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ROMANTIC CONTINUATIONS, POSTMODERN CONTESTATIONS, OR, "IT'S A MAGICAL WORLD, HOBBES, OL' BUDDY" . . . CRASH!

An imaginative, withdrawn boy roams wild in a rugged natural setting that becomes a site of instruction in human mortality and morality. Learning as he goes, he revels in the world's beauty, cowers before its ugliness and pain, or retreats to the sometimes snug but often conflicted institutions of home and school, where he plays power games in order to control those he considers his adversaries—practically everyone, in fact. Curiously, this boy possesses a kind of double vision, seeing people and things as they exist both in their material reality and in his imagination. And even more curiously, he both is and is not alone: accompanying him like a shadow is a bigger-than-life being of his own creation that is alternately stronger and weaker, more civilized and more brutal than he is. This creature, sometimes his closest friend and ally, acts just as often as a stalking nemesis, waiting to pounce on him and demand his rights.

I have, of course, just listed some key elements of Bill Watterson's brilliant and very popular comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*. Readers of British Romantic literature, however, will also recognize in the preceding paragraph key elements of three of the most important texts of that period: William Wordsworth's *Prelude*, where the mature poet recalls and reconstructs his boyhood, spent in the rural Lake District, as both sublime and savage; William Blake's double-visioned *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, where both material and imaginative values are simultaneously celebrated and interrogated; and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where Victor first obsessively, adoringly produces his creature/child and then heartlessly rejects him when he finds him ugly, thus driving his alter ego to evil and locking both of them into a love-hate relationship that ends only with their deaths. Throughout its ten-year history, *Calvin and Hobbes* confirms Alan

Richardson's argument, in the first essay in this volume, that American childhood at the end of this century continues to be haunted, for better or worse, by Romantic conflicts of identity which polarize an autonomous, imperial self and an Other located variously in nature, in society, and/or within that same self.

Granted, Calvin's enslavement to television and his channel-surfing mentality, his fragmented verbal echoes of contemporary commercial and political discourse (sound-bytes he has presumably heard on the tube), and his fear-driven fascination with schemes of vengeance and mass destruction certainly reveal other, more recent influences than those of early-nineteenth-century England. Indeed, Lois Kuznets has brilliantly analyzed him and Hobbes in terms of post-Freudian psychoanalysis and postmodern, poststructuralist decenterings and fractures. However, Kuznets also historicizes the strip in regard to Romantic tradition (35, 45–46; see also Singer 115), which she, like Richardson, finds simultaneously subversive and conservative with regard to social change (57–58); later in the present volume Richard Flynn links the fracturings of postmodern adult poetry with a revitalization of the image of the Romantic child, and Dieter Petzold finds Romantic irony in postmodern fictions for children.

Thus one can see postmodernism itself as a long-term result of Romantic prophecies, and I will suggest, following not just Flynn and Petzold but Chris Baldick and Warren Montag, that in creating a new myth of the monstrous powers and dangers of science and technology first unleashed on the world by the Industrial Revolution and of the resulting reconstruction of society into bourgeoisie and proletariat, Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* anticipated these fractures between and within individuals on both the societal and domestic levels. Certainly William Blake did in his relentless attacks on the "mind-forg'd manacles" societies produce when they rely on reason and technological progress instead of imagination ("London," l. 8, *Works* 102), and Wordsworth did also in a well-known passage in his 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*:

> For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events that are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the unifor-

> mity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. (*Poetical Works* 735)

Writing almost two hundred years ago, Wordsworth uncannily seems to anticipate what we now know as the mass media, telecommunications, and the information highway—and the couch potatoes, like Calvin himself when hypnotized before the screen, who passively sit back and receive the "communicated intelligence." But the Romantic heritage of *Calvin and Hobbes* manifests itself more positively in Calvin's joyously imaginative but usually disastrous explorations of the wooded ravine behind his house, his love of the way fresh snow changes the landscape, the double vision that leads him to endless clashes with the (ironically) mostly female upholders of his still-patriarchal society, his always-intense but always-changing relationship with his other self, Hobbes, and even the manner of the strip's disappearance from the newspapers on Sunday, December 31, 1995.

