
MELANCHOLIA AND MATURATION



THE USE OF TRAUMA IN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



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Chapter 2

A BOY AND HIS DOG

THE IMAGE OF THE CANINE COMPANION in Western literature has a long history, dating back at least to Homer's *The Odyssey*, in which Odysseus's faithful dog, Argos, long awaits his master's return to Ithaca and dies only upon seeing him. This tradition extends through Shakespeare, whose comedic depiction of the relationship between Launce and his dog Crab in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is one of the more noted representations of devotion between a man and his pet. Dogs have also been featured in some of the earliest imaginative works for children. Edward Augustus Kendall's *Keeper's Travels in Search of His Master* was published in 1798 by Elizabeth Newbery, who carried on the publishing business of her husband's uncle, John Newbery, credited with having originated the publication of pleasurable works for children. A didactic story that encourages readers to be kind to their pets, Kendall's book is told from the perspective of a dog seeking to be reunited with his master, a young boy. In 1872, English novelist Marie Louise de la Ramée, writing under the penname Ouida, published *A Dog of Flanders*, a story for children that centers on the relationship between an orphaned boy and his beloved Belgian dog. *A Dog of Flanders* establishes the prototype of the boy-and-his-dog story, which has been frequently reproduced in American children's literature of the twentieth century, most prominently in novels like Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1907) and Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller* (1956).

The image of the boy and his dog is now ubiquitous in American culture, from television programs like *Lassie* and *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* to the paintings of Norman Rockwell—popular for his images idealizing small-town America—who produced a series of four paintings known as *A Boy and His Dog*. Commenting on the indispensable status of the family pet, Marjorie Garber notes that the “very same school reader that instructed mid-twentieth-century Americans in the shape of the ideal family also told us that no nuclear family was complete without its Spot” (35). Not surprisingly, then, children's literature is

also replete with honored boy-and-his-dog stories such as William Armstrong's *Souder* (1969) and Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh* (1991), both recipients of the Newbery Medal.¹ I explore in this chapter the question of why the image of the boy and his dog has so pervaded our culture, finding expression in any number of domains ranging from child-rearing practices and psychotherapeutic programs to the literary subgenre represented by the novels I examine here. I focus mostly on Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller* as the purest embodiment of the boy-and-his-dog story, but I also look to Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* as early precursors to Gipson, and Jim Kjelgaard's *Big Red* (1945), Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2000), and Harlan Ellison's satiric short story for adults "A Boy and His Dog" (1969) as either reinforcing the implications of *Old Yeller* or offering alternative possibilities for the subgenre.

I want to suggest three interrelated points in order to explain the popular resonance of these boy-and-his-dog stories and their related therapeutic manifestations. First, the relationship between a boy and his dog and its representation in literature provide the opportunity for children to practice engaging in affectively charged social relations, if only through reading about them. Second, the narrative of the boy and his dog exemplifies a culturally widespread disciplinary device that involves promoting intense affectional attachments and then demanding their sacrifice as a way of (re)forming social subjects that are properly gendered and sexualized. Third, the relationship between a boy and his dog, characterized by emotional and physical intimacy and providing possibilities of great pleasure for the child, represents a form of childhood sexuality that is often overlooked as such.

Through the boy-dog relationship the boy can practice managing mobile and shifting social relations in a simplified field. The nature of the relationship between boy and dog circumvents some of the potential complexities that impose unwanted limitations on human-human relations. Some of those complexities include the exigencies of adult responsibilities (in *Old Yeller* Travis's father has to go to Kansas in order to earn money), the complexities of communication produced by language itself in contrast to the relative inarticulateness of the dog (Old Yeller cannot protest or give assent in very clear ways, for instance), and the conventions and risks of affectively charged relations between people. The relationship between boy and dog is sometimes hierarchical, sometimes egalitarian. Sometimes the boy is more competent than his dog; sometimes the dog is more competent than the boy. They are throughout intensely passionate attachments, but also eminently disposable ones. The dog provides a site for all kinds of projective fantasies. It is an object both to desire and identify with. The dog can be both guilty and innocent, and hence the boy can be either guilty or innocent and function as either judge or judged. He can rescue the dog, or be rescued by him. The dog has something approximating a "will": he can try to run away, and he can be bad (like steal meat or bark incessantly); but, he is also subject to the will

of the boy, who otherwise lacks subjects on which he can impose his will. The boy can experience physical affection by both petting the dog and being licked in response without evoking fears of either pedophilia, as might happen with an intensely passionate relationship with an adult, or precocious sexuality if the relationship were with a near-age playmate.² Love for a dog, argues Garber, “represents the ‘pure’ and unambivalent relationship *in contradistinction to* human-all-too-human narratives of erotic complexity and ambivalence” (128).

In Gipson’s novel, *Old Yeller* clearly functions in these ways for Travis by coming to figure Travis’s absent father and teaching Travis to assume his role as a normatively gendered heterosexual man who is sober, knowing, and experienced.³ Boy-and-his-dog stories are, as is much children’s literature, about coming of age, and a central component of coming of age, except perhaps for some transgender kids, is coming of age *as* either a man or a woman. Given the ways in which gender identity and sexuality have been so insistently soldered together in our culture, perhaps we should not be surprised at the lengths to which these stories go to ensure that properly gendered children achieve heterosexual adulthood. We can see from these stories how that potential heterosexuality is purchased at the expense of great trauma. In the case of *Old Yeller*, it means that in order to be validated as a grown man Travis must actually murder his beloved dog, which itself repeatedly suffers tremendous wounds while saving the boy he loves. Travis accomplishes his development through his affection for, loss of, and subsequent identification with his dog in what I’m calling a proto-erotic relation of youth. Boy-and-his-dog stories like this one represent and promote a disciplinary technique that involves the formation of intense affectional bonds with companions that are ritually sacrificed so that they can function as objects of identification and spurs to melancholic maturation. Rarely, perhaps, is the compulsion to murder what is understood as the childhood attachment so dramatically literalized as it is in *Old Yeller*, which makes this such an important novel to understand. Our reliance on the use of contrived trauma to initiate children into adulthood has been reinvoked by such practices as the high-schooled assistance dog program, to which I will return at the end of this chapter. In fact, we can understand initiations as typically involving some kind of ritualized or contrived trauma often enacted in highly eroticized scenarios.

