker, 1991)

In *Window* (Baker, 1991), there are no words. Instead, a series of 13 intricate scenes, each framed by a window, tell a powerful story of a neighborhood's gradual change from bush to city life. The first scene depicts a mother holding her newborn son, while looking out over surroundings rich in foliage and wildlife. Every two years another scene emerges through the same window, until the 12th one displays the same surroundings overgrown with the urban density of buildings, people, stores, signs, vehicles, and cemented streets. The 13th and final scene depicts the boy, now an adult with a baby, looking out of the window of his own home, discovering "house blocks for sale" signs right across the street, where woods now stand. Photographed collages aptly made from various materials such as feathers, wool, bark, and tin, skillfully bring the story to life.

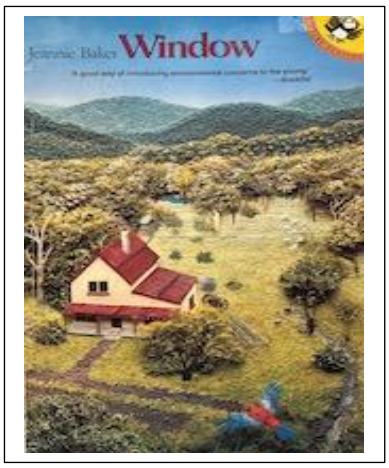

Figure 6: Window

Looking Back through the Window (Author 1)

Recently, while browsing through my own personal library, I came upon the book, *Window* (Baker, 1991), and began leafing through its pages. Iordanaki (2021), referring to Rosenblatt, posits that wordless picture books, infused with illustrative details "give visual cues and gaps for the critical beholder to fill" (p. 495). I immediately thought about the gradual transformation of a residential property that I would periodically view through the window of a car whenever we passed by on our way to various destinations. According to Zocco (2013), "When we look out of a window … the view we get is actually still influenced by our subjective imaginations, interpretations and projections, which we use to fill out the gaps of visibility" (p. 8). As I recount my experience below, the house and its impact on the neighborhood comes into view.

My Narration. In a residential town on a tree-lined drive, a house stood set back from the others. Passing by, you might have mistaken it for a jumbled heap of entangled brush overgrown in olive-green vines. Months before, it appeared that a family had decided to stay longer on their trip, postponing outdoor work for another week. The lawn needed mowing. Leaves had collected in small piles on the flag stone steps. The orange-red petals of the geraniums had begun to turn a faded brown, crisp to the touch. After weeks of neglect, it appeared that the family had no plans to return. Wind-blown propellers from the maple were now scattered across the driveway and onto

the front porch. The grass, having reached the height of the electric meter attached to the front yard wall, provided a hiding place for fallen branches from a late summer storm. Patches of crabgrass lined the un-edged walkway, which had accumulated a filmy residue of moss. The sedges, no longer holding a place of prominence, had become choked by the cedars encroaching on the iron gate. Piles of acorn husks littered the sandbox left uncovered under a striped awning. All signs of human life had vanished.

Figure 7: Neglected house ©C.M. Morawski

Now, unrestrained without prior mangles and manicures of mowers, rakes, and the impermanence of interlocking pavers, clusters of Cosmos now interspersed with Queen Anne's lace. Dandelions, once considered eyesores to be weeded and sprayed, drifted into wisps of floating parachutes. A contingent of worker bees presided over the flowers. From a nearby sand cherry, the lilting song of a cardinal trilled the air. Groundhogs snacked on zinnias, while a rabbit bounded out of overgrown shrubs, stood still, and then settled next to a row of ferns. As dusk approached, a gaze of raccoons scampered down the drainpipe and began the nightly ritual of scavenging for food. Fireflies illuminated the evening air with their flashlights set on intermittent pause. Nature had officially taken over, re-landscaping the area with local plants, flowers, and the infusion of wildlife. After almost two years, instead of being condemned, the property seemed to have simply blended into the middle of the suburban street. Cars continued to drive by. Joggers, out for their daily run, always passed along on the right. Children kept riding their bicycles around the block, occasionally stopping in front to adjust a pedal or finish a half-eaten pear. Without so much as the touch of a human hand, a nature reserve had been established in the neighborhood.