Wordsworth's statement in *The Prelude* that his rural childhood was "fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (Book I [1805]: 306) is illustrated perfectly when he tells of the raising of a drowned man from the lake of Esthwaite:

> There came a company, and in their boat
> Sounded with iron hooks and with long poles.
> At length the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
> Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
> Rose with his ghastly face.
> (*Prelude*, Book I [1799]: 275–79)

Wordsworth here in this grim parody of a forceps-assisted birth restates the ancient dichotomy between the bright and dark sides of maternal nature that, as Camille Paglia notes (230–47), was reinscribed in late-eighteenth-century France in the roughly contemporaneous writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Marquis de Sade. In the *Social Contract* and also in his educational treatise *Emile*, Rousseau had reversed the Judeo-Christian doctrine of original sin to argue that man in nature is innocent and good and that it is our social institutions of home, school, church, and state that corrupt us. De Sade in his actual behavior and his writings represented human life in its most bestial condition where libido is totally unrestrained

FIGURE 1.

and pain is inseparable from pleasure. This dichotomy is perfectly illustrated in a two-frame daily strip where Calvin first recites six lyrical lines about a spider web in tall grass (fig. 1):

> Like delicate lace,
> So the threads intertwine,
> Oh, gossamer web
> Of wond'rous design!
> Such beauty and grace
> Wild nature produces . . .

These lines, interestingly, both echo and mock Robert Frost's poem "Design" (see *Complete* 396). Then, in the second frame, Calvin's face contorts with revulsion as he adds his own commentary to the verses: "Ughh, look at the spider suck out that bug's juices!" (*Observer*, June 29, 1993).

In a Sunday strip that examines the same issue (fig. 2), Calvin and Hobbes are walking through fresh snow as Calvin rather glibly comments: "We have houses, electricity, plumbing, heat. . . . Maybe we're so sheltered and comfortable that we've lost touch with the natural world and forgotten our place in it. Maybe we've lost our awe of nature" (he's obviously been reading either Wordsworth or perhaps a mass mailing from the Sierra Club). Then he turns and looks earnestly up at Hobbes: "That's why I want to ask *you*, as a tiger, a wild animal close to nature, what you think we're put on Earth to do. What's our purpose in life? Why are we here?" With a sweet grin Hobbes replies, "We're here to devour each other alive." For three small frames Calvin considers this wordlessly; then in the final drawing we see him inside, perched on a chair back in order to reach the thermostat as he calls out: "Turn on the lights! Turn up the heat!" (*Observer*, February 23, 1992). Thus Calvin realizes again, like Wordsworth, that the life and innocence of nature are also the death and

FIGURE 2.

corruption of nature—that the beauty and fear are inseparable, and that much of everyday life in society consists of artifices and distractions that help us to deny both our own mortality and our cruelty to others. The lesson parallels that presented below by William Scheick in his analysis of Mary Austin's stories of conflict between the Native American closeness to nature and the Anglo obsession with technology and "progress." In *The Prelude* Wordsworth shows a similar awareness when, after retelling several of his outdoor adventures, he brings the outdoor and indoor worlds together as he recalls skating on the frozen lake while all around the shore the cottage windows light up to call him and his friends home for study, food, or rest (Book I [1799]: 150–59). Then later, having reentered the indoor world, Wordsworth describes the simple but passionately pursued "home-amusements," mostly card games, with which he and his friends distracted themselves inside when bad weather prevented outdoor play. Thus Watterson and Wordsworth seem to agree that the various social activities and conflicts that take up so much of our energy—vital and dangerous as they may be—are trivial in comparison to the moments of vision and insight one may have when outdoors and alone.

Canonical Romantic poetry always stresses the importance of the writer's creative imagination, which sees through these trivial encounters and conflicts of everyday life in society to confront deeper

issues of identity and spirituality. Blake epitomizes the double vision in a much-quoted passage from his November 22, 1802, verse-letter to Thomas Butts:

> For double the vision my eyes do see,
> And a double vision is always with me.
> With my inward eye, 'tis an Old Man grey,
> With my outward, a Thistle across my way.
> (ll. 27–30, *Works* 188)

Texts like the companion "Chimney Sweeper" poems in *Innocence* and *Experience* work similarly by presenting opposing views of the London sweeps' terrible, often fatal working conditions. In *Innocence*, with touching but dangerously naive faith, the child-narrator trusts in his father, who sold him, and in God and the Church: "So if all do their duty they need not fear harm" (l. 24, *Works* 74). In *Experience* the same child has come to recognize his exploitation, and he bitterly blames his poor parents, who "are gone to praise God and His Priest and King, / Who make up a Heaven of our misery" (ll. 11–12, *Works* 104). Calvin shows this Blakean Romantic privileging of the double vision not just by animating his stuffed tiger but every time he sees his parents as dinosaurs or robots, himself as Spaceman Spiff, or the green blob of food on his plate as an attacking enemy.