John Bowlby’s theories of attachment and loss, which seek to understand the importance of affectional bonding with a competent attachment figure during childhood, might elucidate along with Freud and Butler the reasons why boy-and-his-dog stories and their subsequent reenactments as socio-psychological therapies have proven so compelling. If a child’s various attachment behaviors—efforts to retake the attachment figure—are repeatedly thwarted, the child risks enormous frustration, long-term trauma, and the formation of maladaptive attachment patterns in the future. Since the interaction between the attachment figure and child determines the internal working models of the self and

the other, the lost figure and the inability to regain it will alter how a child represents itself to itself and how it perceives any subsequent attachment figures. The inability to reestablish contact with an attachment figure during childhood because of travel, death, illness, or abandonment produces anxiety, frustration, and the alteration of these models, which record the child's inefficacy to alter either its unpleasant state or its vulnerability to heightened risks to physical and emotional well-being. Such experiences can lead to feelings of chronic anxiety and a distrust of other potential attachment figures, which undermines the establishment and maintenance of their relationships. For Bowlby, given both the degree to which these internal models remain difficult to alter and the tremendous impact on one's emotional life of the state of one's intimate bonds, the attachment experiences of childhood prove profoundly important. What Bowlby's careful observations of children separated from their caregivers enable for us is the possibility of understanding some of the reasons boy-and-his-dog stories prove so pleasurable for their young readers. They represent the narrativization of children's anxieties—particularly surrounding attachment, loss, vulnerability, and need—and, with the appearance in the story of the rescuing dog, a temporary abatement of those anxieties and the concomitant potentialities for great pleasure.

Freud of course revolutionized thinking about childhood sexuality and pleasure by denying the popular notion that sexuality only emerges at puberty. Freud considers sexual maturation at puberty to involve the convergence toward a sexual object and aim of both affectionate and sexual currents. The affectionate current, he writes, "comprises what remains of the infantile efflorescence of sexuality" (*Three* 73). His belief that children are indeed already sexual enables Freud to recognize otherwise banal behaviors as evidencing childhood sexuality. He offers thumb-sucking, the holding back of stool in order to maximize pleasure in its release, the voyeuristic curiosity to view their own and others' genitals, and the exhibitionistic glee in exposing their bodies as examples of how young children stimulate their erotogenic zones for the purpose of pleasure. But despite the 1905 publication of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, the subject of children's sexuality still remains highly controversial, if not taboo, more than one hundred years later. Whether or not one accepts Freud's account of the dynamics of childhood sexuality, his work is significant for calling attention to the erotics of children and to the ways that childhood erotics both do and do not mirror the erotic dynamics of later life.

Freud's proposition that children possess an innate aptitude for the polymorphously perverse has offered one possible foundation for constructivist claims that understand (adult) sexuality as emerging out of the multiple, even infinite, possibilities that are channeled, foreclosed, promoted, or constructed in particular ways through various historically and culturally contingent strategies and/or discourses.⁴ What is left after this process, so it goes, amounts to a rather

limited selection of identity formations or positions, and hence a limited range of sexual objects recognized as available and appropriate.⁵

Those discourses on sexuality that render certain possibilities, if not imperatives, blindingly visible also render others obscure and elusive.⁶ For instance, many coming out narratives of gay men and lesbians, in their looking back to early “evidence” of later sexual identity, function not only as efforts to narrativize and hence (re)capture the childhood erotics thought to predate the child’s ability to articulate or conceptualize his or her desires or pleasures, but also as the staging of a belated scene of listening to whatever the child might have had to say about those desires or pleasures. Sociologist Vera Whisman, in her analysis of the coming out stories of gay men and lesbians, notes the tendency of many to “gather evidence for this belief [that they were always homosexual] via retrospective interpretation, a re-reading of their pre-homosexual pasts in terms of their present sexual identities.” She cites one lesbian-identified subject, who recalls, “When I came out I looked back on the types of games I liked to play as a child, or the kinds of toys I wanted to have, or what my goals were. And I think I probably saw them differently” (86). More often than not, the erotics of children are assimilated to the possibilities and outcomes recognized by adults, while less readily assimilable or contradictory evidence remains unnoticed or incomprehensible. Far from simply not existing, the sorts of relations, attachments, behaviors, or scenarios that give children pleasure or that excite them—even in ways that in later life would be recognized as sensual or erotic—might exist in instances that prove difficult to trace from the retrospective vantage point of the often crystallized sexuality of adulthood.

The effect is to make the adult reader incredulous of those potential traces, but what I want to suggest by invoking Bowlby and Freud is that the boy’s relationship with his dog represents a kind of prototypical romance of childhood, a transitional moment from parental attachments of early youth to the explicitly romantic and sexualized attachments of adolescence and adulthood. The dog as attachment figure facilitates this transition through its multiple functions as secure base, site of identification, and object of affection or desire. In *Old Yeller* Travis comes to play father with Arliss and to take interest in Lisbeth by first learning how to do that through his attachment to his dog. If one’s first affectively charged proto-erotic relations are with one’s caregivers—toward whom the affectionate current that follows the emergence of infantile sexuality is directed—and then later with other explicitly sexualized objects, then between them lies a field of learning in which the boy’s relationship to his dog in these stories provides a range of affective practice. More than practice and more than transitional, though, the boy’s relationship with his dog, characterized as it is by an intensity of passion and pleasure, might just be one of those instances of childhood sexuality that has remained largely overlooked by the adults who give more conscious and deliberate thought to human sexuality.

One need look no further than the most popular author of dog stories, Jack London, for evidence of the erotic nature of men's relationships with their dogs. Though the human protagonists of London's novels are adult men, both *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* are often considered children's literature. In *The Call of the Wild*, written from the perspective of the mixed-bred Buck, London describes the dog's feelings for his man as a "love that was feverish and burning, that was adoration, that was madness, it had taken John Thornton to *arouse*" (71; emphasis added). Such is the language of romantic passion: feverish, burning, madness, arousal. About the relationship between John and his dog, London adds:

[John] had a way of taking Buck's head roughly between his hands, and resting his own head upon Buck's, of shaking him back and forth, the while calling him ill names that to Buck were love names. Buck knew no greater joy than that rough embrace and the sound of murmured oaths, and at each jerk back and forth it seemed that his heart would be shaken out of his body so great was his ecstasy. . . . Buck had a trick of love expression that was akin to hurt. He would seize Thornton's hand in his mouth and close so fiercely that the flesh bore the impress of his teeth for some time afterward. And as Buck understood the oaths to be love words, so the man understood this feigned bite for a caress. (72)

This scene can easily be described as a kind of sexual encounter. The man and dog embrace roughly; there is jerking, the calling of "ill" names, the murmuring of oaths—certainly the lewd name-calling and exclamations of rough sex. The dog's heart is nearly shaken out of "his" body—London uses this personifying pronoun—and Buck experiences this as an ecstasy. Buck responds by taking John's hand—that part of the man's body that represents to Buck the giving of life because it is from the man's hand that he is fed—into his mouth.⁷ To John this "feigned bite," a near penetration of the skin, is a caress.