Figure 8: Hidden house ©C.M. Morawski

Picture books can act as mediums through which one can reflect on their storied connections to an environment and place (Burke & Cutter-MacKenzie, 2010). In the case of my observations of the third house, *Window* acted as my medium through which I saw the final transformation of the property as a nature reserve as opposed to an eyesore that needed to be trimmed, weeded, mowed, and raked. That is, *Window* became the critical catalyst for considering the situation from an alternative perspective in relation to understanding place as a fluid phenomenon (Wason-Elam. 2010). Although the book has been placed back on my library shelf, the story will stay with me as I look through future windows and perceive what I see.

***Window* (Author 2)**

Jeannie Baker (1991) uses the window in her text as the lens out for her mother/son duo to see their environment. It is also how their environment is physically framed. For example, as we readers are invited to consider the urbanization that takes over their previously wild landscape, we cannot see what was originally outside the scope of their view. Was the city encroaching just past their line of sight? The window provides the parameters: what is visible, *and what is invisible*. As in *Hildilid's Night* (Ryan, 1971, to be discussed as the third book in the next section), there is an obscuring that is happening. As in *Time of Wonder*, there is a sense that something is coming. For all these texts, we have what is invisible and what is changing.

> [Books] capture some of that energy of change, stow it inside the covers of the book in all its latent readiness to be discharged by a reader. And in the course of our reading, we also enter a zone of necessary fluidity. (Mackey, 2016, p. 481)

Entering text, according to Mackey, opens that potential for change previously packed tightly within the text. There is an implication of physicality for Mackey, an unleashing that happens when the book is opened and, finally, read.

My Narration. Here is a text I did not encounter until later in my reading journey, though it harkens to an important physical text of my childhood. My bedroom was in the basement of a home built into a mountain face. This means that three walls of my room faced, invisibly, the earth. One wall featured two windows; they were less than a meter above the ground. Can you imagine this? It means I could step out my window and feel, immediately, the grass lawn beneath my feet. It means that I mastered the art of escape early. It means that the window symbolized to me friend, safety, and freedom. What it also means (silently) is that I rarely looked out my window; I only leaped.

This is how it was for me to read *Window*, a wordless book, and unleash the potential for considering the window as both an in/out space and a visible/invisible space. It is interesting to me that, for Baker, the book *Window* was actually a source of discomfort. In an interview about her companion text *Belonging* (Baker, 2004), she states:

> I always felt rather uncomfortable about "Window" being a negative statement, In "Belonging" I try to balance this and sow the idea that if one doesn't like a place, rather than move to bush or wilderness and in the process reduce and change yet more bush and so help start a new cycle of development; to take a place that is already developed and without necessarily removing buildings, put back some of what originally made the place special but which was taken away in the process of development. (2004, n.p.)

Figure 9: Home within and without window ©C.L. Dunnington

Baker is urging what Author 1 poignantly noticed above: spaces can move through cycles of home, commerce, nature, and wild. Instead of leaving behind a changed space, for Baker the equivalent of closing the window and moving on, we can go outside the window and work. "I believe thinking about home in a multitude of ways can lead to thinking in a layered and complex fashion about identity, and by extension to understanding and maximizing the power of the individual voice" (Lockhart, 2017, p. 36). Can reflecting on the window, on the home that Baker has created, recontextualize the individual reader considering change?

The Third Book: *Hildilid's Night*

Hildilid (Ryan, 1971), the main character who had a hound dog companion, so disliked the night that she wanted to eradicate it, along with stars, moon, owls, voles, and moles. After numerous attempts that included sweeping, boiling, bundling, shearing, singing it lullabies, and serving it a saucer of milk, Hildilid could not make the night disappear. Finally, the sun began to appear over the hills, but Hildilid was too tired to enjoy it. The illustrations, expressed in pen and ink drawings, effectively set the nighttime mood, along with adding humor to Hildilid's actions.