Explaining his battles with his syndicate over licensing, Watterson further aligns himself with this aspect of Romantic tradition as he writes: "My strip is about private realities, the magic of imagination, and the specialness of certain friendships" (*Tenth* 11). Praising three other strips that have influenced him, Watterson clearly values the individual vision of each of these precursors. Of Charles Schulz's *Peanuts* he says, "I think the most important thing I learned from *Peanuts* is that a comic strip can have an emotional edge to it and that it can talk about the big issues of life in a sensitive and perceptive way" (*Tenth* 17). He admires Walt Kelly's *Pogo* for its visual richness, "lushly drawn . . . , full of bombast and physical commotion," and the rich stew of its dialogue (*Tenth* 17). But he bestows his highest praise on George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*: "*Krazy Kat* is more poetic than funny, with a charm that's impossible to describe. Everything about the strip is idiosyncratic and peculiar . . . For me, the magic of the strip is not so much in what it says, but how it says it. In its singular, uncompromised vision, its subtle whimsy and odd beauty, *Krazy Kat* stands alone" (*Tenth* 18). Like Schulz, Watterson

uses childhood to explore the big issues of life; and in his restless experiments with formats (and the resulting battles with newspapers about space) and with lushly visual fantasy sequences such as those involving dinosaurs, deserts, and Spaceman Spiff, Watterson has followed Kelly and Herriman to achieve his own singular, uncompromised vision.

But he speaks even more specifically about the importance of imagination when he writes of his own relationship to Calvin and of Calvin's relationship to Hobbes. He writes, "I was a fairly quiet, obedient kid—almost Calvin's opposite. One of the reasons that Calvin's character is fun to write is that I often don't agree with him" (*Tenth* 21). As with Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein and his monstrous creature, Calvin thus functions in Jungian terms as a shadow self, a projection of Watterson's repressed desires that both does and does not have objective reality: Calvin, in other words, at least some of the time is Watterson's Hobbes. Continuing, Watterson speaks of Calvin as his inner child in terms that are perhaps less Blakean than Wordsworthian: "Calvin is autobiographical in the sense that he thinks about the same issues that I do, but in this, Calvin reflects my adulthood more than my childhood. Many of Calvin's struggles are metaphors for my own. I suspect that most of us get old without growing up, and that inside every adult (sometimes not very far inside) is a bratty kid who wants everything his own way" (*Tenth* 21). *The Prelude* similarly is not just about childhood but rather the conflict between Wordsworth's adult and childhood selves, "two consciousnesses—conscious of myself, / And of some other being" (Book II [1799]: 30–31) that merge in moments of high mental intensity but that split into fear, jealousy, confusion, and frustration much of the time. This doubleness, with its inevitable ironic instability and tensions, repeats itself in the Calvin-Hobbes relationship. Watterson seems somewhat ambivalent on the subject of the double existence of Hobbes. He sounds a bit like Victor Frankenstein trying to deny responsibility for his strange creation when he almost testily asserts, "I don't think of Hobbes as a doll that miraculously comes to life when Calvin's around. Neither do I think of Hobbes as the product of Calvin's imagination. The nature of Hobbes's reality doesn't interest me, and each story goes out of its way to avoid resolving the issue." But he concludes the same paragraph by reaffirming the importance of private vision: "None of us sees the world in exactly the same way, and I just draw that literally in the strip. Hobbes is more

about the subjective nature of reality than about dolls coming to life" (*Tenth* 22). Nevertheless, just as Mary Shelley deals with the double reality of Victor and his creature or Blake with both material and spiritual frames, Watterson is dealing with *both* the objective nature of reality, whereby Hobbes's "real" presence, words, and actions in the strip have to "make sense" to his readers, *and* the subjective nature, whereby Calvin is always projecting his own unspoken thoughts into his alter ego.

Watterson reveals more disingenuousness regarding Romantic origins in a daily strip published in 1993 (fig. 3), where he has Calvin recite to Hobbes (who is trying to sleep and ignore it) Blake's famous *Song of Experience* about the combined objective and subjective nature of a tiger's reality: "Tiger! Tiger! burning bright / In the forests of the night" ("The Tiger," ll. 1–2, *Works* 85). Ironically, Watterson makes Calvin take these lines literally and thus perversely misunderstand Blake's emphasis on the combined danger and seductiveness of the revolutionary energy his mentalized beast embodies: "Blake wrote that. Apparently the tiger was on fire. Maybe his tail got struck by lightning or something." Calvin walks off muttering, "Flammable felines—what a weird subject for poetry"; Hobbes wakes from his nap, exasperated with human intelligence, or rather the apparent lack of it, to sigh, "This is why I try to sleep through most of the day" (*Observer*, March 27, 1993).