In another of London's popular dog stories, *White Fang*, he again describes the relationship between dog-wolf and man in the language of passion:

As the days went by, the evolution of *like* into *love* was accelerated. White Fang himself began to grow aware of it, though in his consciousness he knew not what love was. It manifested itself to him as a void in his being—a hungry, aching, yearning void that clamored to be filled. It was a pain and an unrest; and it received easement only by the touch of [Weedon Scott's] presence. At such times love was a joy to him, a wild, keen-thrilling satisfaction. . . . Meat, even meat itself, he would forego to be with his god, to receive a caress from him or to accompany him down into the town. (158)

Weedon Scott fills for *White Fang* an aching, yearning void that can only be appeased by his caress of the dog, which gives “keen-thrilling satisfaction.” These books provide other such examples, but the evidence here is clear. The relationship between human and dog is an erotic one, even if that eroticism is barred from sexual expression, as *White Fang* himself recognizes: “At times, when his god looked at him and spoke to him, he betrayed an awkward self-consciousness, caused by the struggle of his love to express itself and his physical inability to express it” (159). Such writing suggests that London is frustrated by the inability of, or at least the compelling taboo against, human and dog consummating their love. They must find satisfaction in the biting, in the jerking, in the caressing, and in the nuzzling that constitute the physical expression of desire within these two relationships.

But Travis is after all still a boy, and so none of the sort of caresses and ecstatic murmuring that appears in London’s work transpires between Travis and Old Yeller. It is precisely because the boy-dog, inter-species romance cannot be understood in terms of the genital sexuality thought to predominate in the lives of adults that this relationship has eluded notice as a proto-erotic one.

First published in 1956, Gipson’s *Old Yeller* can be read as a story about attachment and loss. The short novel opens with Travis recalling his father’s departure from Salt Licks, Texas. He and a group of other men plan to herd their steers to a cattle market in Abilene, Kansas, six hundred miles away. The trip will take months, and the fourteen-year-old Travis, charged with looking after his mother and brother, is reminded by his father that he must be the proverbial “man of the family.” Frontier Texas in the late 1860s, Travis realizes, is a dangerous place fraught with all kinds of potential peril for this small settler family. The months-long absence of his father quite literally requires Travis to lie awake at night and ward off animals that threaten their crops and their lives. It also means that Travis must add the usual workload of his father to his own daily chores: milking the cows, cutting the wood, marking the pigs, working the corn patch, and guarding against “raiding Indians.”

After the departure of Travis’s father, a dog appears to take his place.⁸ This is a case in which the father’s absence is absolute, proximity impossible, and attachment behavior futile. Before his father rides off, though, Travis makes one request: bring back a horse. “What you’re needing worse than a horse is a good dog,” his father presciently replies before their final goodbye (4). When the “big yeller dog” first appears, he steals a rack of meat from the dog run. Travis is indignant and rejects the dog; his attachment to his father cannot be replaced so soon. With his father’s departure we can see Travis needing to make adjustments, in Bowlby’s terms, to his internal model of self. Travis must be the man, and that requires him to act the disciplinarian with his brother, Arliss. But his mother at once scolds him for being too bossy. Travis cannot win here, and the impossibility of his conflicting roles—boy, playmate, man, protector—frustrates

him, as does the enormous weight of the responsibility placed on him by his father. “It didn’t seem fair to me,” he thought, “how could I be the man of the family if nobody paid any attention to what I thought or said. . . . I sulked and felt sorry for myself all the time I worked with the meat [of the killed doe]. The more I thought about it, the madder I got at the big yeller dog” (23).

Anger, argues Bowlby, is a common and perhaps invariable response to loss. The function of anger in his view is to add “punch” to strenuous efforts to recover the lost person and to dissuade him or her from deserting again (65). In Travis’s excessive anger toward Old Yeller we can already see his identification of the dog with his absent father—that is, with a protecting attachment figure. Soon afterward, Travis’s doubt about his ability to live up to his father’s charge is fueled when his mother must rescue him from beneath a rampaging bull and again when Arliss is nearly killed by a bear, a possibility that would have represented Travis’s ultimate failure. Travis softens his attitude toward Old Yeller when the dog rescues Arliss from the mother bear, which is protecting her threatened cubs. The contiguity of these scenes suggests that Travis himself might need rescuing from an “overprotective” mother who threatens to outdo Travis as the authority figure and hence supplant his manhood. Thus, just like Old Yeller rescues Arliss from the mother bear, the dog rescues Travis from this fate by ensuring Travis’s success as the man of the house.

Once Old Yeller proves to be an effective protector, in contrast to Travis’s repeated bumbings, the boy begins to develop an affection for him. The pressure on Travis is eased, as is the tension produced by his impossibly conflictive roles. Seen in this new light, Old Yeller occupies for Travis the place of his absent attachment figure, but Old Yeller is, after all, a dog. Thus, the relationship between him and Travis is necessarily of a different order than that between Travis and his father. Given his age, Travis is not yet his father’s equal in physicality, maturity, or experience. Old Yeller, however, can function more easily as a companion-protector, a sort of peer particularly suitable for an adolescent boy on the brink of manhood. On several occasions Old Yeller must come through by physically defending the boy from wild animals or by protecting the crops from varmints, and the dog, in turn, is fed and cared for by Travis. When the two are badly wounded by a pack of wild hogs, Old Yeller first intervenes to defend Travis, who must then rescue a near-fatally wounded dog. Travis proceeds to care for the dog in return by petting him furiously, withdrawing a thorn from between the dog’s toes, bathing him thoroughly, and letting him snuggle up in bed. Such physical intimacy and bodily care is different from the mutual helpfulness that characterizes Travis’s relationship with his father.