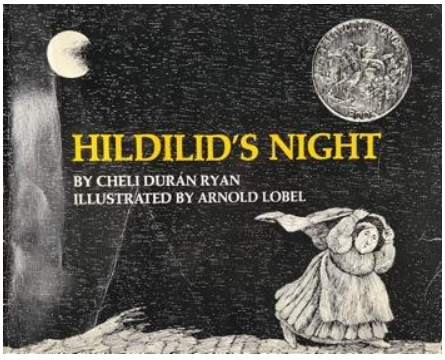

Figure 10: Hildilid's Night

The Night (Author 1)

As day blends into night and darkness takes hold, people tend to move indoors where they can turn on their lights. According to Boyce (2019), without any light, humans are deprived of one of their principal senses—vision. On one particular occasion, I too wanted the night and its darkness to vanish but would have been grateful just to have had only one of Hildilid's lanterns.

My Narration. It was near midnight when we began the final round of our journey to the village house, six stories high, several miles away from the nearest town. The road was bumpy and narrow, jostling the passengers. Headlights were our only guide as shadows became absorbed into the evening pitch. Sounds, unknown to us, rustled, snapped, and creaked intermittently. At every curve, branches scraped the side panels of the car. The vegetation was dense—jack fruit, leachy, longan, banana—all taking on the coloration of smudged ink. Suddenly, openings between the trees began to appear, signaling the beginning of a driveway. After moving through the entrance of a high concrete wall, topped with the elegance of red upward curvatures, we arrived at a courtyard. Directly in front of us, hints of the house, encased in darkness, appeared looming, large, imposing. Without light, there was a presence of unease among us, a sense of

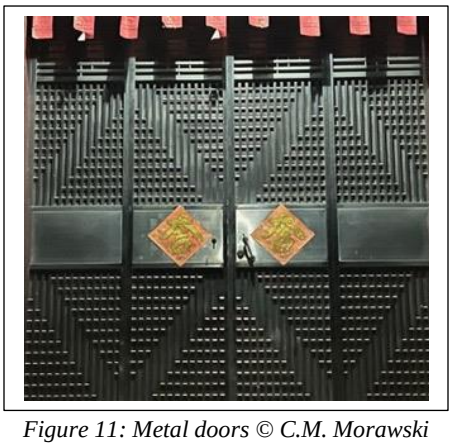

Figure 11: Metal doors © C.M. Morawski

foreboding. Eerily, a rooster's haunting call resounded from a nearby thicket, contributing further to our discomfort. We grappled for an outdoor light, illuminating the intimidating metal doors. As we made our way up the stone steps, past the fishpond, and onto the landing of the first floor, more lights were turned on, making us feel less uncertain, less vulnerable. Next day in the morning brightness, we looked out from the third-story balcony and were stunned by the striking beauty of the surroundings, considered so menacing the night before. After, walking across the side yard by the lily pad pond, the rooster, seeing us approach, quickened his steps and ran away. Reflecting on my experience that night, I came to understand Horwood's (1986) statement: "Being active at night gives … access to a unique and untapped source of beauty, experience and learning" (p. 13). If only Hildilid would make peace with the night and begin reconsidering nature's possibilities not just in the light. Learning about owls, watching colors change her view, observing stars in formation, and the moon appearing anew. Isberner et al. (2019) assert, "Stories often convey messages about the world that can influence recipients' own views and beliefs … via the behavior of the character and its consequences" (p. 576).

Figure 12: The Village ©C.M. Morawski

A week and several minutes later, standing in front of Bund 66, the Peace Hotel nearby, daytime switched from evening to night. Without warning, we found ourselves in a massive crowd surging toward Shanghai's waterfront on the Huangpu River. The silhouettes of skyscrapers blazed in continuums of colorations. The Orient Pearl Tower, majestic in the stature of spherical features, stood stunning in variegations of magenta, turquoise, pink, yellow, and red. Commercial tugs mixed with private boats, strung with lights, some blinking, passed back and forth along the base of the promenade. Thousands of phones poised in position to capture the scene, maneuvering for the best position at the metal railings. As one group left, another moved in to take its place. Family portraits, singular pics, landscapes, panoramic views. It seemed ritualistic, a spiritual rite. A photographic ode to illumination. At 11 o'clock, the lights went out, and darkness prevailed. As quickly as they came, the crowd dispersed, leaving the celestial possibilities of the night sky alone and unnoticed. Or, so I thought.