That Romantic childhood or, for that matter, Romanticism itself, with all its internal and external conflicts, is largely a "guy thing" has been emphasized in the recent work of Romantic feminist critics such as Mitzi Myers, analyzing Maria Edgeworth below, and Anne Mellor, who argues that while Wordsworth, Blake, and other male Romantic poets were using their imagination to explore these conflicts, women writers of the period, including Edgeworth, Dorothy

FIGURE 3.

Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley, were creating a feminine Romanticism in a literary art that emphasized the opposing qualities of rationality, community, and cooperation (2–3). Certainly it is true that while Wordsworth takes his own process of self-formation very seriously in *The Prelude* and Blake stresses over and over again the importance of maintaining one's personal vision, Mary Shelley uses Victor Frankenstein and his creature to show how monstrously destructive such egotism can be both to others and to oneself. Late-twentieth-century American society may still be patriarchal, but except for his father, the community forces against which Calvin does battle daily are represented almost exclusively by the numerous women in his life: his almost anachronous stay-at-home mother; his teacher, Miss Wormwood; his babysitter, Rosalyn; and especially his classmate and neighbor, Susie Derkins. Again and again Calvin despises Susie just for existing, grosses her out in the lunchroom, or lobs snowballs at her—until Susie has had enough, and then she shows she is extremely dangerous when aroused and easily able to outdo him in schemes of vengeance: when Calvin steals her doll, she steals Hobbes (*Tenth* 136–44). Calvin never learns from this in the strip, and in his own comments on it, Watterson emphasizes the primacy of this antisocial masculine imagination to both himself and Calvin. This is not to critique Watterson himself as chauvinistic. In fact, he makes clear in his written comments on Susie that he admires and likes her: "Susie is earnest, serious, and smart—the kind of girl I was attracted to in school and eventually married. . . . Neither . . . [Calvin nor Susie] quite understands what's going on, which is probably true of most relationships" (*Tenth* 24). In his final comment on Susie, Watterson again shows sympathy with feminist viewpoints: "I sometimes imagine a strip from Susie's point of view would be interesting, and after so many strips about boys, I think a strip about a little girl, drawn by a woman, could be great" (*Tenth* 24).

In no way does *Calvin and Hobbes* more clearly reveal its Romantic cultural baggage than in the manner of its departure from the newspapers in December 1995. The production and distribution of Watterson's strip, with its economic and psychological tensions, both reinscribe and interrogate the efforts of the librarians in Anne Lundin's study in this volume to further the reputation of Kate Greenaway's illustrations and the efforts of both A. A. Milne and the Disney empire, as recounted below by Paula T. Connolly, to use Winnie-

the-Pooh to market Romantic childhood. Watterson became increasingly frustrated over time by his long wars with Universal Press Syndicate over licensing rights (Grossberger)—the syndicate wanted to put Calvin and Hobbes onto coffee mugs and T-shirts—and with newspapers about his sabbaticals (Astor, "Mixed") and about getting sufficient space to reproduce his increasingly large and unorthodox Sunday formats (Astor, "Cartoonists"). Rather than agree to what he perceived as these limits to his control and his creativity, Watterson ended newspaper appearances of *Calvin and Hobbes* on New Year's Eve 1995 with a powerful strip that almost literally sends Calvin and Hobbes sliding off the confining medium of the comic pages and into the as-yet-uncharted visions and unfinished business of Watterson's ongoing creative career (fig. 4). Mary Shelley's doomed pair, Victor and his creature, cannot transcend their division or escape their fate, and they perish in arctic wastes, but Calvin and his creature seem to find new life and hope in the snow they have always loved. As the strip begins, Calvin is forging a new path through deep snow, and Hobbes follows, carrying their sled. Both look euphoric as they speak through three frames:

Calvin: Wow, it really snowed last night! Isn't it wonderful?
Hobbes: Everything familiar has disappeared! The world looks brand-new!

