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# Temporal Roots: Ecocritical Essays



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Past





# Rise and Fall of the Elemental Guardians: Eva Peace and Shadrack in Toni Morrison's *Sula*

Ali Martin



Water and earth: two elements that are paramount to life. Without the earth, humans would not have a place to call home, and without water, humans could not survive. These elements carry heavy spiritual connotations, with earth often characterized as the mother to all living beings and water used to purify, and even destroy certain aspects of human and animal life. The myths of ancient Greece and other cultures frequently center on figures attached to earth and water. These figures, be they major parts of the pantheon or lesser figures, embody what the elements mean to the culture of which they are a part. Like Mother Earth, women are expected to produce young, nourish them, and give of their very bodies to ensure the survival of the next generation. Water also has a traditionally female personification, especially when referring to raging storms on the ocean, or the now cliché notion that the sea is a cruel mistress. However, Toni Morrison chooses to parallel water with masculine strength, following the example of the god of the ocean, Poseidon. Morrison explores the traditional understanding of these elements in her novel *Sula*, especially when concerning the characters Eva Peace and Shadrack. Eva Peace takes on the role of Great Goddess or Mother Earth by creating the house in which she and her children, biological and adopted, live, creating identities for three of the children under her care, and having a special connection to the spiritual world through the reading of dreams. She subverts the role by killing her son, Plum, and by not having a husband to tend to. Water is treated in a similar manner. It rages and drowns people twice in the novel,

and rather than associating water with a female figure, Morrison uses the male figure Shadrack to embody the element, turning him into the mythological boatman to the underworld, Charon. By the end of the novel, both of these figures lose the power they once held. Building up the power of Eva and Shadrack only to have the potency of the powers taken away illustrates the turning away from the two basic elements of life, and the consequences of doing so. The earth will no longer be able to nurture mankind, and water will no longer guide it.

Water as masculine and Earth as feminine in *Sula* depict a power struggle that is still prevalent in today's society. Both elements and both biological sexes are needed in order to ensure the continuation of the human race. In her book, *The Ecocritical Psyche: Literature, Evolutionary Complexity and Jung*, Susan Rowland states, "Sky father is not the gender myth of men, and neither is earth mother just for women. Rather, they describe and enact the formation of two types of consciousness generated by different bodily relations to creation" (160). Therefore, elements are more equal to each other because the water can cut through the earth and erode it away, but the earth can keep the water back and prevent flooding. Rather than a power struggle then, perhaps *Sula* suggests through the narrative of water and earth that men and women can and should work together. Both are required for life, and the earth nurtures the children, but the water also provides sustenance for the earth and then guides the children from life to the afterlife. According to Trudier Harris, "In the first paragraph of the novel [*Sula*], Morrison establishes an almost mythical status for the Bottom, claiming kinship for it with many places in which strange, almost supernatural, instances have occurred" (Harris 53). There are many legends associated with Sky Fathers coming down and dominating Earth Mothers as a way to bring cultures from one area under the domination of the other, which is what the white man did to the first black people that lived in The Bottom. The story goes:

A good white farmer promised freedom and a piece of bottom land to his slave if he would perform some very difficult chores. When the slave completed the work, he asked the farmer to keep his end of the bargain. Freedom was easy—the farmer had no objection to that. But he didn't want to give up any land. So he told the slave that he was very sorry that he had to give him valley land. He had hoped to give him a piece of the Bottom. The slave blinked and said he thought valley land was bottom

land. The master said, “Oh, no! See those hills? That’s bottom land, rich and fertile.”

“But it’s high up in the hills,” said the slave.

“High up from us,” said the master, “but when God looks down, it’s the bottom. That’s why we call it so. It’s the bottom of heaven—best land there is.”

So the slave pressed his master to try and get him some. He preferred it to the valley. And it was done. The nigger got the hilly land, where planting was backbreaking, where the soil slid down and washed away the seeds, and where the wind lingered all through the winter (Morrison 5).

Changing the mythos of the land, or giving non fertile land more value by attributing it being close to the sky, is a heavy deceit, but it is one that goes overlooked because now the black men in the area are able to, “literally look down on the white folks” (Morrison 5). By living in The Bottom, the black people are closer to the Sky Father as well as being attached to the Earth mother, and therefore could be considered to have higher positions than that of the white man.

Shadrack’s first association with water and death is as soldier in World War I. His company was traveling “close to a stream that was frozen at its edges,” and “no sooner had he stepped foot on the other side than the day was adangle with shouts and explosions” (Morrison 7). This line is important because it shows the literal act of crossing water in order to get to a land filled with death, and thus reverses the popular notion that water is cleansing and used to purify those that step through the banks of the river. In classical mythology, there are two places where souls go when they die: Tartarus and Elysium. The chaos around Shadrack mimics the lower level of Hades, Tartarus which is where the souls of the damned are punished for their misdeeds. Screams of the punished are said to fill the air, much like the screams of the wounded men in his platoon surrounded Shadrack. He does not appear to take part in the actual violence, but rather he has an out of body experience, forcing him to become a neutral party to the actions around him. Charon is also a neutral party in the myths he is involved in. Shadrack is knocked unconscious and wakes up in a hospital filled with bright lights and food kept in unnaturally triangular shaped spaces on his food tray. The eerie calm of the hospital scene that follows depicts Elysium, or the place where the virtuous souls are rewarded in the afterlife. Seamless traveling from Tartarus to Elysium is what Charon is specifically known for. As the

ferryman, he has unlimited access to all levels of the underworld, and as the reader can infer from Shadrack's longing for the river; the boatman prefers to be moving through the realms instead of being stuck in one or the other.

The second occurrence of death, water, and Shadrack happens when Chicken Little drowns in the river beside Shadrack's shack. While he is not present at the actual site of death, Sula "ran up to the little plank bridge that crossed the river to Shadrack's house" to make sure he didn't see her swinging Chicken Little around (Morrison 61). Crossing the river to meet with Shadrack lets Sula see him up close for the first time. He tells her always, and then she flees back across the bridge over the river, thus returning to the world of the living. Shadrack's saying always confuses Sula, but in the context of him being Charon, it refers to the fact there will always be death in some form. His river is now tainted by the death of Chicken Little, and the current takes the boy far from home, and it is days before he is returned to his mother, only to be buried in a closed casket. While Shadrack was not responsible for the death, it's the unexpected deaths like Chicken Little's that compel him to start his own holiday: Suicide Day. On January third of every year starting in 1920, Shadrack encourages people to take their own lives so that they don't have to keep worrying about death coming to take them randomly as it did Chicken Little and other characters in the novel. From a psychological standpoint, this could be seen as Shadrack trying to cope with the ugliness he witnessed during the war. The fact that he was a soldier and suffered from Shell Shock, or PTSD as it is now called made his actions excusable to the townspeople. They knew he used to be normal, but leaving made him odd.

The incident with Shadrack stays with Sula until her own dying day when he and water are there to lead her to the underworld. Sula imagines death as water that would "envelop her, carry her, and wash her tired flesh always" (Morrison 149). Through the haze of pain, the word "Always" sticks out in her mind. She knows she heard it from someone and that it had something to do with water and death. The fact Sula cannot remember it was Shadrack who told her "always" signals the water she imagines washing over her in death is from the river Lethe, named for the Greek goddess of forgetfulness. Lethe is a river located deeper in the Underworld, and souls cross through it to forget the lives they held when they were alive. It essentially is supposed to erase all aspects of the person the soul used to be. This doesn't completely work as Sula is able to remember Nel after she is already dead. Trying to remember

Shadrack becomes too much for her though, and she finally lets go of the desire. As she does, the pain she feels goes away, and she dies in relative peace. Allowing herself to be okay with forgetting Shadrack is the catalyst that allows her to let go of her pain and die. Despite not being explicitly there, the ferryman is implicitly present when Sula dies and takes her through the water to the underworld.

The image that solidifies Shadrack as Charon occurs towards the end of the novel on Suicide Day. Shadrack takes up his bell and rope and goes about his rounds as usual, but without the usual pomp and circumstance surrounding the event. He is tired, and knows that his only visitor (Sula) will not be coming back. The irony is that this time a great number of the townspeople follow him, ending up at the mouth of the long abandoned tunnel they tried to build years before. Once in the tunnel, they work to destroy it and soon find “themselves in a chamber of water, deprived of the sun that brought them there” while Shadrack “stood there high up on the bank ringing, ringing his bell” (Morrison 162). The tunnel symbolizes the entrance to the underworld, which in classic myths is often some sort of cave-like structure, and the water rushing into the chamber is once again harkening back to the ancient rivers also of the underworld. The people that followed Shadrack did so willingly and with the intention of mocking him. Their deaths serve as an illustration of how people may think themselves invincible and immortal, but when going against nature or death itself, they will always lose. In other words: one should not mock death because it will always come for you.

When an element of power loses its potency, the figure associated with it becomes decrepit and loses their own power and agency. This, in a sense, is what happens to Shadrack. The last depiction of Shadrack the reader sees is of him being “a little shaggier, a little older” (Morrison 173). Morrison also tells us that Shadrack didn’t sell fish anymore because “the river had killed them all” (Morrison 174). The river killing the fish was probably due to some sort of pollution by the people of the town. Mistreatment of natural water sources leads to much bigger problems for the town. It’s only after the river stops giving fish that the white men become interested in the land and the black people become displaced once more. The river as a masculine guardian is broken down, and the land eventually has to succumb to the pressures that the white man places on it. The breakdown of the river leads to a deeper breakdown of Shadrack and the figure of Charon. The fish are symbolic of Shadrack’s power and agency; with them gone Shadrack has little ties to the water

other than the river being beside the shack where he lives. Without the support of the river via the fish, Shadrack loses his agency and the rest of his sanity, and therefore he can no longer be the boatman.

Through the narrative of Shadrack's lost potency and by sheer virtue of being female, Eva Peace could easily be marginalized as a killer mother and town cripple. She kills her son, and the mysterious loss of her leg prompts many rumors, some of which Eva herself starts. Throughout the novel, Eva is shown in contradicting ways. First, she is the mother to all stray children, then she kills her own son for having a drug addiction, and then she nearly dies trying to save her daughter from burning to death. In her article "'She was Laughing at their God': Discovering the Goddess Within in *Sula*," Michele Pessoni describes Eva Peace as "the archetypal embodiment of the Great Goddess who offers nourishment and regeneration. On yet another level, Eva is also a very real woman, capable of great love yet susceptible to the influences of the capitalistic ideology surrounding her. Even as a Goddess figure, Eva has faults" (Pessoni 443). This perfectly describes the paradoxical nature of Eva Peace in regards to her surroundings. She is, at her core, a creator.

The first mention of her in the novel is following a description of the extravagant house she built "over a period of five years" (Morrison 30). She continuously added things to it: More stairways – there were three sets to the second floor – more rooms, doors, and stoops. There were rooms that had three doors, others that opened out on the porch only and were inaccessible from any other part of the house; others that you could get to only by going through somebody's bedroom (Morrison 30). Just a few lines down, Eva is credited with being the "creator and sovereign" of the house. In many ways, the house is her temple for she very rarely leaves the grounds mostly due to her disability. It is "a modern version of the Mystery sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis," and given the constant presence of the number three Eva, is further attached to "the triune Goddess who is virgin, mother, and crone" (Pessoni 444). All aspects of these representations are present in Eva's daily life. She is virgin in the sense that she has no current husband, mother because of Hannah and Plum's presence in the house as well as other children that she was able to take in, and crone because of her old age and wisdom.

Maidenhood is characterized not only by sexual purity, but by the notion of courting. Although Eva has three children, in the text she is said to "not participate in the act of love," but nevertheless she "had a regular flock of gentlemen callers" (Morrison 41). She also participates in "a good deal of teasing and pecking and laughter" (Morrison 41).

The language suggests that Eva Peace is much younger than she actually is, and, therefore, the flirting is acceptable. The figure of maiden is also fortified by the fact she does not actually have a husband. Her own ran off many years before, and it is her hate that allows her to get through the years of being alone. The hating of one man combined with the maidenhood and natural strength that Eva possesses also aligns her with the Greek goddess of the hunt and moon, Artemis. Among her other titles, Artemis is also one of the goddesses of Chastity as she requested that Zeus allow her to remain forever a maiden. Through the alignment with Artemis, Eva is also connected to the Grecian Amazons, the fierce tribes of female warriors that ruled themselves without the aid or connection to men. Eva strives to keep her household free of male rule while also enjoying their company, a trait she passes down to her daughter Hannah and granddaughter Sula.

As a mother, Eva proves to be very nurturing and self-sacrificing for the sake of her children. After Eva's husband, BoyBoy, leaves she is the sole caretaker of three children under the age of five with "\$1.65, five eggs, three beets, and no idea of what or how to feel" (Morrison 32). To make matters worse, her young son Plum developed horrible intestinal issues and was saved only by Eva using the last bit of lard as lubrication so she could pry the hardened stool out of her son. Two days after relieving her son's distress, she went off in hopes of making some sort of a fortune so that she could provide for her children. During this endeavor, she lost her leg. Years later, she would throw herself on the burning body of her daughter Hannah in hopes of saving her life. The acts of sacrificing food and giving her very body for the sake of her children connect Eva to the earth and by extension Mother Nature. According to branches of ecocriticism, earth being labeled as feminine puts Mother Nature in direct parallel with what human mothers are supposed to be, i.e., nurturing, long suffering, and there in order to provide for the needs of her children no matter what the consequences to her own person. Before BoyBoy abandoned Eva and their children, he also abused her. These dire circumstances would have broken most women, but Eva Peace persevered and even went on to thrive despite these hardships. She was also able to get a kind of revenge on the ones that wronged her.

Despite her self-sacrificing nature, Eva also is an example of toxic motherhood. As previously stated, two days after the hardened stool was freed from Plum's bowels, Eva left her children with neighbors and was gone for eighteen months. She did return more prosperous and was able

to care for them effectively afterwards, but the temporary absence is very much like the changing of summer to fall and then winter, when earth no longer produces what is necessary to take care of humans. She also kills her own son because he is suffering from a heroin addiction. The murder of her child is unforgivable to most because a mother should protect her children and not cause them any harm. Another unforgivable statement, as far as Hannah is concerned, is when Eva says she didn't "love" her children in the way Hannah probably wanted her to love them. The label toxic could also be another way of saying that Eva was defending herself from the perceived mistreatment of herself by her children. Earth herself also has similar manners of dealing with overconsumption by humans. There will be periods of draught, famine, floods, and even wildfires. Wildfires are particularly important for dealing with over growth which explains why Eva used fire to kill her son Plum. He was a man, and yet he was trying to revert back to his fetal stage and crawl back inside his mother. The fire burned that part of him away and served to destroy what was no longer thriving. Famine also parallels the lack of perceived love in the house. Eva did what she could to provide actual food and keep a roof over her children's heads, but there was no time to actually play with them and give them the emotional support that Hannah at least craved. Emotionally starving her children led her youngest daughter to marry young and move away from her mother while it kept Hannah close in hopes that she would receive some sort of affection.

Eva is introduced to the readers as a grandmother or crone figure, but she also has a supernatural quality. While she still had her own agency, she was still too old to produce children, only guide them, tell them stories and give them the occasional candy from her pockets. Despite the fact she is credited with taking care of the house and all the inhabitants in it, her daughter Hannah is the one doing most of the actual work. Her age is actually the reason she cites for killing her son, Plum. She wanted Plum to become a man because she wasn't able to carry him in her womb anymore nor care for him the same way she would a child. She did not have the energy or age to back up the mothering that he still sorely needed. Eva also was known to read dreams, the act of conjure women in African American myths. Conjure women were often perceived to be witches, much like Ajax's mother in the novel. Despite their negative connotations, they were still very much respected and venerated for their knowledge. Morrison's own grandmother was one of these women who kept a dream book and told ghost stories to her children (Billingslea-Brown 35). Stereotypical wise women are haggard

and broken down by age. They no longer have anything left of their looks; sometimes even their minds are half gone, as is the case with Eva at the end of the novel. They also have a knack for seeing into the past, future, and talking to ghosts. Eva seems to have the gift of seeing into the past based off her knowledge of Nel being present at the drowning of Chicken Little. Nel spent her whole childhood sure that no one knew or saw what happened at the river. She puzzles over how Eva knew after she leaves. The connection to ghosts comes from fact that Eva states, "He [Plum] tells me things," despite the fact he had been dead for a few decades by that time (Morrison 169). She also has the ability to see into the future. Before Hannah's death, Eva dreamed of a red wedding dress, and according to her: wedding's always meant death. The red was obviously the fire. Hannah being consumed by fire was a very literal interpretation of the dream's meaning. Eva only wished she understood before Hannah was killed. Her debilitating old age is symbolic of what will happen to the earth once she can no longer support her children. She will lose all potency and agency and have only memories of how things used to be to comfort her.