With Old Yeller, Travis is able to maintain adaptive attachment patterns and desirable models of both himself and his attachment figure. With the dog, Travis is able to successfully care for the crops, milk the uncooperative cow, and mark the pigs. He can therefore construct a model of himself as a successful provider for

his family, as someone not impeded by loneliness or anxiety and able to achieve an affectional bond with a responsive companion. These achievements are, according to Bowlby, essential to adaptive and happy living. In fulfilling these duties, Travis is the “man” his father requires him to be. The presence of Old Yeller allows him to avoid the various forms of emotional distress precipitated by the absence of a suitable attachment figure. The dog enables him to quell his anxiety about maintaining the family’s safety and to avoid the anger of not being treated like a man, since his mother comes to support his discipline of Arliss only after Travis develops a satisfactory relationship with the dog.

Two rivals threaten the relationship between the boy and his dog. Travis thinks, “How lonesome I would have been” without Old Yeller, and, “Papa had been right when he told me how bad I needed a dog” (60). It comes as shock to him, then, when a young man turns up at the cabin claiming that Old Yeller is *his* dog. In the face of this rival Travis is paralyzed with fear: “I nearly died when a man rode up one day and claimed Old Yeller” (64). There are two moments at which Travis nearly cries: when his father leaves town and when Burn Sanderson makes out as though he is taking Old Yeller off. Sanderson, sensing the family’s attachment to the animal, permits it to stay, but Old Yeller, too, has a rival. While the boy and his dog recover from their hog wounds, a young girl named Lisbeth comes to stay with them to help Ma around the cabin. Clearly liking the boy, she brings him the young progeny of Old Yeller and her own dog, but Travis rebuffs the gift. “What use did I have for a pup?” he wonders, “I had me a dog” (103). Old Yeller is all he needs, and neither Lisbeth nor the new puppy is a suitable replacement—yet.

Old Yeller’s traumatic climax, reminiscent of Rawlings’s *The Yearling*, no doubt fuels its popularity and award-winning status and demonstrates adult thinking about the normative development of childhood sexuality. In defending Ma and Lisbeth from a rabid wolf, Old Yeller is bitten. Ma hints at what must be done. Old Yeller has to be killed lest he come down with rabies himself and in turn infect or kill a member of the family in his madness. Ma offers to do the deed, but at the moment she offers, Travis understands that it is something *he* must do. Old Yeller is *his* dog, and to allow Ma to kill his dog would be to shirk his duty. And so Travis places the muzzle of his gun against Old Yeller’s head and pulls the trigger, killing his beloved companion. In killing his dog there is an immediate identification with it: “It was going to kill something inside me to do it. . . . Once I knew for sure I had it to do, I don’t think I really felt anything. I was just numb all over, like a dead man walking” (127). In killing Old Yeller it is as if Travis has killed himself and become a walking “dead man.” Shortly thereafter Travis’s father returns to Salt Licks and, after hearing about how Travis handled the affair with Old Yeller, tells his son that he “couldn’t ask any more of a grown man” (131). His father gives us the clue to the tremendous significance of Old Yeller’s death. In killing the object of his proto-erotic attachment Travis finally becomes

a man, and his father returns just in time to validate that transformation. “Now the thing to do,” he tells him, “is to try to forget it and go on being a man” (131).

Papa tries to reassure Travis, who is no doubt gratified that he has graduated to manhood, but his depression persists. According to Travis, hearing his father’s words “still didn’t do me any good. I still felt just as dead and empty” (131). What brings Travis “alive again” is witnessing Old Yeller’s pup reenacting an earlier scene in which its father had stolen some of the family’s food. The story concludes with Travis taking his little brother and the pup into the woods to teach them how to hunt, which shows that Travis has assumed the role of father. If we recall that initially Old Yeller took his father’s place as an attachment figure, then we might understand Travis’s assumption of his paternal role and his coincident rebirth at the sight of Old Yeller’s active pup as the confirmation of his identification with both Old Yeller and his father. Furthermore, given the fact that the pup is the offspring of Old Yeller and Lisbeth’s dog, we can see the two dogs as modeling the proper developmental trajectory for Lisbeth and Travis: heterosexuality and reproduction. Their dogs mated, and so will the children apparently. This realization is what compels Travis’s rebirth. *Old Yeller* demonstrates the importance of relinquishing the childhood attachment figure and hence assuming the responsibility presumably characteristic of adulthood. The contrived traumatization of children and the transcendence of loss, as *Old Yeller* teaches us, are essential to the making of (re)productive citizens.

Another widely read boy-and-his-dog story, Jim Kjelgaard’s *Big Red* offers an additional example of how a boy learns from his dog what exactly it is he must grow up to be and do. Printed on the first page is a quotation from a review that describes *Big Red* as a “sure-fire combination of a boy and dog. When they meet it is love at first sight, and so it will be for all who read the story.” Danny, the boy of the story, is a squatter living along with his widowed father on the property owned by the wealthy Dick Haggin. We learn that Danny has grown up fostering a fantasy of having the perfect dog and that all he wants in life is to “find a dog to shame all others, a fine dog that he could treasure, and cherish, and breed from” (6). After Danny bonds with Mr. Haggin’s Irish setter, whose name is Sylvester’s Boy, Mr. Haggin lets Danny care for the dog. Danny demonstrates promise as a skillful “dog man,” a handler of show dogs, and thus Haggin hires him. Mr. Haggin, who represents to Danny worldly success and great riches, is also a “dog man,” and, like Danny, was quite poor himself as a youth. Danny discovers a picture of Mr. Haggin as a boy, and in realizing that he and Mr. Haggin share a common origin, comes to identify with him. His identification with Haggin is mediated, of course, by Boy: “Mr. Haggin was looking at him, and Danny felt strangely drawn to the older man. They were not a wealthy dog financier and his apprentice handler, but two men who could be brought very close by a common bond—the love of a good dog” (41). So Boy and his dog man embark on a series of adventures, one of which is a trip to New York City to participate in

a dog show. At first Danny thinks dog shows are a waste of time, but Mr. Haggin explains to him their import:

In one sense you could think of it as part of the story of man, and his constant striving toward something better. A dog show is illustrative of man's achievement, and a blue ribbon is more than a bit of silk. It's a mark, Danny, one that never can be erased. The dog that wins it will not die. If we send Boy to the show, and he comes back as best of breed, then that's something for all future dog lovers and dog owners to build on. Don't you see? A hundred years from now someone may stand on this very spot with a fine Irish setter, and he'll trace his lineage back to some other very fine setter, perhaps to Boy. And he will know that he has built on what competent men have declared to be the very best. He will know also that he, too, can go one step nearer the perfection that men must and will have in all things. (32)

Through Boy, who has been bred to be a successful show dog and bird hunter and who is destined to sire other dogs that will be even better than he, Danny recognizes his own destiny. The breeding of dogs mirrors the history of man, with each successive generation improving on the previous one. Boy ultimately fails to win best in show, so it becomes imperative that Danny breed him in order to produce an even better dog. Danny, the son of a poor trapper, is described as more knowledgeable, talented, and charming than his own father. Like Boy, whose very name marks him as the canine double of the novel's human boy, Danny will breed in order to continue the improvement of his line. The novel ends with Danny looking upon his own future as Boy looks upon his newborn pups.