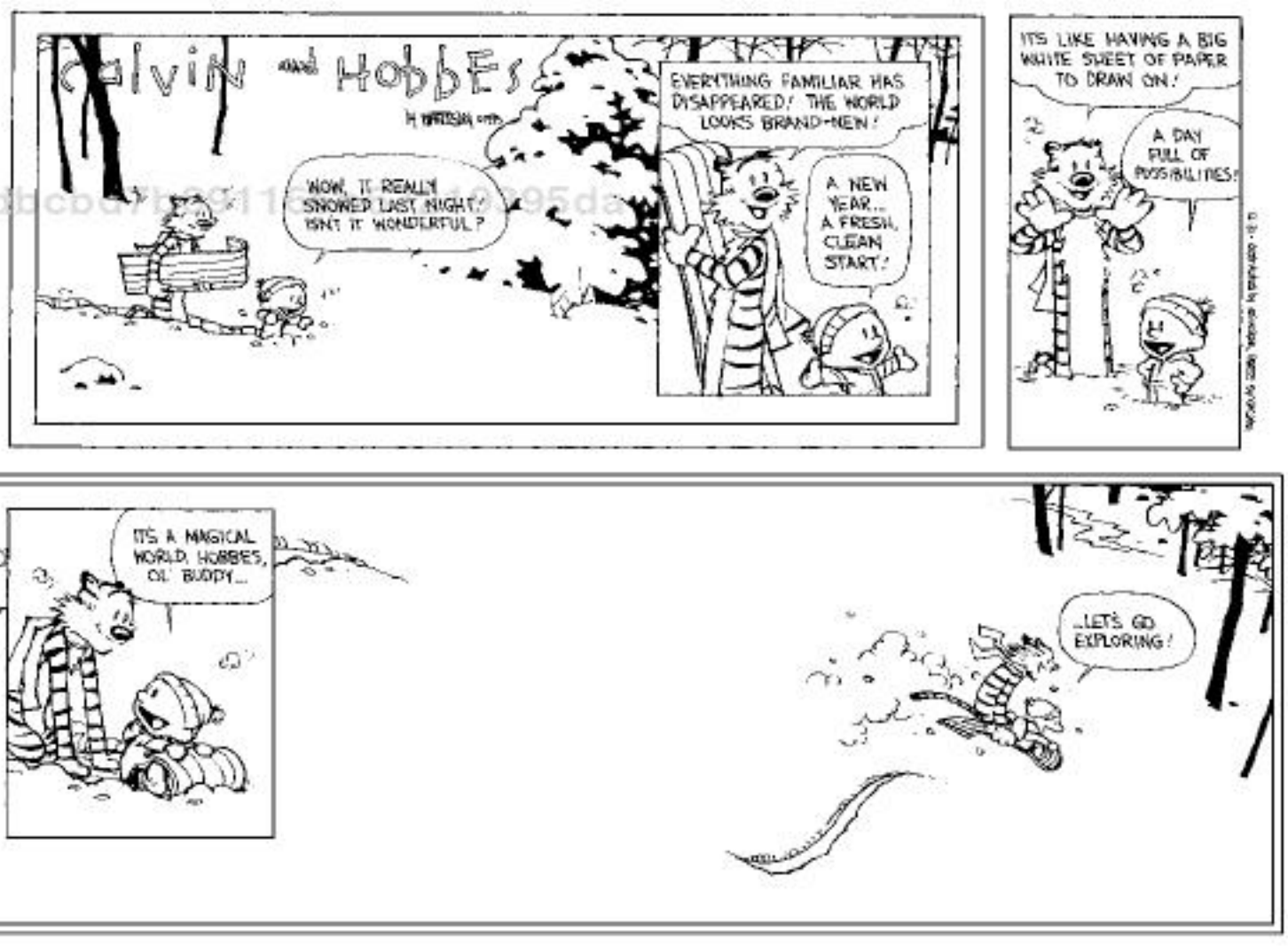

FIGURE 4.

Calvin: A new year . . . a fresh, clean start!
Hobbes: It's like having a big white sheet of paper to draw on!
Calvin: A day full of possibilities!

Then, as they get onto the sled, Calvin continues: "It's a magical world, Hobbes, ol' buddy"; and in the last, long, nearly empty white frame, which stretches across the bottom of the strip, we see them in midair as Calvin says, "Let's go exploring!" Never has Watterson been more "in your face" with his syndicate and his editors, never more Romantic in his protestation against societal constraints and confinements than here. Blake, whose engravings, like newspaper comics, are always framed in boxes, ends "The Tiger" by asking ironically: "What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" (ll. 23–24, *Works* 86). Like the ironically self-conscious writers for children that Dieter Petzold discusses below, Watterson similarly imputes to his creation a metafictional life beyond the frame, beyond the page (and the T-shirt) altogether. In the greatest climactic passage of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth similarly interrupts his poetic recreation of crossing the Alps to celebrate the power of human imagination to lead beyond memory and even beyond poetry:

In such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
Is with infinitude—and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.