Despite the lost potency of the earth and water, the myth of Erysichthon gives hope that their strength will return. According to the myth,

A man enters a sacred grove and fells its most holy tree in spite of warnings of dire consequences. He is cursed by the spirit of the place and visited with an insatiable hunger, which, however, reduces him to a skeletal state, and, having consumed his family's entire estate, he is compelled to beg at the crossroads. Later versions of this story have him commit, finally, *autophagy* [eating one's self] in his attempt to appease his hunger (Da Silva 103).

The sacred grove belongs to the goddess of the earth and fertility, Demeter, and she is the one who curses Erysichthon to his fate. The man's actions mimic the actions of the white men who, "tore the nightshade and blackberry patches from their roots to make room for the Medallion City Golf Course" (Morrison 3). The white men, who were content to leave the Bottom to the black people, decided that once the river and earth guardian figures of Shadrack and Eva were stripped of their potency they could reclaim the land and displace the inhabitants. In keeping with the myth, however, if the potency of the water and the earth were to ever return, the white men would be cursed with "insatiable hunger" and will

have to “beg at the crossroads.” Perhaps the most promising aspect of the story is that Erysichthon “consume[s] his family’s entire estate.” If the white men follow his lead, then all of the structures they build and the success they have will end up being destroyed by their own hands.

The possible redemption of the land and revenge against those who would destroy it serve as a warning to all humankind. The earth and water supplies protect and guide the people who listen to the spirits and adhere to their ways while destroying those who do not listen and mistreat the earth. If the water and earth are not taken care of, then the potency is lost, and outsiders are able to come and take away the land. By allowing Shadrack and Eva to fall into despondency, and by extension the water and land, the people of the Bottom opened themselves up to having the land reclaimed by the white people who lived in the valley. If Eva and Shadrack were allowed to keep their potency and agency, then perhaps the Bottom would still be a thriving community at the beginning of the novel, rather than a place that is being raped by humankind and all of the natural beauty is stripped away in order to make room for artificial beauty and overpriced spaces for leisure and decadence.

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**“[B]ut it had gone wild”:  
Slavery, Ecofeminism, and Post-  
Colonialism in *Wide Sargasso Sea***

Angeline Bullington



Charlotte Brontë’s popular novel *Jane Eyre*, which was published in 1847, is known across the literary spectrum for its surplus of information concerning female identity and independence. When Jean Rhys, a modern author on subjects like the West Indies, read Rochester’s “madwoman” in the attic, she decided to morph the story into an in-depth historical narrative about the unfortunate woman who finds her demise at Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*. In her novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, published in 1966, Rhys explores a new plot for Bertha Mason, giving her a proper identity and resurfacing her historical background. While Bertha, or Antoinette, is the focus of the novel, two other women are present—Antoinette’s mother, Annette, and Christophine, who is Annette’s servant. These two women represent separate narratives of exile even though they are both Martinique natives. While Annette is not described as being forced from her home, she is never happy at Coulibri Estate. The wild and overgrown atmosphere plays a key role in the unhappiness and withering mental state of Annette—she is not only a reflection of Antoinette’s future, but a specific reference to female condition, or, unwanted marriage and early marriage. Christophine is taken from her homeland, given to Annette as a present, and she supplies Antoinette with her identification to the black Caribbean culture. Antoinette herself is the ultimate form of what her mother represents—a woman taken from her home, whether by will or force—and given to a man for his control. Even though the novel does not allow an agreement or disagreement with her status as the “madwoman,” her story of-

fers an alternate background to the woman in the attic, a history full of racial and cultural diversity. An ecofeminist reading of Antoinette, Annette, and Christophine and their surroundings reveals that the harsh reality of the regional and cultural spaces around them affects their relationships with each other, as well as the way men and their community harshly treat them.

As the author of a novel dealing with the life and culture of nineteenth century Jamaica, Jean Rhys is a critical component to the reception of the plot and historical context of the book because she herself is from the same background. In the book *Creole Crossings*, Carolyn Vellenga Berman includes a quote from Rhys in which she states, "So I could manage Part I because I *did* go to a convent. [. . .] The place I have called Coulibri existed, and still does" (169). Rhys grew up in Dominica, and she uses her childhood home and experiences as the setting of the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Angier 3). In her book, *Jean Rhys: Life and Work*, Carole Angier details the connection between Rhys's last novel and her life growing up. Even though Rhys names the setting of the beginning of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Jamaica, Angier develops a relationship between Antoinette's home, Coulibri Estate, and the childhood home of Rhys, Dominica. Angier describes the hardships of the land, saying, "On top of violence and excess Dominica has always had ineradicable poverty and plain bad luck. It has always been hard to work here: the interior repels all effort" (4). However, along with the severity of the Dominican land, there is beauty; for example, Angier also writes, "Colours are brighter, smells stronger; trees and flowers and insects grow bigger. So much grows so quickly that almost everything has a parasite . . . All this careless, cannibal life is beautiful, but also sinister" (3). In other words, just like the land itself embodies a mixture of violence and beauty, Rhys is able to capture this mixture of brutality and blessings of the land in order to create a space for Antoinette to grow into her complex identity.

One of the first main spaces the narrator, who is young Antoinette, introduces to the audience is her home, Coulibri Estate. Antoinette describes the garden at Coulibri as a reflection of the entire estate. Through an analogy of the garden and the Garden of Eden, Antoinette constructs a contradictory image of a wild and overgrown area, which mirrors the deteriorating state of the family that lives there. This garden, Antoinette describes, is "large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible—the tree of life grew there" (19). Here, Antoinette establishes that she recognizes an image of beauty in her garden and is able to place it in the same context as the Garden of Eden. However, she immediately

deconstructs this haven-like image when she states, “But it had gone wild. The paths were overgrown and a smell of dead flowers mixed with the fresh living smell” (19). Since there are no longer any slaves at Coulibri Estate, no one is left to cultivate the garden; thus, it turns wild. While literally, the garden itself is “wild,” this is analogous with the relationship between Antoinette and her mother, which has in its own way “gone wild.” Even though there is still humanity existing in and around the garden, the ruin, or “smell of dead flowers,” intermingles with the fresh life of the garden (19). This negativity complicates the beauty of the area while also giving it depth. In other words, Antoinette remembers a time when she loved her mother and describes enjoying sitting and watching her; however, now the relationship is failing as her mother’s mental state deteriorates, and Antoinette places the audience in the middle of this decline. After her description of the garden, Antoinette recounts a conversation with her mother in which Annette speaks to her daughter “angrily” and pushes her away, and Antoinette, thinking aloud for the audience, says, “Once I would have gone back quietly to watch her asleep on the blue sofa—once I made excuses to be near her when she brushed her hair, a soft black cloak to cover me, hide me, keep me safe” (22). In the past, Antoinette admired her mother because Annette represented beauty and comfort for her; however, now that beauty has transformed into something not necessarily ugly, but something primitive and untamed. Like the garden that morphs into strange things, such as the octopus flowers, the mother/daughter relationship alters over time as Annette’s mental stability grows weaker.

In addition to the parallel between the garden and the mother/daughter relationship, the garden also stands as a reflection of the estate as a whole, the home and the people. After establishing the connection between Eden and her own garden, Antoinette goes on to detail the images of wilderness, placing representations of life and death in order to deconstruct her own household. For instance, while she says the light under the tree is “green” with life growing there in the ferns, the flowers that are also there represent death. Describing the orchids, Antoinette says they “flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root” (19). In this image, the twisted root represents the distorted basis of the culture surrounding Antoinette. In other words, similar to the unnatural form the garden has taken, Coulibri’s previous slaves twist and morph judgments about the Mason family so much that they eventually destroy the home. With

the emancipation of slavery, the surrounding town attempts to gain control over this family they hate. However, the irony of this image lies in the fact that their hate stems from cultural differences the emancipation was meant to solve. As an institution, slavery required the labor of African Americans to uphold the system. Similar to the image of an “octopus orchid,” this ideology flourishes and cultivates land for their masters; however, the lack of the slaves has led to the “brown tentacles” and the desolation of the land. At Coulibri Estate, Christophine is one of the last slaves present since the Emancipation Act recently passed (17). However, the concept is still fresh, and people do not quite know how to work this new issue into their lives. Antoinette’s mother speaks on the subject with anger, furious that her slaves have left, yet the loss barely affects Antoinette since she “did not remember the place when it was prosperous” (19). She connects the deterioration of the estate with the loss of slavery saying, “All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush,” but it does not sadden her because she recognizes that the home never represented “prosperity,” but it portrays “beauty” for her. The beauty, present in Antoinette’s garden, turns “brown” as the loss of slavery begins to affect the people, specifically her mother, and the surrounding area. While no one is there to care for the land, Christophine, Annette’s “girl,” stays at Coulibri and she exists in order to maintain Antoinette’s link between the land and the culture. In other words, Christophine is the only representation of slavery at the estate; she is Martinique just like Annette, but she was given to Annette as a present. Therefore, Annette assumes she only stays because she now has nowhere else to go, but Antoinette does not mistake Christophine’s loss of home as a loss of having a home. While she indeed lives at Coulibri, Antoinette knows there is a possibility of her leaving just like the other slaves, so she avoids and represses this fear.

While she establishes a link between Antoinette and her culture, Christophine represents the problem of slavery in the novel. Since Jamaica is now emancipated, Christophine is one of the only slaves left at Coulibri Estate. While the Emancipation Act is still fresh on the minds of Jamaicans, the cultural differences still present create a threatening environment for Antoinette and her family. These problems, such as mocking from the old slaves of the Mason home, create fear in Annette and lead to the eventual destruction of the home. The destruction creates a new narrative and outlook for the post-emancipation of the Jamaican township. Surrounding the news of the Emancipation Act, there is sadness at Coulibri Estate, such as the death of Antoinette’s father and the

general unhappiness of the Estate (17). In the article, “Women, Slavery, and the Problem of Freedom in *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” Jennifer Gilchrist discusses the connection of “despair” with the emancipation of slavery. Gilchrist states, “As the Imperial Abolition of Slavery changes the political status of the West Indies from British protectorates to colonies, Antoinette suffers a childhood without protection and an adulthood of cultural and gender oppression” (462). These statements present an idea that Antoinette faces estrangement from her mother after her father dies as well as mockery from her community because of her Creole heritage. Despite her estrangement, she holds no ill feelings for the former slaves and the black community. On the other hand, her mother feels anger and fear toward this community and openly admits that Christophine stays with her because she is her “present,” showing that, as a part of the Coulibri Estate, Christophine creates motherly affection and protection for Antoinette when she cannot expect any from her mother (21).

Despite her love toward Christophine, Antoinette cannot escape the fear she experiences when confronting the issue of obeah. In her own words, she explains, “Yet one day when I was waiting there I was suddenly very much afraid . . . I was certain that hidden in the room . . . there was a dead man’s dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly” (Rhys 31). Even though no one has told her about obeah, Antoinette admits that the unknown frightens her. In Regina Barreca’s “Women Writing as Voodoo: Sorcery, Hysteria, and Art” she states, “Voodoo is fire and earth and air and water; mostly it is fire and earth. Voodoo as text is particularly interesting in terms of women’s exclusion from the masculine ‘high culture’ script” (Plasa 101). Further, “[Voodoo] works as an interesting metaphor for women’s texts . . . [relying] on the double frame whereby the ‘true’ power of the voodoo spirits is placed under the aegis of ‘accepted’ religion” (101-102). Religion is not an issue in the Jamaican novel; however, the inclusion of obeah (voodoo) speaks to the position the three women find themselves in— confused, displaced, and afraid in Coulibri Estate. It is through specific indications of West Indian culture, such as this inclusion of obeah, that Rhys shapes the reflection of her own background. In her essay “Reflections of Obeah in Jean Rhys’ Fiction,” Elaine Campbell focuses on the practice of obeah in Rhys’s childhood home and how this practice affects Rhys’s fictional writing. Campbell states,

The version of Obeah practiced on Rhys’ home island of Dominica has been described by Rhys herself as a milder version of

Voodoo . . . [and] she says about Obeah ‘even in my time nobody was supposed to take it very seriously’ but she confirms the existence of Obeah with an example of a practitioner in her own family household. (60)

Through her use of obeah, which stems from her own childhood experience just like many other aspects of the novel, Rhys establishes Christophine as a central character. Since she is brought to Coulibri from Martinique as a wedding gift, Christophine represents property for Annette, but Antoinette does not receive the representation of this culture from her mother who is also Martinique, but from Christophine. Campbell states, “What Wilson Harris call Rhys’ ‘mythic’ treatment of West Indian obeah enabled Rhys to transcend the social barriers imposed by her skin colour . . . What racial barriers prevented Rhys from achieving in actual life, literature enabled her to accomplish through art” (63). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, obeah plays a key role in the element of the mysterious landscape. When Mr. Mason repairs Coulibri, the changes sadden Antoinette; however, it’s not the look of the house that causes the change, but rather the lack of dirt and other un-clean traits. She states, “Coulibri looked the same when I saw it again, although it was clean and tidy, no grass between the flagstones, no leaks” (30). The presence of cleanliness also brings new slaves who “talk about Christophine,” and Antoinette says this talk is what truly changes her home—not the “repairs or the new furniture,” but “their talk about Christophine and obeah [changes] it” (31). In contrast with the new and clean home, here, Christophine represents the contamination still present in the home. In other words, Rhys does not perfectly explain, nor does Antoinette know for certain, what Obeah is; however, by introducing the practice after Mr. Mason repairs the home, Rhys asserts there is a deeper corruption present in the Coulibri home which begins with Mr. Mason’s coming there. His presence, his wealth and white supremacy, brings destruction to the home.

In contrast to the desolation and unhappiness of Coulibri Estate, Thornfield Hall, where Antoinette eventually ends up in *Jane Eyre*, creates a revision of the colonial discourse in the novel (Hope 51). In the article, “Revisiting the Imperial Archive: *Jane Eyre*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and the Decomposition of Englishness,” Trevor Hope discusses Rhys’s “return to *Jane Eyre*” and how the destruction of Thornfield Hall reflects “the encounter between two inextricably intertwined discursive structures [. . .] namely the imperial and the post-colonial” (51, 52). In the

beginning of the novel, Rhys revises the destruction of a home, giving a parallel to the ruin of Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*. Antoinette loves Coulibri Estate more than her mother; she feels safety in the garden and the outside world. As she lies in bed after a nightmare, she describes the world outside her window: “There is the tree of life in the garden and the wall green with moss. And the barrier of the cliffs and the high mountains. And the barrier of the sea. I am safe. I am safe from strangers” (27). Antoinette always refers to this tree as the “tree of life” despite the fact that the land is withering away and the slaves are no longer with the family to help with the land; she still recognizes the life in the home and connects the life there to her safety within. While Antoinette feels safe in the borders and barricades of the mountains and the “tree of life,” her mother recognizes the sinister signs of evil, and she begs her new husband to take them away. The “strangers” Antoinette feels safe from are who Annette fears are coming for them. The black community that continue to mock Annette and her family include some of her former slaves, and she says to Mr. Mason, “They are more alive than you are, lazy or not, and they can be dangerous and cruel for reasons you wouldn’t understand” (33). All of this foreshadowing leads to the ultimate destruction of their home.

