

To: Professor Martha Stoddard-Holmes
Professor Mark Wallace
Professor X
From:
Re: Thesis Proposal, Thesis Outline, and Tentative Schedule
Date: September 25, 2005

Thesis Proposal

In “The Law of Genre,” Jacques Derrida reveals the Western tradition of confining literature within the strict boundaries of different genres as a social construct. In my mind, children’s literature delineates the slippery nature of such categories because it resists the confinement to a specific genre and audience.

Children’s Literature unites elements of classic myth, the novel, and poetry. It challenges conceptions of audience and often functions as a catalyst for social change. J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* uses elements of early British Literature (the elfin language, for example, derives from Old English) and intertwines the narrative with poetry. Moreover, children’s books often transcend the boundaries of audience: the *Harry Potter Series*, for example, enjoys a broad adult fellowship, which incited Scholastic to publish an adult version of the series with a more “serious” cover and layout. In other cases, children’s literature bestows the author with the opportunity to overthrow the tenets of the literary establishment and incite social change. Taking the guise of a children’s fantasy story, Michael Ende’s *The Neverending Story* argues for the importance of the imagination and therewith ended the post-World War II reign of the realistic short story as the most accepted genre in Germany’s literary landscape. This reintroduction of the novel into the literary establishment in turn fostered the appearance of a larger social discourse on how Germany, as a nation, should deal with the guilt generated by the horrors of World War II.

With the submission of a children’s book as the accumulation of my academic experience, I seek to demonstrate my ability to interweave different literary genres,

critical theory, and social commentary. Using a fantastic setting as a framework for an eco-critical *Bildungsroman*, I explore the importance of individual and communal action in a desensitized, phlegmatic society. The idea is that it takes the formation of individual environmental awareness in combination with the willingness to engage in communal actions to change the world.

My narrative centers around fourteen-year old Patricia Tuberson, who enters a parallel, fantastic world after a surfing accident. In the course of the story, she learns that this fantastic world, which shares its natural resources with our world, is threatened by the destruction of the natural environment by humans. The problems pollution causes in the fantastic world manifest an exaggerated version of the ramifications of pollution in our world. Trish comes to understand that the destruction of the fantastic world posits a mere prelude to the ruin of our world. She meets her sidekicks, Miki (a tomboy watergirl) and Harald, an arrogant, grumpy Donkeycorn (the son of a unicorn and a donkey), and they embark on a journey up the California Coast to investigate how to end pollution. Their journey leads them through Ventura, Big Sur, Santa Cruz, Mendocino, and culminates in Humboldt. In the Redwood forests, they discover that both worlds cannot be saved instantly. Instead of engaging in an epic battle against evil polluters and finding a grand solution that fixes all environmental plight at once, they ascertain that they will have to change their own actions and attitudes in order to save both worlds.

The narrative works towards this realization not only through the storyline itself, but also through the development of the main characters. In the beginning of the story, Trish tends to shy away from conflict and frequently decides to ignore problems. Miki masks her fears in aggression. She blames others for the destruction of her world. Harald is an overly self-confident egomaniac. He believes that he can solve all problems by himself and fails to listen to the input of others, which often leads him to do the wrong thing at the wrong time. The journey up the California Coast forces Trish, Miki,

and Harald to face their shortcomings and mature. They learn to accept themselves for whom they are and begin to negotiate their place in the world and their communities. At the end of the story, each of them leaves their childhood behind and returns to their respective community with maturity and the confidence necessary to propel environmental change.

My project will include a revised draft of my manuscript (approximately 50-70 pages regular format), a critical introduction discussing this narratives place within the larger frameworks of children's literature and eco-criticism, and a bibliography.

Proposed Outline

Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 introduce the main characters (Trish, Miki, and Harald) and the problems caused by pollution. The King of the waterpeople proposes to send the three on a journey up the California Coast to find a way to end pollution and stop the demise of the fantastic world.

Chapter 3

Trish, Miki, and Harald travel to Ventura. In Ventura, they meet a witch who gives them a secret prophecy, which they have to decipher by finding clues and completing tasks in Big Sur, Santa Cruz, Mendocino and Humboldt.

Chapters 4-7

By trying to find the information necessary to solve the secret prophecy, Trish, Miki, and Harald are confronted with their own ghosts and shortcomings and learn how to act as a group.

Chapter 8

In Humboldt, they learn that they cannot save the environment instantly, but that they have to change their own actions and attitude and unite their respective communities in the fight against pollution

Chapter 9

They have to separate and return to their communities.

Tentative Schedule

December 12, 2005	Draft of chapters 1-2
January 18, 2006	Draft of chapters 3-6
February 15, 2006	Draft of chapters 7-9
March 1, 2006	Draft of critical introduction
March 29, 2006	Revised project
April 21, 2006	Oral defense