Then, as if anticipating Watterson's lonely battles with syndicate and newspapers and their appeals to both his reason and his greed, Wordsworth immediately continues:

The mind beneath such banners militant
Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward.
(*Prelude*, Book VI [1805]: 532–42, 543–46)

Yet while the mind in such moments of power may eschew spoils or trophies, Watterson, like Blake and Wordsworth, simultaneously realizes that his imagination must accept material realities and the framing discipline of his medium in order for his visions to be communicable and thus useful to others—otherwise his doubled heroes, like Mary Shelley's, would indeed be lost in the snow. Calvin and Hobbes's sled is floating in midair in that last frame, but it is descending, and it is headed for the woods, where, if past strips are any guide, they will soon crash. These same woods may also remind Watterson and us of the great numbers of trees that must be cut down, at steadily increasing prices, to produce newspapers and all they contain, including comic strips; they are in another, broader sense the woods none of us, in this world at least, will ever be out of. Thus the euphoria of idealized Romantic transcendence contains in its very assertion, in Watterson's comic strip as in the poetry of Blake and Wordsworth and the fiction of Mary Shelley, the counterassertion that more compromise must occur not just for artistic production and distribution to continue but for life itself to be faced and lived.

Ever since the publication of *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, I have envisioned a second collection that would pursue the question of the continuing influence and importance of the Romantic reconceptualization of childhood up to our own time. As the foregoing study of Calvin and Hobbes was intended to illustrate, that question has become even more conflicted since the first volume appeared. The Romantic myth of childhood as a transhistorical holy time of innocence and spirituality, uncorrupted by the adult world, has been subjected in recent years to an increasingly serious interrogation developing on at least two fronts. First, as the field of English studies has been increasingly influenced by the interactions of poststructuralism, feminist and gender studies, Marxism and its extensions into cultural studies, the new historicism, and postcolonial theory and criticism, the myth has been deconstructed and rehistoricized as an often sentimental, sexist, but socially useful ideological manifestation originating in Western Europe in the late eighteenth century which tended to support, but could also subvert, the rise of the bourgeois nuclear family. Simultaneously, children of this period have come to be seen less as po-

tential seers and saviors of corrupt adults and more as victims—along with women, colonized native populations, and slaves—of the imperialistic textual, sexual, and political-economic practices of a power structure that enforces a hierarchical organization of home, society, and state and uses education and training as means of indoctrination, brainwashing, and crowd control. Hugh Cunningham's *The Children of the Poor* (1992), Anne Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), and Alan Richardson's *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* (1994) have been major contributors to this revisioning of Romantic childhood, as are the numerous feminist essays of Mitzi Myers and the introduction and several essays in *Infant Tongues*, edited by Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff (1994).

Second, and concurrent with this refocused academic debate, the relentless pace of late-twentieth-century demographic and technological change exceeds our ability to conceptualize about it ourselves, let alone prepare our children for it, while the increasingly acrimonious tone of public debate over family- and child-related issues often seems to threaten more than it advances the well-being and future of children in America today. Given this confusion of theory and practice, masters and servants, change and instability in the world, the home, and the school, can myths or ideologies of childhood, Romantic or otherwise, still be worth talking about? Isn't it at best—if it ever existed at all—a luxury only affluent, well-educated parents can offer their children? On the other hand, was there ever a time, then or now, when ideals were simple, pure, and uncomplicated, or a time when children—and their parents, caregivers, and teachers—didn't make dreams and schemes for a better life?

The contributors to this book contend as I do—though in widely differing ways—that our culture is still pervaded, in this postmodern moment of the late 1990s, by the Romantic conception of childhood that first emerged two hundred years ago as, in the wake of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, Western Europe experienced another fin de siècle similarly characterized by overwhelming material and institutional change and instability. The continuing and sanative paradox of the rhetoric of Romanticism (Knoblauch 127, 133), then and now, is that it democratically privileges individual consciousness at the precise historical moment when the chaos of the world outside—whether read in terms of nature,

gender, or politics—threatens such consciousness, thus producing Bakhtinian dialogics and psychic/political commitment both within individuals and between those individuals and others.

In the first section, "Romanticism Continuing and Contested," leadoff essays by Alan Richardson and Mitzi Myers interrogate both the origins and ends of Romantic childhood. Richardson argues that Western concern for childhood precedes Rousseau and Wordsworth by centuries; paralleling Cunningham's argument in *The Children of the Poor*, Richardson also affirms that Wordsworth's apotheosis of prepubescent childhood benefited the sons and daughters of the rich and privileged long before it trickled down to improve the lives of poor children by arousing the conscience of Victorian social activists. But he concludes "Romanticism and the End of Childhood" by emphasizing that in spite of the dangers and limitations of Romantic-based anxieties for the child, to destroy the myth of childhood would be to abandon twenty-first-century children entirely to the unchecked depredations of late capitalism and the collapse of both the public and the private will to protect and nurture them. Because young children especially need protection in ways that adult women, racial minorities, and subjected peoples do not, Richardson cautions against seeing them as just another disadvantaged or marginalized group.