By revisiting the destruction of a home through fire, Rhys “decomposes” the structure of *Jane Eyre* in order to establish a statement about the unfair treatment of the land and women in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Hope 53). Annette’s fear and anticipation leads up to the terrible fire that destroys Coulibri. When the family is awoken one night by an angry crowd, Mr. Mason tells Antoinette, “There is no reason to be alarmed . . . A handful of drunken negroes”; then Antoinette says, “A horrible noise swelled up, like animals howling, but worse” (38). Then, the angry emancipated slaves set fire to the house. Christophine says, “They must have climbed that tree outside. This place is going to burn like tinder and there is nothing we can do to stop it. The sooner we get out the better” (40). By using Antoinette’s beloved tree, Rhys implies that the family is no longer safe in this home because Antoinette previously connects the tree to her own safety. The mirroring of the land with the destructive relationships in the family establishes the home as an unsafe territory. In other words, there are several inter-relationships in the novel—Mr. Mason and Annette, Annette and Antoinette, Christophine and Annette and Antoinette, and lastly the relationship between the family as a whole with the negro community. These relationship all contain some form of toxicity and deterioration. Specifically, the mar-

riage between Mr. Mason and Annette does not seem built on love and affection; their differences outweigh their similarities, namely the fact that Mr. Mason feels safe at Coulibri and did not listen to Annette's warnings about the community, leading to the fire. In comparison with *Jane Eyre*, Rhys takes a different approach to the destruction of a family and their home. In Brontë's novel, there exists a hope for a new family with the death of Bertha (Antoinette) Mason. When Jane narrates her finding Thornfield Hall in ruin, she is in despair because she was trying to get back to Rochester. Instead, she confronts "blackened ruins" and describes the land, saying, "The lawn, the grounds were trodden and waste . . . no roof, no battlements, no chimneys—all had crashed" (Brontë 414). This image recalls the image of Coulibri Estate burning; however, Jane is then informed that Bertha Mason destroyed Thornfield: "It's quite certain that it was her and nobody but her, that set it going . . . she set fire first to the hangings of the room next to her own; and then she got down to a lower story, and made her way to the chamber that had been the governess's . . . and she kindled the bed there" (416). The man informing Jane does not realize he is speaking to the governess, so he does not know the shock the story gives her. Then he describes Bertha Mason: "she was on the roof . . . shouting out till they could hear her a mile off . . . she was a big woman, and had long, black hair: we could see it streaming against the flames as she stood . . . and [then she] gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement" (417). Here, an image of Bertha standing on top of the blazing Thornfield is a reflection of her mother, Annette, during the Coulibri fire. Antoinette recalls her mother running to the room of Pierre, her sick brother, and returning with her hair singed, smelling of "burned hair," holding the dead-looking Pierre. Then Rhys presents another wild image of Annette while the family struggles to leave the burning house; Annette is fighting Mr. Mason fiercely trying to "go back for her damned parrot" (41). Here, Rhys is not only supplying the audience with a background for Antoinette's madness, but also displacing Annette's position as a sane, perfect, and positive role model for Antoinette.

The contrast of the images of the two women in two texts written by different authors creates a crucial conversation between the texts. Trevor Hope states that it is important to note that "there is no *single* building that monopolizes either narrative structure . . . these are texts about displacement as much as inhabitation," and he goes on to establish that *Wide Sargasso Sea* "violently decomposes the topographic and textual structures of *Jane Eyre* through various modes of geopolitical

dispersal and displacement . . . [providing] the very principle of the structural relationship between the two texts” (53). In other words, while the images of the two homes establish *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* as texts about inhabitation, the displacement of the women in each novel provides a depth to the narrations. The revision of Bertha Mason’s story and Rhys’s re-imagining of the destruction and deconstruction of a home places importance on how the family “reconstructs” itself. While Bronte allows Jane to have a happy ending with Rochester at the expense of Bertha’s blazing suicide, after the fire at Coulibri, Antoinette is further estranged from her mother, and Rhys surprises the audience with Annette’s surprising and mysterious death (61). Therefore, even though Rhys draws a connection between the texts, she dismisses a hopeful and happy ending with the death of Annette and Antoinette’s future marriage to Rochester, in which her displacement continues and her unhappiness.

For Jean Rhys, the West Indian culture holds much influence, and in writing *Wide Sargasso Sea* she successfully creates a revision of the post-colonial narrative through this influential landscape. In her own words, Rhys explains the West Indies and its effects on the novel: “The West Indies *had* a (mel?) dramatic quality. A lot that seems incredible could have happened. And did. Girls *were* married for their dots at that time, taken to England and no more heard of. Houses were burnt down by ex slaves, some servants *did* stick—especially children’s nurses” (Plasa 96). This harsh yet beautiful land complicates the representation of Bertha Mason in Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*; while giving an explanation to the state of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, Rhys establishes the ecofeminist narrative of Christophine, Annette, and Antoinette relationships with their homeland and the central connection between them. Even though Coulibri is destroyed and their links are thrown in destruction with it, the bond that existed at Coulibri is never lost. Through the influence of the beautiful, but un-clean home, Antoinette finds solace and safety; however, once the land is ruined, so is her independence and freedom as a woman. After the destruction of Coulibri, she marries Rochester and her troubling narrative continues from there. Her link with Coulibri is never truly lost, though, because Christophine maintains her role as Antoinette’s motherly guide. Through Christophine’s known practice of obeah, she continues the link to the mysterious and beautiful West Indies; similarly, Antoinette represents the wild nature of Coulibri through her wild and destructive “madness” seen in *Jane Eyre*. Therefore, through the narrative

of these three women, Rhys establishes the importance of the culture and landscape to the story Bronte barely scratches the surface of.

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## ***Sula*: Moving towards Continuity: Adapting to the Post Apoclayptic Landscape of the Bottom**

Ashley Arnett



For three thousand years, the prediction that the world will end has been an ongoing conversation among everyday people, theologians, pastors, filmmakers, and writers. Three types of apocalypse exist in many discussions: the Christian dynamic, the secular perspective, and the environmental apocalypse. The Christian dynamic involves a conflict between human moralities. This representation shows the battle between good and evil within an individual. According to Augustine's eschatology, the end of the world is, "a drawn-out moral struggle going on not between forces of light and darkness (heaven and hell), but within the faithful themselves" (96). Augustine reveals in his viewpoint on the Christian apocalypse that an individual struggles with living in a chaotic world. This individual's obligation is to rid the world of evil by creating order. From the secular perspective, an apocalypse involves the effects of outside forces on the individual. Ecologist in particular, Del Ivan Janik claims that, "D.H. Lawrence [see] man as part of an organic universe, living best by acknowledging its wonder and rejecting the temptation to force its will upon it" (97). In this perspective, an individual is overcome by the effects of an "other" (temptation) they have allowed into their body as a way to cope with adapting to the world after a catastrophe. Characteristics of this include addictions, changes in personality, and appearance. Then there is the environmental apocalypse which relates to the changes that take place in the environment. These include pollution, omens, toxins, animals dying, etc. All three forms of apocalypse represent a gradual decline in order leading to an end, where

there is nothing left but a memory, and as Greg Garrard's book, *Eco-criticism*, quotes D. Thompson, the writer asserts that "an apocalypse unveils a world which becomes transformative due to battles of good versus evil" (94.) However, according to Garrard, "most importantly, for our purposes, apocalypticism is inevitably bound up with imagination, because it has yet to come into being" (94). Therefore, since so many people find it hard to predict the arrival of an apocalypse, fictional literature such as Toni Morrison's *Sula* represents the post-apocalyptic narrative scenario, which shifts the focus towards signs of an apocalypse. Using *Sula*, Morrison shows how such a catastrophe effected the African American community of Medallion, Ohio

In order to understand Morrison's vision of comparing *Sula* to an apocalypse narrative we first must recognize the signs that signal an apocalypse. These signs usually include famine, addictions, war, death, toxic contamination, unnatural disasters, fire, floods, ice, plagues and the list goes on. Morrison uses World War I as an example of the most devastating examples of an apocalypse trigger, whose aftermath negatively effects the entire town in Medallion, especially the male survivors, Ohio. Once that war is over, those who survived the catastrophe must go back home and adapt to the world. It is their job to rebuild a new order and continue with life. It is in that struggle to adapt and move forward from the trauma of the war that the apocalyptic narrative is formed. With that being said, Rachel Carson describes in *Silent Springs* her view point on a post-apocalyptic environment. She believes that environmental abuse is the leading trigger to an apocalypse.

The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world- the very nature of life. (qtd.in Garrard 103).

This abuse of the environment came in the form of World War I, which triggers the linear decline of the Bottom. Three of Morrison's characters, Shadrack, Plum, and Sula all foreshadow signs of the arrival of an apocalypse. Morrison also uses certain colors and symbols to assert

each character's role beyond the surface level. The character's role begins with prophecy of a new day represented by Shadrack, who is set forth to purify the world and control evil. Shadrack witnesses firsthand, the "contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials" ( qtd.in Gerrard 103). This contamination comes from the various fires that break out in the war zone, the gases that were released in the air, and the toxins that seeped into the water. All of which, showcase the leading factors to create the apocalyptic landscape of the Bottom. Shadrack himself in a contributor to the ruin and destruction as a result of war. The trauma he suffered from the war is irreversible, however he must move forward in order to survive.

Then, Morrison moves to victims of temptation like Plum, who are unable to cope with adapting to a post-apocalyptic world. He also was deployed to war and survived. However, unlike Shadrack who returned home to influence others to move forward from the catastrophe and ruin, Plum returns home only to steal, lie, and use drugs in order to cope with his trauma. Morrison showcases the effects of an "other" (drugs, sex, stealing) that enters a person's body using Plum, and how the after effects of drugs or addiction is a form of apocalypse in itself. Lastly, Sula becomes a scapegoat in the Bottom as a result of her leaving for a better life. Upon her return, Sula is conflated with natural disasters and the environmental changes. The people find community when they are able to blame Sula for the oddities that happen and give the "chain of evil" a face. However, it is their motto to attribute unnatural phenomenon to some natural in the environment. With every action, there was a reaction that initiated it; "if milk could curdle robins could fall" (90). What that means is that in the Bottom unnatural disasters always have a natural counterpart. It is not until Sula is back that they abandon their superstitions and give a face to the "evil." The effect her presence has on people and the environment symbolically represents the characteristics of an environmental apocalypse. In her arrival, the town faces a gradual rejuvenation followed by more signs of apocalypse. However, after her death the Bottom, as a community no longer has a buffer to weight their problems on. They revert back to their sinful ways and all follow one another into their demise lead by crazed veteran Shadrack. Morrison uses the example of Shadrack, Plum, and Sula to represent signs of an apocalyptic community in Medallion, Ohio called the Bottom. Morrison 's goes further in the narrative and contrasts the effects the pre apocalypse factors had on these characters which led them to be exiled, ostracized, and sacrificed. The novel is apocalyptic because

each character represents visually and physically the characteristics of the signs leading up to a catastrophic event.

With that being said, the first event in this novel is World War I. As far as the war goes, Morrison focuses on two male characters who both experience trauma as a result of adapting to the world, which for them seems apocalyptic. Shadrack struggles with sticking to his morals as he has to murder men as a soldier. This is where he battles good and evil. He represents a veteran battling with the effects of war and coping with the disorder in the world. The war caused his faith to dwindle. In his life before the war, Shadrack is a young, handsome, thriving man. The war's devastation is so bad it is compared to an apocalypse. The landscape is cold and isolated, there are dead bodies everywhere, the air is filled with toxins from the nuclear bombs and fire, and most of the landscape is covered in bullets and gray ash.

In this case, in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, man is punished as a result of living in sin and engaging in world wars such as World War I which is where the story begins. The war is the first sign of an apocalypse.

Shadrack had found himself in December 1917, running with comrades across a field in France. It was his first encounter with the enemy and he didn't know whether his company was running toward them or away. For several days they had been marching keeping close to a stream that was frozen at its edges. At one point they crossed it, and no sooner had he stepped foot on the other side that the day was a dangle with shouts and explosions. Shellfire was all around him, and he thought he knew that this was something called it, he could not muster up the proper feeling—the feeling that would accommodate it. The day was cold enough to make his breath visible, and he wondered for a moment at the purity and whiteness of his own breath among the dirty, gray explosions surrounding him.

This scene creates the illusion of the arrival of an apocalypse. The war took many men away from home including Shadrack, some men never returned. War is unnatural, and it signals that an even bigger war is pending. Morrison also effectively uses color to enhance the significance of the character purpose. The opening scene is gray, there is no lighting, no mention of the sun, or moon. Shadrack is almost blinded by the smoke and fire. Here, Shadrack and the fellow survivors are marching around during the big catastrophe searching for signs of life. This symbolizes

some form of death march. Marching is an ongoing symbol throughout the narrative that will reveal its significance again in the end. With no obvious other survivors or signs of life the men are unable to understand the emotion they feel as a result of all the destruction around them. Shadrack associates this emotion as “*it*”. This “*it*” he refers to showcases Shadrack’s internal conflict coming to terms with the fact he is either about to die or live. He is plagued by this unexpectedness of death as he and his comrades march on aimlessly. They stick near a stream to detect any signs of movement from the opposing directions. The stream is significant because fire and water are occurring themes in apocalypse narratives. It is symbolic of an ice-age, which insinuates a destruction of the world by ice. During the winter nature decays, animals hibernates, and even the sun goes down sooner. The frozen stream showcases that this is a period of death only to be preceded by life during the spring. However, the cold, lifeless, colorless, landscapes enhances the fact there is an overabundant presence of death. We will later learn that Shadrack has the ability to sense death, but never able to predict it, a trait he adapted as a result of his trauma from the war. This is one of the factors that drive him mad and result in him creating National Suicide Day.

Moving forward, they all march as if this “*it*” is beckoning them towards some unknown direction. It is not until Morrison describes Shadrack’s thoughts, that color is reintroduce into the scene. He notices his breath is pure, which is represented by white, while everything around him is dirty and dying, which is represented by gray. The scene depicts a world destroyed by fire. In the scene, symbolically cloaked in white, Shadrack is risen above the gray, sinister, and evil entities around him. Morrison is foreshadowing a future purpose for Shadrack in the midst of this war., As he sits there and ponders on his purpose Shadrack gets shot. However, it does not register with him. He wakes up in a VA hospital, in an unknown location and does not know who he is or how he got there. All he knows is that his name is “private”. The mystery and confusion in this scene reveals the presence of the apocalyptic narrative even further.

He returns to The Bottom a changed and shell-shocked man. However, his return home is not in vain. The novel focuses on his actions to rebuild the environment after the apocalypse. As a result of the trauma from war, Shadrack is fixated on unexpected death; “It was not death or dying that frightened him, but the unexpectedness of both” (14). He fears not knowing when or how he is going to die. Not much is said of Shadrack other than he was “blasted and permanently astonished by

the events of 1917” upon returning home to Medallion (7). Shadrack tries to bring continuity back to his home town. As a result of being a survivor of the catastrophe he created in the war, it is his obligation is to purify the Bottom and try to regain some order back into the lives of the inhabitants. Shadrack tries to wrong his rights and the wrongs of others. Therefore, he initiates National Suicide day. Maxine Montgomery agrees that Shadrack’s return to The Bottom is a vital part in the preparation process of the apocalypse.

The narrative itself is structured around National Suicide Day, one of the many ritualistic events whose purpose is containing the disorder that so freely pervades the character’s lives and Shadrack’s appearance in the beginning, middle, and end of the novel could well be Morrison’s attempt to satisfy the demand for fiction order. The shell-shocked veteran serves as a priest and prophet to the Bottom, exorcising the townsfolk’s of their misery while heralding their inevitable day of doom ... Shadrack’s presence represents the community’s imminent attainment of linear order and progress. [However] madness has rendered Shadrack incapable of redeeming anyone, including himself. (127-8)

What Montgomery wants to analyze is the fact that the inhabitants of the Bottom find it normal to live in a chaotic world. In order to keep the chaos contained they abide by rigorous order to align their lives around the unexpectedness. On top of a hill, “ [the] planting was backbreaking, the soil slid down and washed away seeds, and the wind lingered through the winter” (5). The town is depicted here in a dying or rotting state. It is unable to even sustain vegetation. These are signs that the Bottom was already on the brink of destruction from the time of its creation. Shadrack then creates an annual day of order in order to replicate a structured community. National Suicide Day was “one of the many ritualistic events whose purpose is containing the disorder that so freely pervades the character’s lives” (127-8). This was Shadrack’s way of controlling “*it*.” These inhabitants do not rely on imagination to guide them, their superstition leads them to make rational decisions As a result of their denial to the unnatural disasters and unexpected changes that plague their town the people are so fixated on structure that when something abnormal does happen they note it as just a part of life. Each year on January third the town await Shadrack’s arrival to commensurate

national Suicide Day. This becomes more than a crazed veteran's ritual. It becomes a vital part in the renewal and move towards continuity for the townspeople of the Bottom, but because he is crazy, "his madness has rendered Shadrack incapable of redeeming anyone, including himself" (127). What National Suicide Day does for Shadrack is that, "It [made] a place for fear as a way of controlling it. He knew the smell of death and was terrified of it, for he could not anticipate it" (14). His sixth sense is more than a personal fear of death. He is able to sense that the Bottom is moving towards annihilation. However, the magnitude of how much killing he witness and killing he did himself is too traumatizing. He is unreliable as a savior to lead the flock into redemption. Shadrack knew death was arriving with each New Year. For those who lived a life of chaos, "Shadrack's call [was for] the ones who insisted on drinking themselves to death or womanizing themselves to death" (16). Each year on that Sunday, Shadrack bellows, "Might as well go on with Shad and save the Lamb the trouble of redemption" (16) Morrison symbolically compares Shadrack to a shepherd (Jesus) who wants those who live in sin to redeem themselves or continue to contribute to the apocalyptic world surrounded by death, toxins, and alcohol.