Countless other texts invoke a similar pattern of attachment and loss. In his memoir *Indian Boyhood* (1902), Sioux writer Charles Alexander Eastman (1858–1939) provides an autobiographical account of a ritual that parallels remarkably the attachment-sacrifice narrative of these boy-and-his-dog stories. He is first given the name Hakadah ("Pitiful Last") because his mother dies shortly after childbirth, and Eastman's father is imprisoned after an 1862 action against Minnesota settlers. So like the boys in these stories, the young Eastman suffers from parental loss. Raised by a grandmother, Eastman tells of his first sacrificial offering at the age of eight to the "Great Mystery," which his grandmother hopes will continue to bless her grandson with "savagely nobility and strength of manhood" (102). Hakadah is told that he must give up his dearest object, and after making a number of suggestions, his grandmother indicates what it is that will please the Great Mystery: the boy's beloved dog. The boy-protagonists of Wilson Rawls's *Where the Red Fern Grows* and William Armstrong's *Sounder* also suffer the loss of their dogs. In the latter text, the boy's identification of the dog with his father, lost first to prison and later to death, is particularly apparent. Dog and

father receive the same wounds, and the boy must search for the whereabouts of both his imprisoned father and his missing dog. His discovery and care of the dog clearly represent what he would like to be able to do for his father. The dog in Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh* is one of the only ones to survive.

Although less common, examples of *girl-and-her-dog* stories have appeared in fiction and film for or about youth. *Border Street*, a 1949 Polish film concerning the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, focuses on a group of children as their lives converge toward the Jewish revolt. A young girl named Jadzia, whose father has concealed the family's Jewish identity, exchanges rings with a young Polish boy in a mock wedding ceremony. Later, the boy's growing anti-Semitism and the revelation of Jadzia's Jewishness destroys their relationship. Jadzia's father arranges for the girl to be hidden, though he himself comes to be confined to the ghetto. She is nearly captured by German soldiers with a German Shepherd trained to sniff out Jews. Though having demonstrated its viciousness with Jews before, the dog is uncharacteristically affectionate with Jadzia and betrays its master to accompany her. Thus, like the other protagonists in the stories I have discussed, this girl is separated from her father and forms an attachment to a dog, which saves her time and again from peril. While she loses the mock boyfriend whose anti-Semitism intensifies, she gains a canine companion, which transforms from a Nazi pet into her new Aryan lover, complete with a golden mane. The dog simultaneously stands in for her lost father and lost proto-boyfriend, indicating, as I suggest, that the dog-lover represents a transitional figure between parental and romantic attachments.

Like *Old Yeller*, the more recent *girl-and-her-dog* story by Kate DiCamillo, *Because of Winn-Dixie*, is a Newbery Honor book.⁹ Like Travis, Opal has lost a major attachment figure, and like Danny, she will learn through her attachment to a dog how to navigate her troubled youth in order to attain successful adulthood. Abandoned by her mother and often neglected by a busy father whom she calls "the preacher" because "he spends so much time preaching or thinking about preaching or getting ready to preach" (13), Opal brings home a stray dog she discovers in the Winn-Dixie supermarket (hence the dog's name). "We're almost like orphans," she tells the dog, since neither of them has a mama and her father is so consistently occupied. Since she and her father have moved to a small Florida town so he can take over as the preacher of a church that occupies a former Pick-It-Quick store, Opal feels extremely lonely. Opal has not been able to make any friends in her new town, but thanks to Winn-Dixie's adept social skills, she meets one towns person after another and develops a small circle of close friends, including a lonely librarian, a mildly retarded pet-shop keeper, a half-blind elderly woman, and a knuckle-sucking five-year-old.

Like *Old Yeller*, the book is pervaded by the anxieties of a child who misses an absent parent. The librarian, Miss Fanny Block, shares with Opal her Littmus Lozenges, which seem to have the power to evoke sad thoughts in those who

taste them. To Otis, an ex-convict, they taste like prison. They remind Amanda of her dead little brother. They remind the preacher of Opal's mama. And to Opal's friend Gloria Dump, a Littmus Lozenge "tastes sweet. But it also tastes like people leaving" (119). Opal too thinks of loss:

I swept the floor real slow that day. I wanted to keep Otis company. I didn't want him to be lonely. Sometimes, it seemed like everybody in the world was lonely. I thought about my mama. Thinking about her was the same as the hole you keep on feeling with your tongue after you lose a tooth. Time after time, my mind kept going back to that empty spot, the spot right where I felt like she should be. (132)

We have here a child's recognition of the prevalence of loneliness and her honest attempt to comprehend loss.

Now, though, Opal has Winn-Dixie, whose one weakness is his intense fear of thunderstorms. During the story's climactic scene in which Opal has gathered her new friends together for a party, a sudden and violent storm scares the dog away in what seems like a repetition of the usual pattern for such stories, which end with the loss of the dog. Earlier in the story she asks her father to tell her exactly ten things about her mama; Opal thinks these things will help with finding her. Now, identifying her dog with her lost mother, she considers what ten things she will write on a "lost dog" flyer to help find Winn-Dixie. The dog, however, is recovered, but only after the occasion of its disappearance is used by her new friends to teach her about reconciling with loss. Opal breaks down with the sorrow of losing her dog, and it is at that moment she finds the courage to ask her father whether he thinks her mother will ever return. He thinks not. In the critical scene of Opal's maturation, she realizes "that you can't hold on to anything. That you can only love what you've got while you've got it" (167).