While Richardson thus almost grudgingly allows that the ideology of Romantic childhood not only continues to exist but may actually play an advocacy role in the current political debate over children and families, Myers unites feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist theory in "Reading Children and Homeopathic Romanticism" to question whether Romantic childhood came into existence during the Romantic period at all or was instead, as she suggests, a later invention of a male-dominated academic literary establishment and one that can and should now be dismissed or at least very extensively revised. Analyzing a once-popular but now little-read story by the Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth, "The Good Aunt" (first published in 1801, just three years after Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*), Myers argues that Edgeworth parallels men's colonization of women and the feminine with England's colonization of Ireland and the British Empire's establishment of slaveholding colonies in the Caribbean. One of the story's main characters is an English boy raised on a plantation in Jamaica who has returned to England to go to school. What he learns is, first, that the grandiose,

powerful masculine self that the Romantic poets apotheosize is the dictatorial force that requires female submission in the home, "fagging" in the public school, and imperial domination in international affairs; and, second, that domestic, institutional, and national models of control must be replaced by opposing models of cooperation and shared power if a society is to be fair to all its inhabitants. Thus Myers both lends support to and extends Anne Mellor's argument in *Romanticism and Gender* that while male poets like Wordsworth and Shelley were creating a masculine Romanticism of the transcendent, nonrational self, women writers of the period were forging a feminine Romanticism of rationality and community in a struggle for self-empowerment.

The next section of the book, "Romantic Ironies, Postmodern Texts," includes Dieter Petzold's "Taking Games Seriously," Richard Flynn's "Infant Sight," and my own "Wordsworth, Lost Boys, and Romantic Hom(e)ophobia." All of us problematize historical Romanticism, in somewhat opposed but complementary ways, to analyze postmodern texts about children written for either children or adults. Petzold begins by reminding us of the undercurrents of irony that lie embedded in the canonical Romantic texts themselves. He argues that although we may carelessly assume that Romantic writers, and their twentieth-century followers, take childhood altogether seriously, in fact Romantic writers glorified both the innocent child and the unifying power of the experienced, controlling adult writer. Thus texts were produced, and still are being produced by recent fantasy writers working in the Romantic tradition, which encourage their readers to suspend their disbelief and experience the fantasy while simultaneously revealing, by means of what today are termed metafictional interruptions, that the writer is playing games with them. Insisting that children like and learn from this, Petzold closely examines "metafantasy" in Peter Beagle's *The Last Unicorn*, Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* (*Die unendliche Geschichte*), and Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

Flynn in effect extends Petzold's argument by linking Romanticism with mainstream adult postmodern poetry in "Infant Sight"; he argues that after World War II poets in America consciously reverted to the Romantic figure of the child in order to free themselves from what they found to be the emotional sterility and formal conservativism of the New Critics and Agrarian poet-critics who had immediately preceded them. He contrasts the cold reification and

voyeurism he finds in John Crowe Ransom's "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter" with texts by Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, and Lyn Hejinian, all of whom use the figure of the child in personal, autobiographical—that is, Romantic—lyrics.

My essay links ironies of Romantic childhood and postmodern texts for children and young adults in yet another way. Concern for homeless children is my starting point, but "Romantic Hom(e)ophobia" focuses on the homeless boys who, in far greater numbers than the girls, either fall through or intentionally escape from the safety nets set for them by professional caregivers in the psychological, social work, and educational communities. Searching to account for this deliberate and potentially deadly self-exiling of runaway boys, I outline a homoerotic element which I argue is inherent in the Romantic exaltation of boyhood, show to what degree Wordsworth in *The Prelude* in effect prewrites *Huckleberry Finn* and *Peter Pan*, and use queer theory to argue that some well-respected books about homeless boys, written for children and adolescents (Virginia Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown*, Felice Holman's *Slake's Limbo*, and Maurice Sendak's *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*), may actually be doing young readers a grave disservice by refusing to engage seriously with the same-sex tensions that often complicate their lives.