Morrison parallels Shadrack's return back to the Bottom to the Christian apocalypse dynamic. According to the Christian apocalypse theme, one survivor or one that is pardoned by God must go back and be a sort of Shepard leading the blind, weak, sinful, or addicts to choose between life (non-sinful) or their death (a continuation of temptation) because either way their habits will one day unexpectedly take their life. In his redemption call, Shadrack predicts those who will one day march on with him into redemption. They are those who are drug ridden, living in sin, or near death. The irony is that all the inhabitants of the Bottom live like this. Later on in the novel, they find a way to reflect their sinful ways onto one of their inhabitants. Their denial of an impending apocalypse is what keeps the town thriving. In their article, *Principal of Perceptions in Toni Morrison's Sula*, Barbara Lounsberry and Grace Ann Hovet take on a different stance of Shadrack's importance in the novel. They believe that Shadrack is incapable to lead a flock.

Shadrack's equally elaborate and idiosyncratic structure to contain death --National Suicide Day--also fails to function as intended. Shadrack, like all the character of the Bottom, hopes to contain the monstrous hands of life and death ... To be safe and free is the aspiration of all the people of the Bottom, but, in

[our] view, any such hope is futile. Shadrack himself realizes that his ordering ... of both house and death does not prevent death's occurrence. Indeed as a method to control death's "unexpectedness," National Suicide Day is doubly futile and ironic. (127)

Shadrack's, "National Suicide Days -- [inability] to function as intended" might prove true in characters like Plum whose routine after the war leads him to seek drugs. Shadrack's method to control death does not have a chance in the life of Plum, and as mentioned before, those who usually ignored his calls for redemption, "were the ones who insisted on drinking themselves to death [or turning to drugs]" (16). However, it is soon revealed that those like Plum and Tar Baby who suffer from a sin-ridden contribute to the apocalypse. Their lifestyle is the first to march on with Shadrack in death. Plum's life after coming home from the war parallels a secular apocalypse narrative. His drug addiction shows signs of an apocalypse because it is so sever. Some of its signs include famine, death, and toxins (drugs). These methods of living become a way of life for Plum. The addiction itself further reveals an apocalypse is soon to come in the life of Plum, because drug usage leads to death. Therefore, the effects of the drugs on Plum is symbolically apocalyptic. This is a world he creates for himself by allow outside forces (drugs) to manipulate his mind and appearance. These characteristics include stealing lying, not sleeping, nomadic tendencies, and changes in personality, and appearance. Because Shadrack fails at redeeming Plum, Lounsberry and Hovet believe Shadrack fails as the shepherd. No matter how much he tried to micro-manage his life and those around him, "National Suicide Day is doubly futile and ironic." It is still up to the individual to decide rather or not to continue on, adapt, or rebuild self after such a catastrophe like the one Plum faces. As mentioned earlier Shadrack's pleas to redeem his community are invalid because of his post-partum. Lounsberry and Hovet do not see that Plum's death is a foreshadowing of how other inhabitants in the Bottom will end up as the novel unfolds. His form of death places further emphasis on the continuation of the downfall of the town. So far, both war and drug addiction decrease the longevity of three main male characters in the novel and further reveals the apocalypse that looms over the African American community, but why?

What is said of "Eva's last child, Plum, to whom she hoped to bequeath everything, [is that he], floated in a constant swaddle of love and affection, until 1917 when he went to war" (45). Just like Shadrack who was a handsome thriving man before the war, Plum, who was Eva's

only son, had hopes of a bright future. Even his name which is the color purple represents royalty. However, upon his return home to the Bottom, he was unrecognizable

His hair had been neither cut nor combed in months, his clothes were pointless and he had no socks. But he did have a black bag, a paper sack, and a sweet, sweet smile. Everybody welcomed him and gave him a warm room next to Tar Baby's and waited for him to tell them whatever it was he wanted them to know. They waited in vain for his telling but not long for the knowing. His habits were much like Tar Baby's but there were no bottles, and Plum was sometimes cheerful and animated .... Then he began to steal from them, take trips to Cincinnati and sleep for days in his room with the record player going. He even got thinner, since he ate only snatches of them at the beginning or end of meals. It was Hannah who found the bent spoon black from steady cooking. (45)

Characters like Plum, who come from a life of uncertainty and disorder, struggle with allowing outside forces, such as drugs, to take control of him as a means of regaining a sense of continuity and order. The image of, "the bent spoon black from steady cooking" (45), references his addiction to heroine. Tar Baby turned to the bottle, but Plum's pain was so severe he needs heroine to numb him completely. This reveals a revelation about the effects of war on men and reveals why war is a leading sign of apocalypse. Even though he walked and talked, he was symbolically already dead. There is no need for him to march on with Shadrack during National Suicide day because he was slowing killing himself from within. It is no wonder Eva placed Plum in a room near Tar Baby; both of these men were dying as a result of the temptation they let overtake their body. The war was not the only factor that made it so easy for Plum to turn to temptation. Plum comes from a life of difficult physical pain. When he was a baby, "Plum stopped having bowel movements...He seemed in great pain and his shrieks were pitched high in outrage and suffering. She resolved to end his misery once and for all. Plum stopped crying as the black hard stools ricocheted onto the frozen ground. [And now it was over]" (34).

Since birth, his life is never stable. It is easy to see why drugs became a form of ritual and routine for Plum. Just as Shadrack had National Suicide Day to regain structure, Plum's drug usage and frequent trips

to Cincinnati are all a part of his scheme to contain the disorder and pain that overcomes him. However, the effects of the drug on his body are too much. In order to save Plum from himself, Eva, sets him on fire. However, in this apocalyptic narrative it is in that outhouse as a constipated baby with his mother that Plum first encountered death. The outhouse is empty, cold, dark, and filled with so much misery and pain. Even with a second chance at life that day in the outhouse, years later Plum is unable to fulfill his destiny as Eva's royal child. In his drug induced madness, Plum reverts to a childlike state, This time in a sacrificial killing of her son, Eva "managed to sooth him ... She resolved to end his misery once and for all" (34). This scene showcases the unnatural lifestyle that pervades the lives of the inhabitants, babies can not defecate, a man turns back into a child, a mother is too poor to raise her child, and they live in a frozen and lifeless landscape.

Just as Shadrack was surrounded by fire in the war zone, Plum's sacrificial death scene repeats the same fiery apocalyptic landscape:

[Plum] felt twilight. Now there seemed to be some kinds of wet light traveling over his legs and stomach with a deeply attractive smell. It would itself-this wet light- all about him, splashing and running into his skin. He opened his eyes and saw what he imagined was the great wing of an [angel] pouring a wet lightness over him. Some kind of baptism, some kind of blessing he thought ... [Eva] rolled a bit of newspaper into a tight stick about six inches, lit it and threw it onto the bed where the kerosene-soaked Plum lay in snug delight. (47)

The unexpectedness of death was not just a fear of Shadrack's. After "Hannah who found the bent spoon black from steady cooking" (45), Eva feared losing her son to drug addiction. She is more like Shadrack than she realized because she can also predict deaths. Along with this Eva finds her own way to gain normality within her family. She does this by providing a home and playing her role as the matriarch. She also tries to right her wrongs as the novel moves closer to the end. In a way, she sees herself as a contributor to Plums addiction because she abandoned him as a child, another sign of the chaos of the Bottom. Her sacrifice is not only beneficial but also selfish. She could not live with seeing her son, "whom she hope to bequeath everything" to, die of drug addiction, especially after all she has sacrificed. At the same time, as a mother she could not witness her son in agony and paid again. In his book, Toni

Morrison's *Sula*, Harold Bloom agrees with the fact Eva's act of sacrifice suggests a purification of some sort. This purification leaves further evidence that Plum's life reflects an apocalyptic narrative He says,

As the agent of death, Eva acts primarily out of love. Tears stream down her face as she slightly holds Plum. Grieving yet resolute, Eva's choice of death by fire echoes other mythic literary deaths and suggests purification and even rebirth, particularly in reference to, "wet light" and 'some kind of baptism. But Plum neither rises from his own ashes nor does he emerge from the flame strengthened and sanctified. He is extinguished by his own mother. No one questions Eva's act, certainly not the community that never believes the rumors it circulates. Eva's primary motivation is to allow Plum to "die like a man" rather than retreat into drug induced infancy. (153)

Plum is the example of the secular apocalypse because he is thrown into the fiery furnace, but he is not redeemed and saved by God to reemerge as a shepherd or prophet because of his usage of drugs. His life symbolizes the fact they are closer than they know to the Bottom's demise. As his life moves closer and close to the end, times moves backwards in Plums world. He retreats back into infancy and calls on his mothers to treat him as such. Rather than have Plum die one day from an overdose or tainted batch, Eva takes control of the situation and sacrifices Plum for his own good. He is the first to go but not because of National Suicide Day. His death, "the rebirth" symbolizes Plums longing to be back in his mother's wombs. His death marks another an unnatural phenomenon that goes unnoticed. Rather than emerge from the furnace as Shadrack has Plum's scene is a spiritual cleansing where Plum is comforted by the thought of being back into his mother's warmth and wetness of her womb. The inhabitants of the Bottom relied on order and structure, Eva could not allow "it," an unexpected death like Plum's break to the fabric of the stability she relied on. She too suffered from the fear of it. This same fear drove her to leave her children and cut off her own leg. Morrison portrays Eva as some type of grim reaper who comes to take Plum away from his pain. His death is a purification or baptism by fire. Eva is not blamed for Plum's death. His death marks another unexpected unnatural disaster of the Bottom.

Morrison moves to Sula who embodies the changes that take place in the environment. The Bottom is a town that is very familiar with

natural and unnatural disasters. The first mention of unnatural disaster was when, “Somebody’s grandmother said her hens always started laying double yolks right after National Suicide Day” (16), Eva returned with only one leg, Plum expectantly caught a fire, Chicken Little drowned, and again when Hannah caught a fire. Any attempt to discredit Shadrack as a chosen prophet to lead the people of the Bottom is silenced when the only day of normality and glee is when Shadrack led the Bottom to their death. The town feared Shadrack, but it isn’t until Sula’s death the prophecy of him being shepherd comes true.

Accompanied by a plague of robins Sula came back to Medalion. The little yam-breasted shuddering birds were everywhere, exciting very small children away from their usual welcome into a vicious stoning ... Although most of the people remembered the time when the sky was black for two hours with clouds and clouds of pigeons, and although they were accustomed to excess in nature—too much heat, too much cold, too little rain, rain to flooding—they still dreaded the way a relatively trivial phenomenon could become sovereign in their lives and bend their minds to its will. In spite of their fear, they reacted to an oppressive oddity, or what they called evil days, with an acceptance that bordered on welcome. Such an evil must be avoided, they felt, and precautions must naturally be taken to protect themselves from it. But they let it run its course, fulfill itself, and never invented ways either to alter it, annihilate it or to prevent its happening again. (89)

It is obvious in the way that the town bans together against Sula, they unknowingly continue to draw closer to the end. They notice a change in the very structure they built around them to create community. All of the things that used to be just superstition, now have a face, ‘so they laid broomsticks across their doors at night and sprinkled salt on porch steps’ (113) because their imagination is wreaking havoc in their lives. Laying broomsticks and salt was their way of keeping out an “other” or in this case “*it*.” Even Eva noticed a change in the already chaotic tendencies of the Bottom with Sula’s arrival. She says after seeing her, “I might have known them birds meant something” (91). Eva’s knack for seeing beyond is mentioned again. Eva and Shadrack are not the only one, Dessie says, “Yeh, well I noticed something long time ago, Ain’t say nothing ‘bout it’ cause I wasn’t sure what it meant” (115). She also

sense the “*it*” both Shadracks and Eva feared. They knew the town was set for ruin. Taking heed of these internal feelings of “something,” they all band together once they realize their sin — nature is what draws them into the ground. This marks the community’s attempt to move towards normality and social order. All because they saw Sula as a curse. The cure to controlling the oddities and unnatural disasters was to ostracize Sula and stop living in sin. The first to change is Teapots mom. She began to nourish her son. She spent less time at the Time and a Half Pool Hall. Along with this “women cherished their men more” (115). Their imagination allows them to see that Sula is the cause of the towns plagues and unnatural disasters. However, Morrison reveals that the people of the Bottom already live in chaos on a daily basis; “most of the people remembered the time when the sky was black for two hours with clouds and clouds of pigeons, and although they were accustomed to excess in nature—too much heat, too much cold, too little rain, rain to flooding—they still dreaded the way a relatively trivial phenomenon could become sovereign in their lives and bend their minds to its will” (90). It was easy to blame Sula for the bizarre happenings because after she left she became an outsider. She became an “other” herself. In her return the apocalypse draws near, however its actual date cannot be predicted. As a result of that the inhabitants rely on their imagination to control their actions.

It was the “unexpectedness” of death that Shadrack feared; he knew the smell of death all along. He warned the towns people to take their life or as they did “let it run its course, fulfill itself, and never incited ways either to alter it” (89) Rather than makes changes to their sinful lives with the signs that something sinister is approaching they ignored it, accepted it, adapted to it, and blame Sula for it. Ironically, “Their conviction of Sula’s [chain of] evil changes them in accountable yet mysterious way. Once the source of their personal misfortune was identified they had leave to protect and love one another ... and in general ban together against the devil in their midst” (117-8). What they do not realize is that the evil already loomed in the community. The oddities, the weather, the soil slipping, the robins, were not signs that Sula was evil, but that the town was fallings apart year by year. In Karen F. Stein, article *Toni Morrison’s Sula: A Black Woman’s Epic* she believes in order to emphasize the arrival of an apocalypse the novel exhibits

A recurring rhythm of birth, death and rebirth structures, every chapter describing an actual symbol death. To compound

the irony, death is often seen as positive, as in Eva's burning of Plum, a ritual of release and purification. Unlike many traditional epics, which depict the founding of a civilization or its restoration to proper order *Sula* begins with the razing of the Bottom to make room for a whites-only golf course. This destruction, which sets the book's one of hovering doom, is both example and symbol of the steady erosion that the black community and its members suffer. The contrast of fertile life and sterile machinery reenacts the black struggle to survive in the face of white oppression, the epic struggle between life and death. Economically and politically powerless, the black community is vulnerable to white societies' exploitative self-aggrandizement. (146)

Stein concludes that the Bottom's apocalypse does not come in a form of demons and gods but in a linear gradual decline of their society. The once thriving town, plagued by robins, snakes, fires, and floods, was nothing more than "A joke. That was the way it got started" (4). Stein notes that, "Economically and politically powerless, the black community is vulnerable to white society's exploitative self-aggrandizement" (146). Therefore it is no surprise that Shadrack reveals himself again at the end of the novel to lead the townsfolk out of the Bottom. It is, in a way, a new order. Even though it crumbled and slid away, the whites in the valley saw that the Bottom's landscape is valuable for building their own utopia; "Economically and politically powerless, the black community is vulnerable to white societies' exploitative self-aggrandizement. (146) The joke that the town is founded upon made it easy for them to once again be undermined to make room for something more productive, this time in the form of the Medallion Golf Course.