Figure 13: Orient Pearl Tower ©C.M. Morawski

As I glanced back at the scene, wanting to see the stars without lights, I noticed a woman standing alone with a hound on her right. Holding a pair of binoculars up to both eyes, she seemed to be studying something in the sky. Then, with a camera she captured photos of that sight, while I thought I heard her say, "I like this time better than bright day light." Horwood (1986) so aptly asserts that darkness can open up a magical world in which growth can occur on both intellectual

and emotional levels. Furthermore, Dillard (2008) notes that if you want to study the stars, it is necessary to do so at night in the dark. So, the next time that I venture out at night to explore, I just might see Hildilid looking at the stars from her open front door.

Hildilid's Night (Author 2)

The first encounter I had with *Hildilid's Night* was in second grade. A teacher read at Halloween time, though Hildilid is no Halloween text, nor is it easily described. The specifics of the memory are this: we all sat on a rug with inexplicable dinosaur-like creatures on it. It was worn out where some children had kicked their shoes repeatedly. I sat on a worn-out spot and tried to hold still for the third, and final, read-aloud of the day. All the books were somehow "Halloween themed," but the only title I remember is *Hildilid's Night*.

My Narration. Rereading this text now I can see that it is a humorous, though complex, tale. In some ways I was *right* to be perplexed. But my confusion came with a narrative frustration with the missing "why" of the book. *Why did Hildilid hate the night*, I wondered. The book still leaves this question unanswered, I am pleased to report. The book came back to me years later, when my town was hit by an ice storm that caused days of lost electricity.

It was 1998. I owned my first ever CD-player and had exactly four discs I listened to on repeat. These were listened to at night, in my bed, often falling asleep before the last track played. I would wake in the morning silence, the CD-player's face lit. I also owned a corded telephone, light blue with cloud stencils on it. It sat on a card table near my bed, and should I be fast enough, I could answer the phone before my family. I mostly waited to place calls out on that beautiful phone until after dark, when no one else needed the phone. The night, I felt, was my friend. At night I was free. There were no young siblings; they had earlier bedtimes. There were no parents, who also had earlier bedtimes. And then an ice storm hit that wrecked the night for me, that took away the peace of my very clearly electricity-dependent texts.

In the days of cold and dark in my own home, with school cancelled and cracking ice everywhere outside, I thought about Hildilid again. I remembered that haunting text that had stayed with me, elusively, for years. Because I could now understand Hildilid's hatred. I too was mad about the night, though I was largely mad about the discomfort brought on by my own more momentary night. It is useful to think about text and meaning in these fractured moments, or, re-reading and re-calling. What new meanings are shaped? For here we have a layered memory: first night and Hildilid as incomprehensible, then night and Hildilid as deeply comprehensible. Below, Mackey unpacks her experience of water-lilies as danger.

Figure 14: The ice storm ©C.L. Dunnington

> In our boat, struggling to control one oar apiece, my brother and I were already in a liminal space; the disruption to my sense of the world provided by learning about the perfidiousness of the lilies was one more shift in an arena already charged for change. Brief as it was, this moment of remembering served as a corrective to my adult sense of the past as something singular. *For children, an idea is singular only until it is rendered multiple or contradictory or confusing*. Such changes are a regular feature of ordinary life, and children incorporate new knowledge in a taken-for-granted way. (Mackey, 2016, p. 480, emphasis added)

Thus, my early idea of night-hatred, complicated by an older child's experience of a power outage, both of these memories were compressed and revisited as I reread *Hildilid's Night* now.

