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Glenn Willmott

# Reading for Wonder

Ecology, Ethics, Enchantment

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Glenn Willmott  
Department of English  
Queen's University  
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

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## PREFACE

This book is fueled by a growing recognition that wonder is an important, perhaps crucial, cognitive and ethical experience, both in life and in its culture industries, and that the less we know wonder, the more fragile our appreciation of ecological justice and social belonging will be. Wonder has power, yet what kind of power, and how it works, has long remained obscure and fragmentarily understood. Drink Me, it reads on the bottle Alice holds, at the threshold of Wonderland. But should she? What is the difference between the wonder of a magic potion, a new digital device, a landfill site, an oak tree, or a lyric poem? In the pages to follow, I aim first to gather existing ideas about wonder into a properly synthetic *theory* with ethical relevance to ecological and social concerns; then to anatomize the *poetics* of wonder as a designed experience in literature and across a range of arts; and finally to develop an ethical and political distinction between *good and bad* designs for wonder, with thoughts about how to cultivate the good, when modern public culture seems to rush headlong between walls of gray disenchantment on one side, and of sensational enchantment on the other. Wonder might yet save us, and others, from ourselves.

It has been a great pleasure for several years to present talks full of curious slides and rambles here and there in the baroque geography of wonder, and this book has benefitted from the thoughtful responses of scholars, in particular, of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada, and the Modernist Studies Association. My interdisciplinary thinking has especially been enriched in discussion with colleagues at Queen's University: in Psychology, Mark Sabbagh, and in Computing,

Nicholas Graham. Significant refinements and illuminations, as well as valued encouragement in writing, have come from my peer reviewers. Above all, I am indebted to my companion in literary and other life adventures, Yaël Schlick, who gave many hours to the book's improvement and whose insights and sense of style are unerring.

Kingston, ON, Canada

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