The apocalypse reveals itself as the arrival of the hegemonic western society moving upward and fulfilling their manifest destiny. Now, it was time for something new to emerge from its ashes. We witness the "erosion" of the town in the beginning. The fact that they have been able to plant on the landscaped and survive is ironic, but the town was already doomed from the beginning. Overcome with glee as a result of Sula's death,

Everybody, Dessie, Tar Baby, Patsy, Mr. Buckland Reed, Teapot's Mama, Valentine, the deweys, Mrs. Jackson, Irene the proprietor of the Palace of Cosmetology, Reba, the Herrod brothers,

and flocks of teenagers got into the mood and, laughing, dancing, calling to one another, formed a piped pipers band behind Shadrack. ... They didn't mean to go in, to actually go down into the lip of the tunnel, but in their need to kill it all, all of it ... they went too deep, too far ... A lot of them died there. (162)

Shadrack, The Lamb, finally lead the flock into redemption. The “*it*” that followed him after the war, and drove him mad is what leads the town into a new day. Suicide day came full circle and Shadrack returns in the end of the novel to lead the inhabitants into the tunnel of death. The approaching demolition of the Bottom for white hegemonic society angered the inhabitants. The town they built in spite of omens, plagues, and deaths, crumbles right before their eyes in order to make room for something they cannot even be a part of. Morrison reveals that the end of the Bottom did not come into the form of demons, angels, and demi Gods, but in white hegemonic society moving in to obliterate majority of the Bottom's inhabitants. The pages of the novel simply present the apocalyptic experiences and signs, which point to the inevitable end of the Bottom.

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Present





# The \_\_\_\_\_-American Dream: An Ecofeminist Reading of Race and Identity in *The House on Mango Street*

Taylor McAnally



Everyone knows the story of the big brick house with the white picket fence, the nice, quiet subdivisions full of identical houses and identical families. Thanks to advertisements, television, canonical texts, and other avenues of popular culture, today's technology-enhanced era reinforces the idea of the "American Dream" through mass media 24/7. Regardless of race, class, religion, or gender, the lure of the ideal home appeals to the masses. Told with a fairytale quality, the American Dream possesses a magic that transcends space and time. According to Harold Bloom, the American Dream represents one of the "crucial topics" that "[expresses] the whole concern of human existence in the twenty-first century" (xi). Bloom goes on to explain that Benjamin Franklin "gave us the definitive formulation of the American Dream" in his autobiography, specifically defining the concept as "a rise from rags to riches" (23). While the rags to riches theme exists in other diverse literature, the specific American interpretation and ideology hinges upon the effort and hard work of the individual, traditionally the patriarchal breadwinner of the home, toward economic prosperity (Bloom 23), while the wife remains indoors as the keeper of the home. In Sandra Cisneros's novella *The House on Mango Street*, the American Dream appears again, this time on a poverty-stricken Hispanic street in Chicago during the twenty-first century, narrated through the experiences of an adolescent, Mexican-American girl named Esperanza Cordero. Through an ecofeminist lens, Cisneros utilizes Esperanza's readings of houses and homes, universal spaces of domesticity, to comment on the commodity culture of dwell-

ings, revealing how Esperanza's perception of identity and selfhood is directly connected to the house of the American Dream.

In Cisneros's novella, "place" as an ideological function that reveals historical underpinnings of race and gender becomes the focus of Esperanza's narrative, specifically the role of women within their place. According to Maya Socolovsky, "Ecocritical approaches to literature—studying the relationship between literature and the physical environment—recognize that we define ourselves socially, culturally, and politically through 'place'" (n8 202). She goes on to explain how "place" functions as a "socially produced ideological concept" (Socolovsky n8 202), reinforced by the patriarchy through avenues of popular culture and mass media. As the ultimate environment of humans, Earth acts as the most familiar place between men and women alike; however, the concept of ecofeminism reveals the observable connection between Earth and women when Earth is gendered and personified as *Mother* Earth: the land equates to the female body, and many adjectives employed to describe women are often used to describe nature as well. Thus, a physical place or object can directly connect to a person's identity through the meaning associated with a term. Further, Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon acknowledge this connection through their definition of "place identity":

In general terms, place identity can be defined as an interpretation of self that uses environmental meaning to symbolize or situate identity. Like other forms of identity, place identity answers the question-Who am I?-by countering-Where am I? or Where do I belong? From a social psychological perspective, place identities are thought to arise because places, as bounded locales imbued with personal, social, and cultural meanings, provide a significant framework in which identity is constructed, maintained, and transformed. Like people, things, and activities, places are an integral part of the social world of everyday life; as such, they become important mechanisms through which identity is defined and situated. (113)

Before readers even open the book and read Esperanza's stories, they are immediately presented with a potent symbol of space within the title: *The House on Mango Street*. Each word of the title functions as parts of an equation that reveals significant "place identity" within the text, each symbol connected to different aspects of masculinity and femininity, as well as ethnicity. Clearly, images of home and dwelling place connect

to *house*, and *street* suggests urbanization and civilization. While *house* signifies the feminine domestic realm and *street* denotes mobility, a typical masculine trait of agency, *mango* spatially connects the two terms within the title. According to Ines Salazar, “the use of the word ‘mango’ . . . refers to a widely available and very popular fruit in Mexico and other parts of Latin America” (395). Thus, the fruit serves as an exotic symbol of a far-away home, a fruit that maintains popularity based on the fact that the plant grows in large quantities. Further, the fruit, in its own locale, dispossesses novelty, but rather functions instead as a symbol of community; however, the image of the mango plucked from its roots and brought to Chicago acts as a symbol of otherness and dislocation. By employing such a loaded term in conjunction with images of living in an urban location, Cisneros immediately reveals the significance of a metropolitan space, specifically for men and women who left their homes in order to create new identities.

While dislocation affected both men and women of Mexican ethnicity, their plight differed in day-to-day struggles. “The history of Mexican-Americans in Chicago,” Salazar offers, “dates back to the 1920s when significant numbers of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were recruited to work in Chicago’s steel mills, stock yards, and railroads to support this nation’s industrial expansion” (396). During the rise of industrialization, men from impoverished or economically unstable countries or states moved to larger cities in search of jobs, all hoping to attain the notorious American Dream. Men searched for profitable employment while women traditionally stayed home caring for children or completing other domestic duties. Sandra Cisneros herself grew up in Chicago, Illinois, under similar circumstances because her father, according to Cisneros’s biography *A Home in the Heart: The Story of Sandra Cisneros* (2005), “moved from Mexico to Chicago to work on the railroad during the Mexican Revolution of 1910, to escape the violence,” ultimately bringing his family along with him; thus, Cisneros and her family lived in Chicago during a time of increased immigration and industry (“A Home”). As a result, *The House on Mango Street* serves as a type of autobiography for Cisneros, who grew up moving around slum neighborhoods in Chicago, dreaming of an “actual house” in the face of constant disappointment (“A Home). In the biography, Cisneros explains the “balancing act” that she had to endure while growing up as a “Chicano and American, [referring] to the experience [as] ‘straddling these two cultures’” (“A Home”). Not only did Cisneros and other women of color experience difficulty because of their race, but they were also marginalized because of their

gender. Cisneros acknowledges this when she begins the novella with a dedication in English and Spanish—*A las Mujeres/To the Women* (Cisneros)—which immediately brings up issues of race and gender that are inseparable. In her article on Chicana Feminist perspective, Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano argues that “there are important differences between a Chicana perspective and the mainstream feminist one with regard to issues of race, culture, and class” (140). As a symbol of domesticity and a type of captivity for women, a house carries significant meaning when equated to identity. Like a mango in the bustling city of Chicago, Cisneros felt out of place as her family moved around with no place to permanently call home, which results in her—and Esperanza’s—desire for a home of her own where she can form her own identity. Therefore, Esperanza’s experiences as a Chicana female tint her descriptions of houses, particularly the one on Mango Street.

Possessing the same title as that of the novella, the first chapter, narrated by Esperanza, focuses entirely on the main homes and dwelling-places of the Cordero family, immediately establishing a binary between the homes of dreams and the homes of reality. Beginning the chapter, Esperanza says, “We didn’t always live on Mango Street” (Cisneros 3). She goes on to list from scattered memories the other places where she and her family have lived, concluding, “what I remember most is moving a lot” (Cisneros 3). During this early period of dislocation and resettling, her parents comforted Esperanza and her siblings with bedside stories of “a real house that would be ours for always [and that would be] white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence” (Cisneros 4). Clearly, the concept of the American Dream occupied the thoughts and desires of the Cordero family as they moved around Chicago, revealing the connection between dwelling places and economic identity. Notice, however, the lack of a fence in Esperanza’s description; instead of a space of imprisonment, Esperanza and her family desire an open, less regulated area. This description signifies a deeper, cultural reading of space and dwelling in the American Dream ideology for those who have a hyphen in their nationality. The mark of the hyphen symbolizes the morphing of two separate, distinct entities, while immediately indicating otherness. Because the Cordero family is *Mexican-American*, and not simply the stock American of Caucasians, they long for more freedom and liberty, which becomes represented by their home. The “rhetoric of cultural ‘unbelonging’” for immigrants results from the system of nationhood, which automatically functions through “exclusion, inclusion, and membership” (Socolovsky 3). As a

result, people like the Corderos with hyphens in their names exist in an intermediate space of national identity, resulting in exile and dislocation. Once accepted into American membership, mainstream ideology encourages homeownership as a way to signify a person's identity and worth. In the case of marginalized Esperanza, home becomes a crucial force that she works with and against, though the politics of homeownership do not apply to those who spatially inhabit an outsider position, and definitely do not apply to women. Thus, in spite of hard work, as represented by Esperanza's father, the rise from rags to riches eludes the outcasts. As a result, the American Dream transforms into the American Nightmare (Bloom xv).

After lullabies of the ultimate dream home, the house on Mango Street is a rude awakening and disappointment to Esperanza. The house of reality is nothing like the house of her or her parents' dreams: "But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in" (Cisneros 4). Instead of the large, open yard, she has "no front yard" at all (Cisneros 4). If the home represents the American Dream for the Corderos, then a forceful entry reveals how difficult the dream is to achieve for the Cordero family, but specifically for Esperanza as a Chicana female, who equates the home with her identity. This is not the home that Esperanza wants to call "ours." In fact, her description mirrors that of a rape scene. The house, small and red, resembles a young Hispanic girl. As ecofeminism equates the land with the female body, the house, in this description, alludes to Esperanza's body, or identity. As if hiding for protection, the house that serves as a metaphor for the girl holds its breath against the attacker who "[pushes] hard to get in" (Cisneros 4). Esperanza's word choices reveal her fear of living in a bad neighborhood as a young Chicana girl. It appears her father echoes that fear by nailing "wooden bars" to the window (Cisneros 5). Although he says it is so they "don't fall out" (Cisneros 5), the bars also prevent anyone else from coming in uninvited, though the material of the bars themselves further reveals the futile nature of his efforts, compared to stronger metal alternatives. The house contains a stigma for those who live outside of Mango Street, signifying danger, poverty, and exile. At the end of the chapter, Esperanza recounts a moment when a nun asks her if she "lives *there*" (Cisneros 5), and Esperanza, "[feeling] like nothing," knew then that she had to have a "real house [that she] could point to" (Cisneros 5). The stigma

attached to “*there*” alienates one demographic from another, and Esperanza immediately equates “nothing” with Mango Street, where no place worth living exists (Cisneros 5), and further equates “nothing” with herself. As Esperanza’s eyes follow the nun’s pointed finger to “there,” she is forced to view “her surroundings through the prism of the nun’s perspective and feels ashamed” (Salazar 393). The moment Esperanza experiences DuBois’s concept of “double consciousness,” according to Salazar, causes her to experience “self-alienation” as she views herself through the eyes of a woman who is not in an “othered” position (394). Ultimately, Esperanza internalizes the idea that her possessions and commodities—her house—defines who she is and equates to her identity. According to Regina Betz, “The manner in which a person communicates suggests something about her identity” (18). Throughout the novella, Esperanza never misses a chance to distance herself from the house on Mango Street, as well as Mango Street itself, creating a clear boundary between herself and the space around her. Ultimately, Esperanza decides upon her own dream house, as opposed to her parents’ dream or the house that automatically comes with a husband or father. Although Esperanza’s situation as a poor Chicana female limits her ability for homeownership without marriage, she continues to dream of a space that she feels is good enough to define her self-worth.

Near the end of her story, in a chapter entitled “Four Skinny Trees,” Esperanza relates herself to trees that have been planted by the city, revealing her acknowledgment of dislocation and exile as an “other”-American in a place she resents. Like the concrete that encloses the trees (Cisneros 75), Esperanza’s house on Mango Street and the visible bars on her windows confine her to her space. Esperanza admits to feeling misunderstood like the four trees that “do not belong here but are here” (Cisneros 74). By employing the word “here,” Esperanza locates herself to a space of immediacy with the trees, as compared to a word like “there” that the nun uses and signifies distance and separation. Just as the nun creates a boundary between herself and Esperanza, Esperanza attempts to inhabit the space that the trees successfully exist in. After many chapters about longing for a new place and distancing herself from Mango Street, Esperanza, through the authorship of Cisneros, devotes a story to refuge in nature, a space not tainted by the poverty-stricken politics of the suburbs. When Esperanza can no longer stand the sights of Mango Street, she considers the secret strength of the roots of the trees that penetrate deep beneath the earth with a “reason for being” (Cisneros 74). Despite their condition as trees planted in

concrete, seemingly controlled by someone other than themselves, they continue to serve their ultimate purpose (Cisneros 75), continuing to live; Esperanza finds encouragement from the trees, revealing how she views her own identity as a girl in captivity. Early on Esperanza learns the truth about the American Dream, yet she still internalizes the value of a specific kind of space, namely a house that projects a certain aesthetic value. Instead of finding and accepting a home in a place that protects her from the elements, surrounded by family and friends, Esperanza ties the notion of home to the commodity of the house itself, thus limiting that dwelling-place to a specific function, the same way the trees serve a specific “reason for being” (Cisneros 74). In other words, the house that Esperanza strongly abhors does in fact protect her to a certain extent from outside elements, but she resists the house as a home because it does not coincide with the homes of commercials or fairy tales. And throughout the narrative, Esperanza’s reason for being and purpose in life fixates on the goal of obtaining the dream house for her own, in spite of whatever roadblocks—race, gender, socioeconomic—stand in her way. With each vignette that Esperanza fills with stories of homes and houses, she uses familiar objects or people to serve as metaphors of her situation to discuss purpose, belonging, and place.

As Esperanza narrates her story, she adds in more features that she requires of her dream home, each revealing components of her psyche. Esperanza begins the chapter “Bums in the Attic” with an assertive statement: “I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where papa works” (Cisneros 86). Skipping introductions and formalities, Esperanza gets to the main point of her story, once again defining her dream home. Instead of the dream home that her parents fantasize about, Esperanza describes her home with no connection to her family, adding one important feature that her previous description lacks: the hill. This chapter follows a few traumatic experiences for Esperanza on Mango Street, so the inclusion of the hill reveals her need for safety. While her father attempts to provide Esperanza with safety by placing bars on her window, Esperanza sees the bars as a sign of imprisonment. Esperanza believes that the “people who live on hills sleep so close to the stars they forget those of us who live too much on the earth” (Cisneros 86), indicating a desire for spiritual sanctuary that she can never find on the earth; the stars in heavens are unmovable, reappearing each night with the type of consistency that Esperanza’s life lacks. Instead of celestial beings, Esperanza’s dwelling is associated with “last week’s garbage [and] rats” (Cisneros 87). From the top of the hills, the people in nice

homes of their own literally look down on those who struggle to exist in their space, people who are as much cast offs of society as garbage and infestation. Once Esperanza comes to an age of acknowledgment of this, she no longer travels to work with her father, too “ashamed” to “[stare] out the window like the hungry...tired of looking at what [she] can’t have” (Cisneros 86). As a result, Esperanza determines to “one day” have her “own house” that is clearly not on Mango Street, as evidenced when she says she “will not forget where [she] came from” (Cisneros 87). Ultimately, Esperanza feels that she must leave her place of exile in order to have the opportunity for homeownership and, ultimately, a different identity.