Before rejoining the party she kneels down by a tree she had planted. Dunlap, a young boy with whom she repeatedly exchanges childhood taunts, comes to bring her inside: "And then he surprised me. He did something I never in a million years though a Dewberry boy would do. He held out his hand to help me up. And I took it. I let him pull me to my feet" (180). One of the ten things the preacher tells Opal about her mother is that she was a fast runner and could outrace him. Now, as though she embodies her mother, Opal races Dunlap back to the party, and wins. Thus, Opal not only gains a group of friends and a surrogate family, she also gains a little proto-boyfriend. Despite the absence of her mother, we are left confident that Opal will attain womanhood. Unlike Opal's mother, with whom the dog is identified through its disappearance, Winn-Dixie returns. The dog therefore offers itself as an alternative object with which Opal can identify, thereby encouraging us to believe that Opal will, unlike her mother, but like her dog, grow up to be a good, dependable mother/wife.

One notable difference between *Old Yeller* and *Because of Winn-Dixie* is the fact that the loss of the dog in the latter book is not absolute; he comes back. This difference can be understood as related to differences of setting and genre. As with *The Yearling*, the frontier setting of *Old Yeller* raises the stakes of maturation to the level of physical life and death. In contrast, the contemporary setting of *Winn-Dixie* appears to lower those stakes, and while *Old Yeller* is a historical novel, *Winn-Dixie* is closer to a contemporary problem novel, which is usually smaller in scope and more distinctly focused on the problems of the individual than the historical novel. Neither Opal's life nor the dog's is ever in danger. The danger is now to Opal's emotional and social health. Whereas Travis is concerned with keeping himself and his family alive, Opal is concerned with managing her loneliness and forming a supportive community. These are important and crucial tasks, to be sure, but the consequences of failure in Opal's case are less immediately dire. Since her physical survival is virtually ensured, Opal is free to address her mental and emotional health, mirroring perhaps the historical trajectory of childhood in the United States. Now that children are more likely to survive birth and childhood, and now that many can safely avoid the dangers associated with child labor, their concerns are free to turn to their psychological and emotional needs.

What happens to the dog literalizes this shift in focus. Opal and her father return to the party without having found Winn-Dixie, but they discover that the dog has been inside the house all along. In fact, Winn-Dixie never really ran away; he simply went further into the house and hid under a bed. Losing the dog *inside* the home represents the shift in *Winn-Dixie* to internal, psychological, and social dangers. Moreover, this discovery that Winn-Dixie was inside all along prompts Opal's reconciliation with the loss of her mother and immediately precedes the scene between Opal and Dunlap that signals her identification with her mother. Like the dog, her mother appears to be *inside* Opal as an identification that manifests itself when Opal outruns Dunlap the way her mother had outrun her father. Finally, the discovery of Winn-Dixie inside the house relates to the shift to a girl protagonist for this dog story. In *Old Yeller*, a "boy book," the danger is physical, and most of the major events of the novel take place outdoors. The same is true for most of the boy-and-his-dog stories mentioned throughout this chapter, including *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and *Where the Red Fern Grows*. In *Winn-Dixie*, the problems, dangers, and events become interior ones, since the novel occurs in mostly domestic spaces and is concerned with social and psychological issues. The sample of girl-and-her-dog stories is simply too small to suggest that *Winn-Dixie* either fits or establishes a particular pattern for dog stories with girl protagonists, but this set of differences from *Old Yeller* seems hardly coincidental given the significant ways in which dog stories invoke notions of gender identity and performance.

The prominence of the boy-and-his-dog story in children's literature and American culture has inspired a number of satires and parodies that betray a discomfort with or resistance to this mechanism for inducing melancholic maturation. Emily Cheney Neville's 1964 Newbery Medal winner, *It's Like This, Cat*, both offers an alternative to the boy-dog relationship and connects the boy-pet motif to the issue of gender and psychological or emotional health. Her novel centers on a long-haired fourteen-year-old boy named Dave, who prefers to stay indoors listening to Belafonte records, which he buys with the money he earns from babysitting. These indications of Dave's boyhood deviance—having long hair, listening to Belafonte, and babysitting—are clearly coded in gendered terms and are presumably girlish. His father, of course, thinks Dave should cut his hair, play outdoors, and, to ensure his boyhood masculinity, get himself a dog. In the very first line of the novel, Dave says, "My father is always talking about how a dog can be very educational for a boy. This is one reason I got a cat" (1). Dave's father is obviously not alone in his assumption that getting a dog is useful as a remedy for sissy boys, since that assumption clearly underlies the entire subgenre of the boy-and-his-dog story. Dave's insistence on a cat represents a rejection of that normalizing project.

Gordon Korman's *No More Dead Dogs* (2000) even more explicitly parodies the subgenre. Eighth-grader Wallace finds himself in trouble when he writes a negative review of *Old Shep, My Pal*, a fictitious boy-and-his-dog story that is clearly reminiscent of *Old Yeller*. His teacher, Mr. Fogelman, is shocked by Wallace's irreverence: "*Old Shep, My Pal* is a timeless classic! It won the Gunhold Award!" (4). Wallace questions why the book has to be so sad: "Go to the library and pick out a book with an award sticker and a dog on the cover. Trust me, that dog is going down" (5). Like Dave in *It's Like This, Cat*, Wallace rejects the motif and its tendency to win awards, and also like Dave, Wallace is depicted as failing to live up to the ideals of boyhood. He is only a mediocre athlete and he is smart enough to correct his classmate's use of the word "subconscious" (7). Ideal boys should not be too clever, it seems. Because he gets detention for his review of *Old Shep, My Pal*, Wallace is ultimately suspended from the football team. He is further punished by having to help put on a school production of *Old Shep, My Pal*, sealing his fate as a failed boy because of his association with the drama club. Wallace talks the drama club into changing both the language of *Old Shep* by updating it and the ending of the play by allowing Shep to live. This connects the death of the dog to outdated language and hence a notion of datedness, which most directly applies perhaps to the theme of manhood in these texts. When the play debuts, the audience loves the changes, and Wallace is recuperated as a modern hero who rescues the play from a saboteur and ends up with a date with the president of the drama club. Korman's *No More Dead Dogs* is a contemporary novel written in a comedic mode, unlike the historical, high-stakes seriousness of *Old Yeller*. The

fact that the characters in Korman's novel are driven to chant "no more dead dogs" suggests a desire to rewrite the ending of these books, just as we saw with responses to *A Separate Peace* and *Bridge to Terabithia*.