My singular idea had been complicated. Re-collecting, I could see that Hildilid had represented a concept of night that required complication, now thrice. And now I consider the potential for decentering texts, what Jessica Whitelaw (2017) has called "disquieting," those texts that haunt and scratch at what is incomprehensible or challenging. She notes that the "1970s saw a shift toward a belief in the power of the imagination," away from those picture books that sought to protect readers (p. 33). *Hildilid's Night*, firmly published in the 70's, likely joined this epistemic turn toward imaginative picture texts. For me it certainly was a place of possibility for considering what is ultimately unknowable: why night or, why *not* night?

> The picturebook slows down our awareness, and it holds ideas up to the light in words and pictures in suspended moments made for dwelling and observing […] this synergy has the potential to move us aesthetically as readers, to "urge voyages." (Whitelaw, 2017, p. 35)

Hildilid has urged my voyage yet again. Returning to this rich text now and remaining haunted by Hildilid who was "too tired from fighting the night to enjoy the day," I feel a caution pulling at me that was unavailable to me as a child (p. 30). What is at risk in a text if we are indeed too tired from fighting to press on? As teachers, how can these liminal spaces urge us forward? For Hildilid, rest provides the answer. In the case of my storm, the power was simply restored. But, for all of us, is there solace in the fight itself, regardless of outcome?

Concluding Comments

Ryan et al. (2014) comment that biophilia helps explain why shadows and heights instill fascination and fear, while gardening and strolling through a park have restorative healing effects. That is, Nature has many faces. It is both colorful and monochromatic, peaceful and violent, elegant and messy. In their editorial on environment and place through children's literature, Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al. (2010) remark, "children's literature variously represents, mediates and informs experiences and understandings of diverse environments and places as well as the people and other presences … found therein, be these imaginatively constructed or firmly rooted in a diversity of realities" (p. 253). More specifically, picture books have the capacity to serve numerous roles in our lives, from creating bonds between child and parent to sending messages within the picture plotlines of their stories.

We too have experienced the many faces of Nature from varying perspectives, and it was the reading of three picture books that provided us with both aesthetic and efferent opportunities

to revisit and review a sampling of our own biophilic connections, whether as direct encounters with Nature or metaphors regarding life events. For example, the effects of weather on our lives emerged in the pages of *Time of Wonder*. The scenes in *Window* encouraged us to reconsider observations concerning changes to a home's ecological setting. *Hildilid's Night* provided opportunities for us to readdress our own relationship with the darkest time of day. More specifically, the books acted as what Scott (2020) refers to as valuable portals through which we can inquire and make sense of life and the world in which we live, which for us would include Nature and its daily possibilities.

For teachers, this type of self-reflection, a journey into autobibliography, can invite meaningful biophilia into the classroom. As Pulvermacher and Lefstein (2016) assert, "Developing teachers into collaborative and critically reflective professionals requires that we deliberately interrogate and inquire into the stories that emerge as they study to become teachers" (p. 265). Using our own narrations as studies for how children's book text evoked specific biophilic connections, our hope was to find the "universal in the specific." Our hope was that these narrations serve as inspiration for teachers embarking on this type of work.

Yesterday, the Museum of Nature opened up their display of rescued owls to the public. Out of respect for the birds, everyone was asked to remain quiet and calm. One of the owls, scrutinized us with a half-opened eyelid, while another rotated its head, ignoring us altogether. Observing the owls in such close proximity allowed us to appreciate the muted striations of color values found in their feathers, the sharp edges of their beaks used at dinner time, and the powerful potential of their talons that gripped the rough bark of their recently hewn perches. Captivated by the presence of such dignified creatures, we eventually walked away, humbled by yet another continuum of Nature's possibilities, with a new sense of physical and psychological knowledge of rereading our natural world. As we return once again to the shelves of our picture books, informed by our lived-through experience with owls as well as the many other occurrences encountered every day, we concur with Mackey (2016) who states, "We weave strands of our own lives into the words before us on the page and ride the energy that is thus created so, every reading is also new" (Mackey, 2016, p. 482).

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