Not only does Esperanza fail to fit the space of Mango Street, but even her name refuses to inhabit the space designated for her. “In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters,” Esperanza explains early on in the novella (Cisneros 10). For English speakers, specifically, Spanish words take up too much space in the mouth of those who can only stumble out foreign-sounding words like *Esperanza*; therefore, the hegemonic class renames according to their preference, regardless of the identity that resides in a person’s name. Like the hyphen in a person’s nationality, bilingualism indicates a merging, yet separateness, of two entities that are contingent upon coexisting. For Esperanza, the Spanish signifier of her name alienates her from the rest of society who casts off people like the Corderos to the unwanted areas of town. Her assimilated name in English is easier to remember and to say for non-Spanish speakers, but it also carries weight in its meaning: hope. Hope for what? For Esperanza, hope to escape the confines of Mango Street, hope to own a house that she can point to in a place where she is no longer marginalized. Although Esperanza received her name from her great-grandmother (Cisneros 10), she states specifically, “I don’t want to inherit her place by the window” (Cisneros 10), which reveals Esperanza’s fear that she will inherit immobility based on her ethnicity. Even at home Esperanza has no nickname, unlike her sister (Cisneros 10). She says, “But I am always Esperanza” (Cisneros 11), indicating a desire to be renamed into something shorter and easier like an English name. Near the end of the novella, one of Esperanza’s elderly aunts reminds her, “You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street” (Cisneros 105). Here, the connection between Esperanza’s name, place, and identity clearly reveal themselves. For those who live on the outskirts of a flourishing society because of their ethnicity, places and names are potent symbols. As if her aunt knew of Esperanza’s goal of

leaving Mango Street, she says, “When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? ...You can’t erase what you know. You can’t erase who you are” (Cisneros 11). In spite of Esperanza’s efforts to continuously distance herself from the stigma of Mango Street, to eradicate the tainted space from her identity, she still cannot forget her roots. In the next chapter, Esperanza describes a brief conversation with her friend Alicia, who migrated from Guadalajara (Cisneros 106). Esperanza says, “[T]oday [Alicia] is listening to my sadness because I don’t have a house” (Cisneros 106), which again confirms Esperanza’s need for a home that can represent her. Not only does Esperanza narrate the stories of Mango Street to readers, but she also shares with friends her dreams of homeownership, and Alicia’s response supports what her Aunt says:

“You live right here, 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to the house I am ashamed of.

No, this isn’t my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I’ve lived here. I don’t belong. I don’t ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you’ll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house, not even a photograph...only one I dream of.

No, Alicia says. Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you’ll come back too.

Not me. Not until somebody makes it better. (Cisneros 106-107)

Through this passage, Esperanza reveals one of her main reasons for why she cannot identify with Mango Street: it needs to be made “better.” In its current condition as a poverty-stricken neighborhood, Esperanza’s need for safety, like the houses on the hill, increases along with her awareness of her situation. Esperanza does not want a place by the window like the other women in the story because she does not want to sit in a similitude of safety, watching the neighborhood grow worse before her eyes; instead, Esperanza desires to leave Mango Street behind, returning only after someone other than herself has made it better. Making a full circle from when Esperanza introduces the etymology of her name to readers, her aunt reminds her that her name means hope, that she *can* leave Mango Street, but that she must also return for the others. Unfortunately, however, it remains unclear at the end of the novella whether or not Esperanza does, in fact, escape the confines of Mango Street.

Once upon a time, Esperanza internalized the fairy tales of the American Dream by which her parents reared her, but the “happily ever after” never came; her dream house never existed on Mango Street. Other girls in the novella find an illusion of freedom from the confines of Mango Street, but they never truly leave and create their own identities. Like the wooden bars on Esperanza’s windows and the skinny trees Esperanza equates with herself, women throughout Mango Street are held in a system of patriarchal captivity because of their gender which is also reinforced because of their ethnicity. For example, Rafaela, a young married woman, “gets locked indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at” (Cisneros 79). Like Esperanza’s grandmother, who always sat by the window (Cisneros 10), Rafaela dreams she is Rapunzel, another example of the powerful influence of fairy tales, longing for freedom from her domestic imprisonment (Cisneros 79). Unable to leave, however, Rafaela requests the “kids” of Mango Street to bring her back coconut or papaya juice (Cisneros 80), which function like the symbol of the mango, emphasizing a longing for a faraway home. “Down the street” (Cisneros 80), where the ladies dance and are freed from their houses and husbands, “women much older than [Rafaela] ... open homes with keys” (Cisneros 80). Esperanza does not reveal the marital status of the women, but she does emphasize the reason why Rafaela idolizes them: they come and go in their own homes and have the keys in their hands which symbolize tokens of power. Esperanza also asks Sally, a mischievous girl in the neighborhood, if she wishes she “didn’t have to go home [but could] stop in front of a house, a nice one with flowers and big windows and steps” that she could climb on her own “where a room is waiting for [her] (Cisneros 82). Esperanza goes on to describe the trees, blue sky, and never having “to worry what people said because [she] never belonged here anyway ... and nobody would think [she is] strange because [she] likes to dream and dream” (Cisneros 83). Ultimately, the question Esperanza asks Sally is really for herself, and the nice house she mentions resembles the American Dream house, which these girls can never obtain. But in the end, Esperanza takes the power in her own hands by rewriting her own story. In “A House of My Own” Esperanza writes:

Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man’s house. Not a daddy’s. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody’s

garbage to pick up after. Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem. (Cisneros 108).

Refusing to settle for the American Nightmare, and no longer deluding herself about the myth of the American Dream, Esperanza acknowledges a need to rewrite the stories for herself and, ultimately, the other marginalized citizens of the United States. According to Kelly Wissman, “Esperanza’s alternative “happily ever after” comes through locating the vocation of writing as the fulcrum for *self-definition* and social change” (emphasis added, 17). Esperanza does not completely abandon the ideology that a house represents a person’s ideology, nor does she give up on her particular aesthetic preferences completely; however, instead of allowing herself to perpetuate the American Nightmare within her own self-definition, she determines to rewrite her own ending in which, whatever the condition of the house or however it compares to the houses on the hill, it belongs to her and she to it. The house symbolizes a place of solitude in its quietness and cleanliness through the imagery of the pure snow and blank paper. Contrasted from images of garbage and rats on Mango Street, this home is a pure, clean, safe, and undefiled sanctuary where Esperanza finds peace in her identity. As a female who is also “othered” by her ethnicity, Esperanza lacks the agency to change Mango Street, or leave, on her own; therefore, readers never really know if Esperanza ever escapes. However, one thing remains true: Esperanza’s spirit leaves the littered streets of Mango Street through her stories when readers pick up Cisneros’s book. Ultimately, Esperanza takes the power into her own hands, literally, when she pens her narrative, creating a space of freedom where she cannot be silenced or controlled by anyone other than herself.

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## **“An ugliness that was not their own”: The Scapegoating of the Breedloves in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye***

Kendria Patterson



Set in 1941 in the author’s Midwestern American hometown, Lorain, Ohio, Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* details the events preceding and following the incestuous sexual assault of Pecola Breedlove, a young African American girl. The novel features the use of multiple narrators and perspectives in order to convey the circumstances surrounding this event. As one of the text’s shifting narrators, Claudia MacTeer, the youngest child of the family with which Pecola lives temporarily after a fire at her home, recalls the events that follow the assault: “Cholly Breedlove is dead; our innocence too. The seeds shriveled and died; her baby too” (6).

As the only daughter in a dysfunctional family of outsiders, Pecola Breedlove endures a life of neglect and abuse. Throughout the novel, Pecola suffers through and witnesses physical, emotional, and sexual violence at the hands of her own family and the surrounding community. As the main narrator of Pecola’s story, Claudia seeks to explain the plausibility of the events surrounding Pecola’s suffering by stating, “since *why* is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in *how*” (6). The answer to this question lies within the Breedlove family’s overall isolation from Lorain, Ohio’s African American community. The family’s distance from the ideal image of “whiteness” within mainstream American culture and community-branded “ugliness” establish its members’ positions as outsiders to this community. This branding as exiles within the community leads to the scapegoating of the Breedlove family. Scapegoating refers to the “blaming or punishing of one for the sins of others” (“scapegoat, n.”).

In the context of the African American community in Lorain, Ohio, this *sin* is *blackness*. Although the town is highly segregated with little interaction between the white and black communities, the Breedloves endure racially-charged alienation. In *The Bluest Eye*, the Breedlove family serves as the scapegoat for the racial discrimination that the members of this African American community face outside of the boundaries that separate them from the mainstream culture, and within this space subject the Breedloves to a similar form of alienation.

In understanding the scapegoating of the Breedloves, it is important to note the racially divided spaces that exist within the town of Lorain, Ohio. The novel makes the racial segregation within Lorain evident through Claudia's description of the predominantly white area of town when she and her older sister, Frieda, travel there to visit Pecola as she works in the Fisher's home with her mother, Pauline. Claudia describes the experience of crossing the liminal space that exists between the racially segregated areas:

The streets changed; houses looked more sturdy, their paint was newer, porch posts straighter, yards deeper. Then came brick houses set well back from the street, fronted by yards edged in shrubbery clipped into smooth cones and balls of velvet green. . . . The backyards of these houses fell away in green slopes down to a strip of sand, and then the blue Lake Erie, lapping all the way to Canada. The orange-patched sky of the steel-mill section never reached this part of town. This sky was always blue. (105)

Claudia's description of crossing into this space highlights the racial and economic separation of the two sides of the town. As she and Frieda cross into the predominately white section of Lorain, the physical environment transforms into an area of manicured lawns and natural beauty that remains untarnished by markers of racial otherness and lower economic status, as signified by the mention of the steel mill. The noted differences in the environments of the racially divided sections of town illustrate the constant white presence that exists within this seemingly racially homogenous area. Claudia's attention to these details highlights a sense of desire for the physical beauty of this forbidden area. She further describes a park in which "black people were not allowed" (105). She goes on to state that the banishment of African Americans from this space causes it to "fill their dreams" (105). Nathan Colborne explains the relationship between desire and scapegoating. According to Colborne,

the scapegoating of an “arbitrary victim,” such as Pecola and her family, allows for the displacement of the rage fueled by the inability to fulfill social desires (112-113). In the case of the Breedloves, their fulfillment of this role is not arbitrary, but racially motivated.

Although the majority of the novel’s action takes place within the nearly entirely African American spaces of Lorain, Ohio, race exists in the backdrop of the novel through the constant invasion of white cultural values into this space. The constant invasion of whiteness within this environment leads to the racialization and scapegoating of the Breedlove family. As Pelagia Goulimari points out, the African-American community of Lorain, Ohio is “penetrated by white middle-class standards of value” (194). Goulimari likens this penetration to the raping of Pecola by her father. Claudia describes a similar intrusion of these standards that begins with “Christmas and the gift of dolls” (19). She details her experience of receiving white dolls for Christmas, although she had “no interest in babies or the concept of motherhood” (20). For Claudia this intrusion of mainstream standards and desires is similar to the alienation and later rape enacted upon Pecola. Interestingly, both intrusions result in an unwanted child; Pecola’s comes in the form of the pregnancy that results from her rape, while Claudia’s comes in the form of a doll. Another prominent intrusion of white cultural values within the text is the recurring allusion to the iconic Dick and Jane readers. The novel opens with a simulation of the popular Dick and Jane readers, which utilized simple language and familiar imagery in order to teach young children how to read. Debra T. Werrlein notes that as often the first form of literature that children of all races and economic statuses were exposed to, the Dick and Jane readers ingrained and normalized the image of the idealized white, middle class, nuclear family into the minds of its readers (56). The simulation of the Dick and Jane story repeats in fragments throughout the novel and aligns with the telling of the Breedloves’ story. Morrison introduces it in the novel’s opening: “Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy” (3). When juxtaposed with the tragic domestic life of the Breedlove family, the Dick and Jane story highlights the attempts of the African American community to mimic this idealized image. Homi K. Bhabha highlights the use of mimicry by a colonized population in order to fulfill the desire of creating a “reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (n.p.). According to Bhabha, the mimicking culture seeks to establish itself as

a unique entity that closely resembles the dominant culture, rather than seeking to become a part of it. Typical Lorain, Ohio African American families, such as the home-owning MacTeers, prove to be more successful at mimicking the expectations presented in the Dick and Jane story, and establishing itself as the ideal, recognizable Other. In this instance, the African American families who succeed at imitating the dominant culture assume the position of dominance within the othered group. The Breedloves' inability to attain this goal causes them to be viewed as outsiders to the surrounding community.

Throughout the text, the MacTeers seem to closely mimic the idealized family as presented by the Dick and Jane readers, and their home possesses many similarities and differences to Dick and Jane's home. As the narrator, Claudia describes the MacTeer home as "old, cold, and green" (10). Here the color green reappears from the description of Dick and Jane's "green-and-white house" (3). The first description of the house is delivered through the eyes of Claudia at night (10). The presentation of the home through darkness illustrates the difference in racial identity between the MacTeers' and Dick and Jane. In other words, the MacTeers serve as the African American version of middle class life. The highlighting of the racial difference between the MacTeers and Dick and Jane, reiterates Bhabha's notion that through mimicry, the minority culture seeks to create a "reformed, recognizable Other," rather than deleting the barriers that separate them from the dominant culture" (n.p.). The narrator describes the house being lit at night by "a kerosene lamp [that] lights one large room, [while] [t]he others are braced in darkness, peopled by roaches and mice" (10). This image of limited light illustrates the fact that the MacTeers' economic and domestic situation has both positive and negative aspects. On the surface, the MacTeers appear to be an ideal model of the African American middle class; however, many negative aspects exist within the MacTeers' private domestic life. The MacTeer family structure follows the model of the nuclear family as depicted by the Dick and Jane primer, with the only difference being that the MacTeers have two daughters instead of a son and a daughter. Although the families are similar structurally, the atmosphere differs greatly. For instance, Mrs. MacTeer greatly contrasts with Dick and Jane's mother, whom the primer describes as "very nice" (3). Claudia's experiences with her mother characterize Mrs. MacTeer as being very cold and uncompassionate. When Claudia suffers an illness shortly before Pecola's arrival, her mother subjects her to verbal abuse rather than comfort. Claudia and her sister Frieda also experi-

ence violence at the hands of their mother through her administration of corporal punishment. Furthermore, the MacTeers' ownership of their home suggests that they are economically privileged. They own a home with enough rooms to be able to rent out a space to Mr. Henry, whom the family proudly refers to as "our roomer" (12). Although the ability to rent out a room suggests economic wealth within the family, the MacTeer girls' sharing of a room hints at a lack of space within the home. In discussing Mr. Henry's arrival with her friends, Mrs. MacTeer reveals that the "five dollars every two weeks" that he will pay in order to rent the room will be a "big help" (15). This conversation illustrates the MacTeers' straddling of the line between economic wealth and poverty. The MacTeers, and the other accepted African American families within the text, exist in the liminal space between the extremes of the Dick and Jane model and the Breedlove family. Despite the obvious differences between the lifestyle of the MacTeers and Dick and Jane, the family is not subjected to the same judgment that the Breedloves endure.

The use of sections of the Dick and Jane primer as headings of chapters detailing the lives and surroundings of the Breedloves highlights the scapegoating and racialization of the family. Although none of the homes described in the text matches up with the image of the ideal domestic space presented by the Dick and Jane readers, it is only the Breedlove family that is directly compared to the story. The chapter describing the family's home begins with this section from the Dick and Jane primer:

HERE IS THE HOUSE IT IS GREEN AND WHITE IT-  
HAS A RED DOOR IT IS VERY PRETTY IT IS VERY PRET-  
TY PRETTY PRETTY (33).

Descriptions of other homes within the text fail to match this description; however it is only the Breedloves whom the text directly compares to the white Dick and Jane through the placement of text from the primer. Although the standards presented by the Dick and Jane story and the dominant culture exist within the lives of other African Americans in *The Bluest Eye*, only the chapters directly pertaining to the Breedlove family feature the use of the primer as a heading. This section of the primer situates itself on the page in all caps directly above the section detailing the Breedloves' residence in an "abandoned store on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio" (33). The narrator describes the area in which the storefront is located as having a "fluid population." At one time the building housed an Ital-

ian pizza parlor, a Hungarian bakery, and a gypsy “base of operations.” It was later transformed into a “living quarters” by a “first-generation Greek landlord” (34). Each of the building’s inhabitants represents a racial category that does not fit neatly into the assigned spaces of the racially segregated town. The Breedloves’ residence within this space of racial otherness reiterates their status as outsiders to the Midwestern community. Their placement in this abandoned space greatly contrasts the image of the “green-and-white house” in which Dick and Jane reside (3). The narrator describes the family as “fester[ing] together in the debris of a realtor’s whim” (34). This imagery locates the family in a state of decay and ruin. The Breedloves suffer many traumas within this space, such as the fire that places them “outdoors” (17), the physical violence between Pauline and Cholly, and Pecola’s rape. The trauma experienced within this space, deconstructs the characterization of the home as a place of happiness as it is portrayed in the Dick and Jane story. The family is further described as “making no stir in the neighborhood, no sound in the labor force, and no wave in the mayor’s office” (34). The family’s inactivity within the community isolates them and causes their otherness amongst members of their own racial identity.