Despite these traces of resistance, the trajectory of the boy-and-his-dog story has been reproduced as an actual therapeutic program in which participants train service dogs in order to relinquish them to persons with disabilities. The program has been attempted with two populations: schoolchildren and prison inmates. The high-schooled assistance dog program, founded by Bonita Bergin at her Assistance Dog Institute in California and replicated by school districts throughout the country, involves pairing "at risk" youth with dogs, which the students then train. As the dogs learn to be service animals for the disabled, their young trainers are provided with an incentive to come to school and improve their academic performance through the lure of the dog's affection. According to program enthusiasts, these troubled teens see dramatic improvements in school attendance, grades, self-esteem, and overall behavior (Lake, Green). One high school counselor at a school that instituted the program claims that these kids "are learning about life, people, society and themselves. That knowledge will [allow] them to make a positive contribution to society, no longer a victim of its inadequacies." According to Bergin it is "the unconditional love that these animals offered the youngsters" that keeps them involved in the program and coming to school. "For some," she continues, "it was something they'd seldom experienced" (qtd. in Green). Reporter Ranny Green characterizes the relationship between youth and dog as a romance: "When you toss in the touch factor with petting and massage, and eye contact, you have the makings of a burgeoning love affair and partnership." The kids come to school because they are in love—with their dogs. At the very least, what they experience is an intense attachment to these animals.

The final lesson comes in the inevitable conclusion of the program. After eighteen months of training, the dogs are ready to be handed over to the disabled recipients in a ritual graduation where each student ceremoniously walks across a stage to relinquish the animal to its new lover. The ceremony is, as we expect, an emotional one. The students weep, hesitate, then move toward the wheelchair bound recipients one by one. The animal is given up, lost. Clearly those involved find it satisfying to witness young people potentially reduced to tears by handing over their carefully trained puppies in what represents, at the very least, a craving for pathos as a prescribed remedy to the youth's perceived troubles. In other words, what we see here are these children being disciplined through their disciplining of these dogs, which the young people are forced to give up in order for the dogs to make useful contributions to their new owners. As Green reports, "The students can relate to these animals that once refused to accept direction. For they, too, have done the same with authority figures, ranging from parents, teachers and the law." The objective is for these young people to identify with the

now disciplined and socially useful animal, and that identification is ensured by the intensely affectionate relationship cultivated between youth and dog and by the subsequent loss of the animal.¹⁰

Perhaps not surprisingly, schools and prisons are the two locations in which the “therapeutic” use of dog training has been made. This notable coincidence highlights the disciplinary use of the enforced attachment-sacrifice paradigm. Associated Press writer Bill Baskervill reports that the use of dog training programs in prisons is meant to “teach prisoners respect for life.” One of the benefits, Baskervill notes, is that the dogs are saved from being euthanized. The canines, which he describes as being at first “high strung,” “nervous,” and “stubborn,” are transformed into “lovable, well-mannered pets adopted nationwide.” It is not difficult to read this as precisely the fantasy, if not the objective, with regards to the prisoners themselves. The fact that the dog-training programs are intended as therapeutic, explicitly designed to produce subjects who will make “positive” social contributions, and employed with students and prisoners exposes the disciplinary use to which this process of attachment, loss, and identification is put. This is not to claim, however, that the adults involved are not well meaning, innovative, or mostly benevolent. The students and prisoners in these programs must agree to participate, and they no doubt find the program rewarding despite (or because of?) the loss of the dog. That is, of course, the point.

In discussions of what is referred to as “situational homosexuality”—sexual contact between persons of the same sex that supposedly takes place only because other-sex partners are unavailable—the two “situations” most commonly cited are schools and prisons, precisely the two locations in which the “therapeutic” use of dog training has been made. This coincidence confirms the disciplinary use of the enforced attachment-sacrifice paradigm that is manifested in these parallel ways: the “situational” homosexuality of schools and prisons and the boy/prisoner-dog attachments of the training programs. Both manifestations involve fostering attachments while expecting and promoting the loss of those attachments. In the case of “situational homosexuality” amongst school-boys or prisoners, individuals are placed in circumstances that cultivate same-sex attachments, while the prescriptive expectation is that those attachments are merely provisional. The dog training programs reenact the same “situation,” replacing a person of the same sex with a dog, and thus they are exemplary of this disciplinary use of sacrifice.

Schools and prisons are imagined as places of (re)formation, and as I have tried to show here, the practice of encouraging intense, affectional attachments—especially queer ones—and then compelling the loss of those attachments has proved particularly useful as a (re)formative disciplinary device in which a melancholic identification with the good, disciplined object results in the “better,” normative behavior of the subject. What boy-and-his-dog stories do is reproduce that device in narrative form, thereby extending its influence while

simultaneously providing evidence of an often-overlooked form of childhood sexuality, that of the relationship between a boy and his dog.

In the boy-and-his-dog story the young protagonist experiences an intense attraction to and affection, even to the point of sensual passion, for a dog, which in turn reciprocates that passionate and queerly perverse attachment. At least that is how some relationships between humans and their pets seemed to Austrian psychologist and Nobel laureate Konrad Lorenz, who in his book *Man Meets Dog*, writes, “Anyone who, disappointed and embittered by human failings, denies his love to mankind in order to transfer it to a dog or a cat, is definitely committing a grave sin, social sodomy so to speak, which is as disgusting as the sexual kind,” although he notes that “of course it is harmless and legitimate for a lonely person, who for some reason or other is deprived of social intercourse, to procure a dog to assuage an inward longing to love and be loved” (74).¹¹ While neither Travis nor Opal is as of yet disappointed or embittered, both are deprived of social intercourse with one of their parents and instead form passionate attachments to their dogs, which help facilitate their gender-sexual development.

Ultimately, these books give pleasure not only to their child readers, but also to the adults who write and publish them, who purchase them for children, who consent to read them to children, who select them to be available in libraries and to be made a part of school curricula, and who vote on awarding them prestigious prizes. I want to assert that these stories function as sources of pleasure precisely in that they enable the reader to revel in the ideality of this bestial relationship, this “social sodomy,” and all that it offers as an exemplar of a secure, successful, and pleasurable attachment in contrast to the typically more embattled attachments of life. These stories encourage us to rethink the literary practice of anthropomorphization in children’s literature. Making animals humanlike represents an impulse not only to form attachments with sensitive, responsive, and competent attachment figures in the absence of satisfactory attachments with other humans, but also to practice engaging in the complex sexualized relations of later life. Perhaps the representation of this bestial erotics indicates a more endemic impulse toward what is queer that draws force in part from a widespread dissatisfaction with the qualities and (im)possibilities of normative human-human attachments.