Next come two articles which deal, though in differing ways, with "Romanticism and the Commerce of Children's Books" or, more specifically, the conflicted interaction of the Romantic ideology of childhood with the marketing of some of its best-known icons. Anne Lundin's essay uses theoretical perspectives derived from Jane Tompkins, Michel Foucault, and Anne Mellor to examine the role that engravers, publishers, critics, librarians, and imitators have had on establishing, canonizing, and promulgating the feminine Romantic aesthetics of Kate Greenaway's picture books. The growing popularity in America of the "Greenaway tradition" of sentimental, preindustrial, community-centered, pretty, pastoral Romanticism found two powerful advocates in Anne Carroll Moore, the early-twentieth-century director of the children's room of the New York Public Library, and Bertha Mahony, founder of the *Horn Book*, the first journal of children's books. Largely through their influence, Lundin shows, Greenaway's substance and style have been so often reproduced as to become truly internationalized during the course of the twentieth century.

Paula T. Connolly's essay provides a fine close reading of the divided, ironicized Romanticism of A. A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh books, establishing that it is not the knowledgeable, manipulative, part-playing Christopher Robin but the blundering, dreamy Pooh —the stuffed toy that will inevitably be left behind when the boy grows up—that actually embodies the Romantic ideal of innocent childhood. She also shows how Milne's highly successful marketing of his stories, originally written for his son Christopher, ironically made them impossible for either father or son to leave behind; indeed, Milne's commercial success acted as a kind of metafictional curse upon Christopher's life and career (so, at least, Christopher maintained), and Milne himself found himself similarly trapped in the role of children's writer that he very much wanted to shed. Connolly concludes after taking a close look at the Walt Disney empire, currently the official merchants of images of Christopher, Pooh, and their cohorts, and at the entrapments and betrayals operating whenever a beloved childhood icon becomes subjected to contemporary mass-marketing techniques and strategies.

Concluding the volume is a final section, "Romantic Ideas in Cultural Confrontations," which contains two essays examining the richly evocative interactions of Romantic childhood, which these writers take as a given in the twentieth century regardless of its date of origin, with other major cultural systems. First William J. Scheick demonstrates how turn-of-the-century writer Mary Austin united transcendental Romantic thought about nature, spirit, and childhood with Native American culture and a protofeminist insistence on the importance of women as storytellers in her story collection *The Basket Woman.* In these stories, which sometimes implicitly, sometimes overtly criticize the materialistic, patriarchal Anglo civilization of the Southwest, Scheick shows that a child narrator or character both embodies and comes to understand Austin's belief in the interpenetration or integration of dream and reality, the human with the animal and the spiritual, myth and history, art and ethos. Scheick concludes by examining two late-twentieth-century novels for children, Jean Craighead George's *Julie of the Wolves* and Whitley Strieber's *Wolf of Shadows*, which reaffirm Austin's Romantic synthesis.

Finally, Teya Rosenberg both examines and interrogates the interaction of Romantic transcendence (what M. H. Abrams has called "reconstituted theology"), archetypes, and multicultural perspec-

tives (including reincarnation) in Canadian fantasy author Ruth Nichols's 1976 novel *Song of the Pearl.* In the novel a woman dies young, learns she has lived before and will live again, and undergoes a series of experiences that lead her to greater and greater self-knowledge—but only, and troublingly, within the limits imposed upon her by her sex.

It would be naive to imagine that the essays in this book can in themselves have much impact on the current cultural and political debates over children's issues—education, health care, the family. Nevertheless, like the other recent books already mentioned which historicize various aspects of Romantic childhood by tracing its specific conflicts with political-social-economic forces at work over the last two hundred years, these essays too show us, when we compare the past with the present, how little these forces, so often dangerous to children's lives and minds, have changed over time. We hope that our readers may see further yet into these forces and into the creativity—often subversive—of the writers responding to them that first produced childhood as we still know it in Europe two hundred years ago and that continue to underlie, and to offer useful perspectives upon, the present situation. As if anticipating today's bumper stickers, writers working in the tradition of Romantic childhood "practiced random acts of kindness and beauty"; they also saw the need to "question authority" and even to "question reality." Historically conscious study of them and their writings can enrich the current highly politicized public debate over which sorts of competing literacies—functional-technological, cultural-intercultural, and/or critical-revolutionary (Knoblauch and Brannon 17–24)—children and teachers need in order to be empowered rather than merely trained or indoctrinated. Wordsworth inscribed the epigraph of a redefined personal, family, institutional, and national/international life when he wrote that "the Child is father of the Man"; we believe that continued study of Romantic writers and the tradition that began around them can both father and mother safer, stronger children in the twenty-first century.

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PART ONE

Romanticism Continuing and Contested