The description of the Breedlove’s dwelling place suggests that the bond amongst the members of the family is purely physical; the narrator describes the family as existing within a “patchwork quilt of reality” (35). They are only bonded through their dwelling within this space and through their biological relations. The descriptions of the furniture further demonstrate this fact. The furnishings are described as having “aged without ever having become familiar,” and although the family experiences shared trauma within this space, the narrator states that “there were no memories among those pieces” (35). Each individual member of the Breedlove family serves as only a piece of their physical existence. The lack of emotional connection amongst the members of the Breedlove family further illustrates the physicality of their relationship. The only experiences the family shares are those of a physical nature. According to the narrator, “the only living thing in the Breedloves’ house was the coal stove” (37). This source of artificial heat serves as the source of the separation amongst the members of the family. The coal stove ignites the fire that initially displaces the Breedloves and also appears as the catalyst of the major physical altercation between Pauline and Cholly.

Due to the fact that the Breedlove family’s home fails to match up with the definition of a home as defined by the Dick and Jane readers, the Breedloves are considered permanently “outdoors.” After the fire in

the storefront temporarily displaces the Breedloves', the MacTeers take Pecola in as a "case," and she lives with them until the Breedlove family can be reunited (16). Upon learning about Pecola's impending arrival Claudia and Frieda learn about the terror of displacement. Claudia explains, "Outdoors, we knew, was the real terror of life" (17). As understood by Claudia and Frieda, Pecola and her family endure the ultimate trauma. Claudia goes on to explain that "to put oneself outdoors . . . was criminal." As the source of the fire in the Breedlove home, the community places the blame for the family's displacement on Pecola's father, Cholly. The MacTeer girls understand displacement as a permanent state, and according to Claudia, "if you are outdoors, there is no place to go." Although Pecola lives with the MacTeers during this time, the temporary placement is not her home. However, as Catherine Leen points out, "the social hierarchies the community rigidly imposes on itself, which deem homelessness to be the worst possible indicator of dysfunction, doom Pecola from the outset" (107). Pecola's experience with the permanence of outdoors leaves her with the inability to ever escape this label and social status. The fear of outdoors instills in many members of the community, "a hunger for property [and] ownership" (18). As a family that owns and rents out rooms in their home, the MacTeers signify the class separation within the African American community.

The overwhelming amount of symbols of white beauty surrounding the community encourages the perception of African American features as ugly. The Breedloves are described as wearing an "ugliness [that] . . . did not belong to them" (38). The text emphasizes the fact that this "ugliness" does not belong solely to the Breedloves, but to the African American community as a whole. The narrator explains that the Breedloves "saw . . . support for [their ugliness] leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance" (39). Although the text implicates only the Breedloves with this statement, this proof of supposed ugliness burdens the entire African American community. However, only the Breedlove family, more particularly Pecola, suffers for this ugliness. The use of the word "black" as an insult appears on many occasions in the text by other African Americans. The use of "black" as an insult appears when a group of boys circle Pecola after school and taunt her with a chant: "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo . . ." (65). As the narrator Claudia goes on to explain: "That they themselves were black . . . was irrelevant" (65). As the narrator of this section Claudia explains the use of "black" as an insult: "It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave

the first insult its teeth” (65). Here, the young boys inflict the sense of racial inferiority that the community as a whole suffers from onto Pecola. Pecola’s position as a scapegoat frees the boys from having to suffer for their blackness, with the only stipulation being that they punish Pecola for the blackness that they collectively share. As the arbitrary victim, Pecola serves as a “sacrifice to the flaming pit” (65). Another key figure in this scene, Maureen Peal, serves as a sign for the internalized racism that plagues the Lorain, Ohio African American community, and leads to the ultimate scapegoating of Pecola. Claudia describes Maureen as a “high-yellow dream child” (62):

She enchanted the entire school....Black boys didn’t trip her in the halls; white boys didn’t stone her, white girls didn’t suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls’ toilet. (62)

The descriptions of Maureen as “cute” reinforce the association of African American features as “ugly.” It is the closeness of Maureen’s physical features to whiteness that earns her this label. Unlike Pecola, Maureen exists within a space that transcends the strict racial boundaries of the Ohio town. Her ability to escape racialization and ridicule from all member of the spectrum stems from her closeness to whiteness. Pecola also endures the use of the word “black” as an insult when she visits the home of Junior, a young boy whom she meets at a local playground. Pecola goes with him to his home after he invites her over to play with his kittens (88-89). Pecola describes the house as “beautiful” with “lace doilies . . . everywhere” (89). The image of lace reiterates the presence of whiteness within an African-American space. As Pecola admires the home, Junior throws “a big black cat right in her face” (89). After the cat scratches Pecola’s face, she pets it. Angered by the affection that the cat goes on to show Pecola, Junior throws the cat into a radiator, and it dies. Upon the arrival of Junior’s mother, Geraldine, he accuses Pecola of killing the cat. This accusation leads Geraldine to view Pecola with a sense of contempt:

[She] [s]aw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out on her head, hair matted where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks. . . . She had seen this little girl all of her life. (91)

Geraldine recognizes Pecola as the image of blackness that many within the community seek to escape from. Geraldine orders Pecola to leave, calling her a “nasty little black bitch” (91-92). In this scene, Pecola serves as both the scapegoat for blackness as well as for a crime she did not commit. This fact calls further attention to the position of the family as the scapegoats of the community.

While the entire Breedlove family serves as the scapegoat for the community, Pecola serves as the scapegoat within her family. Out of all of the members of this isolated family, Pecola suffers the most blame and trauma. In many instances throughout the text, such as in the case of the death of Geraldine’s cat, Pecola endures the entire punishment for acts that were either shared, or that she took no part in. The scene in which Frieda and Claudia visit Pecola at the Fishers’ home, Mrs. Breedlove’s place of employment, illustrates this fact. Pauline instructs the girls to wait with Pecola in the kitchen, and while inside, the girls spot a “deep-dish berry cobbler” (108). Excited by the sight of the “purple juice bursting here and there through [the] crust,” the girls decide to move closer (108). The girls’ admiration of the pie ends with Pecola touching the hot dish, causing it to “fall to the floor, splattering blackish blueberries everywhere” (108). Not only does the pie burn Pecola’s legs, but Mrs. Breedlove enacts a violent punishment upon her:

In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola and Frieda and [Claudia] by implication (109).

Although all three girls were within close proximity to the pie, only Pecola is directly punished, by both Mrs. Breedlove and the pie itself. The fact that the pie that burns Pecola’s legs contains “blackish blueberries” signifies the punishment that she faces at the hands of other African Americans. The punishment she endures at the hands of her mother highlights the scapegoating of Pecola and her family as a whole. Mrs. Breedlove’s verbal scolding indirectly implicates Claudia and Frieda, although she directs her anger at Pecola. In this moment, Pauline displaces the scapegoating that she endures at the hands of the surrounding community onto her daughter. This situation simulates the use of verbal insults that refer to the African American community as a whole, to insult only one person.

The constant scapegoating of Pecola within the Breedlove family, and of the Breedlove family within the African American community as a whole leads to Pecola's ultimate trauma—the sexual assault she endures at the hands of her father. Cholly's attack on Pecola stems from a hatred for her that "slimed in his stomach and threatened to become vomit" (162). Cholly develops this hatred towards his daughter from his perceived inability to improve her life. After Pecola performs a gesture—scratching one of her legs with the opposite foot—that triggers within Cholly a memory of her mother, Cholly acts upon Pecola's body as if she is her mother. Pecola's suffering of this attack in the place of her mother serves as the ultimate instance of the sacrifice of her body. After enduring this punishment on behalf of her mother, Pecola is then punished by her mother for her father's actions. Pauline blames Pecola for the rape and subsequent pregnancy and physically abuses her (189). The scapegoating and punishment that Pecola endures lead to her ultimate isolation. By the novel's end, Pecola suffers from insanity which causes her to believe that she possesses "the bluest eyes" (204). Claudia describes her as "spen[ding] her . . . days, walking up and down . . . [with] her head jerking to the beat of a drummer so distant only she could hear" (204). Although Pecola's fate seems tragic, her "madness" finally frees her from her scapegoating by the Lorain, Ohio community. As Claudia explains, Pecola's "madness . . . protected her from [them] simply because it bored [them] in the end" (205). Although Pecola remains in Lorain physically, her mental absence leaves the community without its prime scapegoat. Pecola's absence changes the structure of the community. By the novel's end, Claudia reiterates the lack of marigolds that grew in the fall of 1941. As Lisa A. Long points out, "Pecola symbolically nourishes the rest of the community, though she does so in a particular way; she is the 'other' against which others define themselves" (114). Pecola's absence leaves the community unable to thrive in both physical and emotional terms.

The scapegoating of the Breedlove family, and particularly Pecola, illustrates the ways in which the societal oppression of the dominant culture does not end at the boundary that separates it from marginalized groups. Through imitation and mimicry, the African American community utilizes the expectations and values that oppress it to oppress a small section of its own members. Through its scapegoating by the Lorain, Ohio African American community, the Breedlove family endures the oppression of the community as a whole.

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## “She called in her soul to come and see”: Woman Empowered

Caitlyn Pittman



Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* depicts the main character Janie's journey from girlhood into womanhood. The novel opens with the importance of dreams, and how a woman, especially Janie Crawford, holds a dream as truth above every rational thought: "Now women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is truth. Then they act and do things accordingly" (Hurston 1). Janie epitomizes this sentence every time something tragic happens within her life. Janie got married to Logan Killicks, a man who made her work and kept her away from society. Despite this Janie holds on to the dream that she will one day have the marriage she wants. This dream is depicted by her sexual awakening experience under the pear tree. Throughout the novel there are moments where it seems as if Janie believes that she can converse with nature and that she hears nature talking amongst itself; in fact the novel should be read with an ecofeminist critical lens. "Ecofeminism is the joining of environmental, feminist, and women's spirituality concerns" (Spretnak). Throughout *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston utilizes several elements of nature and animals in order to help define and empower Janie Crawford as a woman and guide her through a sexual awakening.

Janie's first encounter of sexual awakening happens under a pear tree. The text introduces the image of the pear tree very early on in Janie's journey of womanhood to lay the foundation of Janie's beliefs towards marriage and relationships:

It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren brown stems to glistening leaf buds; from the leaf buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously. How? Why?... She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid. (Hurston 10-11)

Janie was attracted to the scene beneath the pear tree because it represented an attraction that she had never experienced before. By watching the bees Janie's body reacted in a sexual manner and helped her understand what sexual pleasure looked and felt like. Janie observed the bee taking from the bloom as well as the bloom "arch to meet the love embrace" and give back to the bee(11). This experience becomes the ultimate symbol to Janie of what a relationship should be, an effortless union between two individuals. Rachel Stein in her article, "Remembering the Sacred Tree: Black Women, Nature, and Voodoo in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," brings up that Hurston was on a trip to Haiti when she wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and believes that the immersion into the Haitian culture heavily inspired her work. For example Stein exults, "Within the pear tree, Hurston has embalmed the transgressive possibilities of the sacred voodoo tree,..., which defies colonial suppression and revalues black women's association with nature" (Stein). Stein's quote alludes to the tree's empowerment of Janie, and through the connection to this tree Janie has very high expectations for her marriages.

Janie continuously compares her marriages and relationships to her experience underneath the pear tree. Janie's first marriage to Logan Killicks leads to incredible disappointment because he expects her to clean and help him on the small property they live on. Believing this marriage to not add up to the ideal of marriage she had in her head after her experience beneath the pear tree, Janie returns to Nanny with tears in her eyes: "Ah wants things sweet aid mah marriage, lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (Hurston 24). Her relationship with

Logan Killicks does not bring up the imagery of the pear tree, with its sweet feelings, and does not insight any sexual awakening within Janie. Instead Janie's marriage to Logan Killicks leads to disappointment because of its contractual nature. Janie's unhappiness with Logan Killicks leaves her vulnerable to the charms of Joe Starks. Although he does not represent the "sun up and pollen and blooming trees", Joe offered Janie the opportunity for a new life of luxury, something Janie mistakes for a real marriage(12). Although marrying Joe presents Janie with a life of luxury, it also means the loss of Janie's freedom and voice; she was expected to be just a pretty face by her husband's side. Maria Racine believes that the character of Janie's men often reflect Janie's own development: "Throughout the course of the novel, the evolution of the male voices seems to parallel with the evolution with Janie's; Increasingly, Janie's men have voices, and her voice develops as her relationships improve"(Racine). Janie realizes that, "the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another...took the bloom off of things"(Hurston 46). Janie became disillusioned and discouraged about her marriage. Janie is taken back to her time under the pear tree where she saw the giving and taking of the bee to the blossom, and believes that Joe represents this for her; actually, any man that comes her way Janie believes could be the fulfillment of her dream beneath the pear tree. As soon as Joe begins to treat Janie in a way which is obviously not a giving and taking relationship, she has an epiphany, "the bloom has been taken off of things". When Joe came to Janie on her farm with Logan he presented her a life full of "giving and taking" which she saw under the pear tree. However, by the end of their marriage Joe began to be more representative of Matt Bonner's mule, useless and void of any more power. "She had no more blossomy opening dusting pollen over her man, neither any glistening young fruit where his petals used to be"(Hurston 46). Although Janie is drawn in by the finesse that Joe presents her, she soon realizes this is not the type of marriage she was looking for. The disadvantage of marrying a man so much older than her is the fact that she would not be fulfilled in the way the blooms of the pear tree were. After her husband's death, Janie met Tea Cake, who she believes is the fulfillment of her idea of a marriage. "He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps"(106). Unlike Janie's vision of bees and blossoms, Janie's life with Logan and Joe had turned into mules and hard labor, just as her Nanny had imagined for her.

Hurston utilizes the mule to develop Janie's identity as a woman and a human being. Early in the novel, Janie's Nanny explains, "Honey de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able to find out...so de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule of de world so fur as Ah can see"(Hurston 29). Nanny exploits this idea in order to teach Janie that life is not meant to be a fairy tale, but rather she is supposed to lay down and carry whatever burden her husband bestows upon her. Nanny, in her own way, wants what is best for Janie, yet she also wants Janie to realize what her truth is as a black woman. She wants Janie to realize that she should expect to not be treated with respect or even as a human being. However, even though Nanny knows this truth and longs for the protection of Janie when she dies, she married Janie off to Logan Killicks so that Janie would have stability in life. Logan Killicks, an older man, who at the beginning of his and Janie's marriage seems to do everything for Janie; however he then begins to expect Janie to do manual labor. "Ah aims tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah'm talkin' 'bout is hot uh mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im."(26). Even though Logan does not call Janie a mule like Nanny did, he says that a mule would have to be gentled up for her to be able to handle it, and like the mule, he expected her to do hard labor. Joe Starks first sentence uttered to Janie: "You behind a plow! You ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is hot wid uh holiday!" set the tone for their entire relationship(28). Within this line Joe Starks reveals a hope for the life that Janie wished she had. Joe acts like he wants her to be held up on a pedestal, which he did, but only for status. In Eatonville, where Janie is expected to "sit on de front porch and rock and fan," Janie is again disappointed. Rachel Stein again relates the image of the mule to Hurston's time in Haiti saying, "...the mule image that Nanny uses to describe black women's lowly position within American society echoes the negative Caribbean identification with donkeys"(Stein). Hurston must have observed the negativity towards women in the Caribbean and thought about how she could work that into her novel. Hurston integrated the prejudice of the Caribbean into Eatonville, although this prejudice was within a community and directed primarily towards women, instead of the whole community. Joe Starks pontificated, "somebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don't think none themselves"(67). Joe Starks believe women and "chillun" to be the same as "chickens and cows", or any animal for that matter,

especially Janie. Joe believes that he has the ultimate control over women and “chillun” and “chickens and cows”, so much so that he buys a mule to prove he can tame it better than another man. Matt Bonner, who the town ridicules for his inadequacy at being able to control his stubborn mule, which the towns people also taunt and tease is a parallel to Janie’s life with Joe Starks. Hurston utilizes Matt Bonner’s mule as a parallel to Janie’s own struggles in discovering her true identity and voice: “Didn’t buy ‘im fuh no work. I god, Ah bought dat varmint tuh let ‘im rest. You didn’t have gumption enough tuh do it.” (54). Joe buys the mule so it can rest, but similar to his marriage with Janie he bought the mule so he could exhibit his power and to make himself look like the better man for being able to have that sort of power. Joe says “I god” to voice indignation but to place himself above Janie in stature. Janie expresses empathy for the mule because she knows what it is like to want to be free from control and an owner, and for Janie to be entrapped by her own gender as the mule is entrapped by his owner. When Joe dies the references to mules end, because Joe’s reign over Janie ends. Janie is free to do as she pleases. Janie is free of her “load,” and is no longer to bear what her man puts on her to bear. Janie is finally able to escape her Nanny’s haunting words and realize her true power as a woman and human being who has a newfound voice.