Science-fiction writer Harlan Ellison makes use of the boy-dog motif in a way that exposes its queer possibilities. In the post-apocalyptic story entitled “A Boy and His Dog,” Victor and his telepathic canine, Blood, roam the wastelands simply trying to survive. One day Victor unexpectedly falls for a girl named Quilla June, and he abandons Blood in order to pursue her. Later, when he returns with her to where the dog has been waiting for him, Victor finds Blood sick, starving, and too weak to travel, which poses a dilemma in the dangerous wasteland. Victor is forced to choose between his beloved dog and Quilla June, who insists on hurrying away. The story concludes with Victor making his choice: boy and dog eat the girl, literally. “Do you know what love is,” Victor recalls Quilla June asking

him. “Sure I know,” he thinks, “A boy loves his dog” (983). “A Boy and His Dog” is the queerly reversed version of *Old Yeller*: whereas Travis murders his dog in the service of the family unit and his own successful manhood, heterosexuality, and reproductive future, Victor chooses to maintain his bestial commitment to Blood at the expense of his heterosexual possibility by murdering the girl, a telling choice given the scarcity of available females in the world of Ellison’s story.

Like Ellison’s “A Boy and His Dog,” Jeanne Desy’s 1982 “The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet,” collected in an anthology of feminist fairy tales, similarly invokes the potentially erotic-romantic relationship between human and canine companion while addressing the pattern of sacrifice usually associated with this relationship. The princess in this story is too tall, outspoken, and intelligent for any suitable princely suitor, but she does have a beloved, speaking dog that remains always faithful. At first the princess attempts both to mask her height by remaining seated in the presence of the prince who is courting her and to silence herself and her wit by feigning muteness. Still, the unsatisfied prince wants her to get rid of the dog, and he makes this the condition for their marriage. Paralyzed with frustration and uncertainty, the princess asks her dog what to do:

“Sometimes,” the dog said, looking beyond her shoulder, “sometimes one must give up everything for love.” The Princess’s lip trembled and she looked away.

“What will I do?” she cried again. The dog did not answer. She turned toward him and then fell to her knees in shock, for the dog lay motionless on the floor. For hours she sat weeping at his side, holding his lifeless paw. (Zipes 45)

Thus, her dog sacrifices his life so that she can marry the prince. To honor her canine lover, she wraps him in her wedding dress and marches out of the castle to bury him, passing the prince along the way and telling him “good-bye” because she can no longer remain seated or silent. In the end, her dog is reborn as a handsome, albeit shorter, prince. The story concludes with a lesson, which emerges from a conversation between the wizard who observes all of these events and his own companion, a cat named Mirabelle.

“Ah, well.” The Wizard said. “I gather from all this—I shall make a note—that sometimes one must sacrifice for love.”

Mirabelle looked intently at the Wizard. “On the other hand,” the cat said at last, “sometimes one must refuse to sacrifice.” (47)

Both of these narratives refuse the normative conclusion that calls for the sacrifice of the canine companion, offering instead a queer and feminist revision that embraces social sodomy.

Although the conclusion of *Old Yeller* seems to reject the bestial and queer love of boy and dog, the novel, like the wife of Lot, enacts or stages a looking backwards. In order for this story to work, it must be projected back nearly one hundred years from the era of its composition to when hydrophobia, as rabies was then still known, remained unexplained and untreatable. The unavailability of a vaccine and the inevitable outcome of the disease produce the sense of necessity that Old Yeller must be killed. In 1956 when this story was published, similar circumstances such as those depicted in the novel would not have invoked the force of necessity: dogs could be vaccinated against rabies, and this was becoming a requirement for the licensure of pets. Thus, the story functions as a kind of looking back in a nostalgic return to America's frontier past—frequently noted as a useful site for working out questions of manhood and masculinity—for a developmental and disciplinary tract in the same way that for adult readers it facilitates a looking back to their own childhoods. The return to the frontier, and to a town called Salt Licks, as a setting for the love between boy and dog and the subsequent violence that ends their relationship suggests an ambivalence that is embodied by Lot's wife.

C. Jerry Kutner goes so far as to write that Disney's film version of *Old Yeller* "isn't just about child abuse; it *is* child abuse, as any number of viewers who saw it in their youth can attest" (2). Through such novels and films, the child-viewer is able to experience the trauma of "having" and "losing" the queer attachment. What seems remarkable about the high-schooled assistance dog program, which reflects the trajectory of these dog stories, is that it purportedly does children a favor by traumatizing them in a way that blurs the line between the benevolent pedagogy of "let me show you" and the violent punitiveness of "I'm going to teach you a lesson." These children are drawn in by the life-saving temptation of a queer attachment only to have its loss demanded of them. They are offered the comfort of the object only to be forced to relinquish it, and the offer and retraction operate together as a disciplinary technique by which the child's normative citizenship is purchased. The memory traces of the loss function as a warning away from the return to or search for the lost object. It is Travis's father, after all, who advises him to get a dog in the first place. But ultimately for Travis to permit the potentially rabid Old Yeller to live is literally to risk madness, to risk the death of his family, and to fail the charge of manhood—a necessary charge, no doubt, as it is a charge to survive—by allowing his charges to die. There is clearly a lesson in all of this for Travis, one he has to learn the hard way. Old Yeller, like the trained dogs of the high-schooled assistance dog program, is a good, disciplined object whose loss makes possible an identification that enables Travis to become the good, disciplined subject.

In Bowlby's theory of attachment, the child builds internal working models of itself and its relationship to attachment figures as it experiences these relationships. As one figure is exchanged for another, or as the relationship with the

attachment figure changes, these models are gradually updated. Nevertheless, traces remain throughout adulthood of those models first formed during childhood, and therefore the attachments formed during youth continue to exert a profound influence throughout the lifespan. This understanding of the significance of childhood attachments resonates with Freud's view that the "character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes" (*Ego* 19), or with what Butler, in response to this passage in Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, describes as the "sedimentation of objects loved and lost" (*Psychic* 133). The significance of lost childhood attachments compels our attention to those texts, like the ones I have looked at here, that represent relationships to children, that present the possibilities of what might be, and that function didactically in offering reasons either to provoke or to resist losses of the queer sort.