Other than the natural symbols of pear trees and animals, the novel uses horizons to express that Janie’s hopes and dreams are never too far away. The horizon represents a better life, the possibility of change and perhaps improvement. The horizon is introduced to the reader in the opening paragraph, “Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For other’s they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men”(Hurston 1). Janie’s dreams remain on the horizon for most of her life. Nanny often put the idea of a horizon on Janie as her load to carry. For Nanny, Janie represents a chance for their family to move past slavery and oppression; Janie could make something of herself. Although Nanny had good intentions, Janie is overwhelmed by the pressure that Nanny put on her. Janie is overwhelmed by the vastness of the horizon, and how vast its possibilities are: “Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon—for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you—and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it around her granddaughter’s neck and choke her”(Hurston 89). For a while Joe Starks represented a new

horizon for Janie. Being a marriage that she was unhappy with and new was going nowhere, Janie was intrigued by Joe Starks' big talk of a "far horizon." However, Janie takes careful note that she knows he is not the pollinating bee that she had always hoped for. Hurston narrates that: "Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent the sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance." (Hurston 28). Janie realized initially that Joe is no bee, but Janie longs for talk of a "far horizon", anything that could get her far away from Logan, and closer to her "bee for her bloom," and she vowed that, "from now until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything" (Hurston 31). After Joe dies, it seems like Janie might finally find her bee in the form of Tea Cake. Janie thinks to herself when she first met Tea Cake: "He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom----a pear tree blossom in the spring" (Hurston 101). Tea Cake is the "bee to her bloom", what Janie is in constant search of throughout the novel.

Upon meeting Tea Cake Janie immediately relates him to the image of the bee that she had been longing for many years. In Janie's time with Tea Cake he often does prove to be her bee and expunges Nanny's idea of marriage and what it is and should be thought of to be. "Once upon uh time, Ah never 'spected nothin', Tea Cake, but bein' dead from standin' still and tryin' tuh laugh. But you come 'long and made somethin' outa me. So Ah'm thankful fuh anything we come through together." (158). In her declaration of love to Tea Cake, Janie lets Tea Cake know that in her other marriages she was basically dead and had no hope, but he had brought her horizons that her previous husbands had not been able to do. In her other marriages she was nothing, unfulfilled, but with him she was somebody and fulfilled. With Tea Cake Janie finally found her bee and the new horizons that she had always hoped for. However, Janie and Tea Cakes "blossoming" love was not meant to last, and would be destroyed by nature.

Hurston utilizes the volatile and impersonal hurricane to exemplify the destructive power found in nature within the novel. Janie, Tea Cake, and their friends can only look on in terror as the hurricane destroys the structure of their lives and leaves them to rebuild their lives through the destruction. "The wind came back with triple fury and put out the light for the last time. They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against crude walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God" (Hurston 151). Being faced

with the destructive nature of the hurricane, Janie, Tea Cake, and their friends are humbled by the power of nature and ultimately the power of God. A pivotal event in the novel, the hurricane marks an abrupt transition from Janie's idyllic life with Tea Cake. Janie finally understands what she was looking for in a marriage, yet her revelation is ill-timed.

In a little wind-lull, Tea Cake touched Janie and said, "Ah reckon you wish now you had of stayed in yo' big house 'way from such as dis, don't yuh?" "Naw." "Naw?" "Yeah, naw. People don't die till dey time come nohow, don't keer where you at. Ah'm wid mah husband in uh storm, dat's all." (Hurston 153)

In Janie's life with Joe or Logan she never realized that she had free will, however through the hurricane's destructiveness she realizes that she has had free will her whole life and is completely satisfied with the choices she has made. Janie's choices to marry Logan and Joe only helped her gain the strength and knowledge she needed to love Tea Cake and realize that he was her bee. Literary theorist, Missy Kubitscheke states that, "Janie twice leaves established social positions for a more adventurous life, descends into the underworld of the hurricane, faces a literal trial following Tea Cake's death, and returns to Eatonville with her hard won knowledge" (Kubitscheke). The storm represents a new transition in Janie's life. Janie found her bee, the hurricane brings his demise. Because of Janie's innate connection to nature in the beginning and her belief of her love being birthed from nature it would only be fitting if her love were also destroyed by nature. She believed she had found her "bee" in Tea Cake and new horizons, however nature has always found a way to intervene in Janie's life. After the storm strikes, events rush rapidly to Tea Cake's death and the novel's conclusion.

Hurston's utilization of nature and animals within her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* underscores the message of empowering Janie to be the woman she wanted to be: "...Janie does not see herself as the possible agent of ecstasy she has witnessed, but rather as a fairytale or modern romance heroine, [looking and waiting] for her prince—or in this case her bee—to come" (Kaplan). Janie mistakenly believes that simply entering a marriage will help her find her bee at first, however she soon realizes that it was up to her to find her true self before having a successful marriage. Janie found the unity between nature and herself she had always longed for through her marriage to Tea Cake. It was the unity of marriage with Tea Cake that helped her realize as long as she

was whole and realized that his soul would not die. "Of Course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had stopped feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it up from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see"(184). This closing line of the novel affirms that Janie had finally found her dream and horizon she was always searching for. However, before Tea Cake Janie believed that a man had to give her the horizon. It was her unity with Tea Cake which made her realize that she had ownership over herself and the natural elements which surrounded her. Janie through her unity with nature had finally found empowerment.

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# “I now walk into the wild”—misguided and misunderstood: An Ecocritical Study of Jon Krakauer’s Novel *Into the Wild*

Gail McClain



*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life... [.]<sup>1</sup>*

The language, the imagery—every aspect of this quote from Thoreau’s nature narrative, *Walden*, entices nature enthusiasts to explore the wild beast within. Thoreau’s selection of the word “deliberately” means to live in the wilderness consciously not by accident or by habit but by choice. Only desiring to experience an unembellished lifestyle, Thoreau proposes that the “essential facts of life” are the bare, material necessities of existence, such as food and shelter. Thoreau entices readers to question the value of their inner fulfillment. In essence, Thoreau forces us to contemplate the value of existence if the chosen path is not independently and thoughtfully conceived. In Peter Weir’s film *Dead Poets Society*, Professor John Keating, played by Robin Williams, suggests that, “Sucking the marrow out of life doesn’t mean choking on the bone.” This idealization of existence is expressed in Jon Krakauer’s national bestseller, *Into the Wild*, a true story of a boy by the name of Christopher Johnson McCandless who lived the last years of his life “deliberately”—as suggested by Thoreau.

Denouncing his average lifestyle for a custom that pushed the very existence of his being, in April 1992, McCandless began his great Alaskan odyssey with nothing but a ten pound bag of rice, a small .22 rifle, a tattered state road map, and the clothes on his back. Trekking through the frozen Alaskan bush, McCandless stumbled upon an old abandoned bus—bus 142—where McCandless spent the last 113 days of his life. Due to lack of preparation McCandless, unfortunately, died a slow, painful death in the unmerciful and unforgiving Alaskan wilderness. Why would a well-educated, likeable boy such as McCandless leave his comfortable existence for one that would ultimately kill him? Critics of McCandless condemn him for his lack of preparation to survive in the Alaskan wilderness; however the question about a human's complicated decision-making with regards to a hostile natural environment suggests that critics—and admirers alike—must use an ecocritical lens in answering why McCandless chose to embark on his great Alaskan odyssey. More specifically, critics and admirers should query how nature might have been represented to McCandless and affected his perception? Jim Gallien, the last man to see McCandless alive, states that publications, such as *Alaska* magazine, misrepresent nature by only illuminating the beauties of nature while neglecting to inform readers of the harshness of the wilderness. Similarly, nature writers such as Henry David Thoreau, Jack London, and Leo Tolstoy entice readers to engage with nature in its most pure, unadulterated form. These deep influences paired with what Krakauer calls “youthful desire” invited McCandless to experience nature in a way that was not truly representative of nature but an idealized version. In Greg Garrard's book *Ecocriticism: the New Critical Idiom*, he points out that: “[Wilderness] holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth, a post-Christian covenant, found in a space of purity, founded in an attitude of reverence and humility” (66). Media and nature writings seek to illuminate the idea that one can have an authentic, pure relationship with nature, but they neglect to mention the unforgiving side of nature, how one simple mistake can ultimately kill an unsuspecting explorer. Krakauer believes that what drove McCandless to the wilderness was a combination of glorified nature writings, misrepresentations of nature throughout multiple forms of literature, and youthful desire to push one's self to the limits. Much criticism surrounds the story of McCandless's death; some say he was foolish and died because of his own stupidity, but these critics neglect to examine the full extent of why McCandless was so ill prepared on his great Alaskan odyssey. Studying Jon Krakauer's novel *Into the Wild*,

in terms of representations of nature encourages a new exciting way to revise the study of nature writing, which is often undervalued: “[...] nature writing, which enjoys considerable popularity in the USA, has tended to be downgraded by academic prejudices favoring fiction over non-fiction, and human dramas over narratives of interaction of humanity and nature” (Garrard 58). Despite Garrard’s claim, human drama, in fact, does exist in nature writings such as Krakauer’s *Into the Wild*. In essence, influences from multiple forms of literature such as media, fictional writing, and scientific works misguided Chris McCandless along his great Alaskan odyssey, inevitably leading to his avoidable death.

To truly understand why McCandless chose to embark on an Alaskan odyssey, one must ask the question: What was so incredibly enticing about *Alaska* to McCandless? McCandless felt strongly about discovering the wilderness of Alaska, and no other wilderness would meet his desires the way that Alaska would. Alaska is known as the “Last Frontier” because it offers natives and visitors some of the last uncivilized, wild regions in America. In an interview quoted in Jon Krakauer’s novel *Into the Wild*, Jim Gallien, the last person to see McCandless alive, states most clearly what drew McCandless, and many others like him, to Alaska:

People from the Outside, they’ll pick up a copy of *Alaska* magazine, thumb through it, get to thinkin’ ‘Hey, I’m goin’ to get on up there, live off the land, go claim me a piece of the good life’. But when they get here and actually head out into the bush—well, it isn’t like the magazines make it out to be. The rivers are big and fast. The mosquitoes eat you alive. Most places, there aren’t a lot of animals to hunt. Livin’ in the bush isn’t no picnic. (4-5)

Gallien means that any uninformed individual can glance at *Alaska* magazine and underestimate the harshness of the landscape, not through his own fault but because nature magazines misrepresent the Alaskan landscape. To visualize Gallien’s argument, one must also examine a cover of *Alaska* magazine (see Appendix I) to witness how the magazine only represents the part of nature that appeals to the audience as a place that nature enthusiasts can carelessly visit. In fact, the cover of *Alaska* magazine in April of 1992, the month and year that McCandless exited Gallien’s truck into the frozen Alaskan wilderness, portrays a young man standing in a river, with a beautiful frozen mountaintop covering the entire background of the image. The image of the young man shows

him in a simple pair of wading boots, light fishing gear, and a huge smile on his face. This image forces viewers to admire the beautiful backdrop and the portrayal of an easy going day casually fishing in the Alaskan wilderness. Gallien finds this problematic because what the magazine does not show to viewers is that in April the rivers and ground are still frozen over by the winter freeze, which then thaw out by early June—just as McCandless experienced when he crossed over the frozen Teklanika river in April 1992. Viewers of the magazine cover cannot physically feel the bone freezing temperature that Alaska offers during April. In his novel, Krakauer illuminates that McCandless wore a “fake fur-parka” (162) venturing into the Alaskan wilderness. As a result, this sparks the question: how has media affected the way McCandless interprets the wilderness? The fake fur-parka implies that McCandless, in his naïve youth, mimics what he thinks surviving in the wilderness consists of, such as ideas presented on the cover of *Alaska* magazine in April 1992. Undeveloped photos were recovered from the site of McCandless’s death which were later developed. One of the recovered images of McCandless (See Appendix II) photographs him wearing simple wading boots and carrying light fishing gear and portraying a huge smile, while standing in front of a breathtaking icy mountain backdrop. The picture of McCandless is almost irrefutably identical to that of the cover of *Alaska* Magazine in April 1992. Neglected by media’s portrayal of nature, a boy with little experience and an idealized vision of the Alaskan wilderness could not possibly understand the extent of surviving a *true* Alaskan experience.

Krakauer studied McCandless extensively in order to write *Into the Wild*, and through his studies he found that McCandless carried very little survival gear and food. Along with harsh temperatures, like Gallien states, the food supply is extremely scarce in Alaska, especially since the larger game move in herds and can be easily missed. Gallien, an experienced Alaskan hunter and woodsman, highlights that McCandless most certainly did not have the necessary supplies to survive the unforgiving Alaskan landscape: “Alex’s backpack looked as though it weighed only twenty-five pounds or thirty pounds. He wasn’t carrying anywhere near as much food and gear as you’d expect a guy to be carrying for that kind of trip” (Krakauer 4). McCandless was unprepared for his great Alaskan odyssey, not because he was uneducated—in fact, before his final departure, McCandless spent a significant amount of time educating himself about the wilderness; the issue with his studies is that many of the sources he relied on for motivation and survival misrepresented crucial facts concerning nature.

McCandless's lack of preparation inevitably leads critics to question: why did McCandless choose to strike out on his own into such a harsh environment so ill prepared? Media plays the biggest role in the interpretation of nature by glorifying the experience, while neglecting to inform the audience of the harshness of the wild. Because McCandless chose to "walk into the wild" (Krakauer 69) so unprepared, critics argue that McCandless was reckless, arrogant, and simply idiotic with his idealization of nature. McCandless lacked the necessary means to survive his Alaskan odyssey not because he was some irresponsible fool but because he internalized media's glorification of nature. As quoted in Krakauer's novel, *Into the Wild*, one critic states that "The kid didn't know what he was doing. [...] he wasn't no Alaskan. [...] the scope of his self-styled adventure was so small as to ring pathetic—squatting in a wrecked bus a few miles outside of Healy, potting jays and squirrels, mistaking a caribou for a moose (pretty hard to do)... Only one word for the guy: incompetent" (177). Firstly, the critic is right to refer to McCandless as a "kid" because his lack of knowledge and preparation to survive in the Alaskan bush reflects those of a child and, therefore, his actions should be viewed as those of a child. McCandless was not an Alaskan native; he had no true knowledge of the harshness of the terrain in Alaska, only that of what media highlights. Agreeably so, McCandless was "incompetent"—because McCandless did not have the necessary skills to survive in Alaska, but he did survive for 113 days in the Alaskan wilderness without the proper gear and know how—remarkable for an "incompetent kid." As for the claim that McCandless mistakenly identified a caribou for a moose, well, McCandless was correct in his identification of the large game. In Krakauer's novel *Into the Wild* the author goes into great detail explaining how it was the Alaskan natives that mistakenly identified the moose for a caribou; the proof of the irony that McCandless, an "incompetent kid," misidentified the animal lies within a self-taken photo of him with the *moose*—not a caribou.

For Krakauer, the explanation of why McCandless ventured into Alaska is simple: "engaging in risky behavior is a rite of passage in our culture no less than in most others. It can be argued that youthful derring-do is in fact evolutionarily adaptive, a behavior encoded in our genes, McCandless, in his fashion, merely took risk-taking to its logical extreme" (Krakauer 182). Agreeably so, McCandless had always been the type of person who found joy in pushing himself, a trait that was recognizable even from a very early age, says Andy Horowitz, a childhood friend: "[he] was born into the wrong century. He was looking for more

adventure and freedom than today's society gives people” (Krakauer 174). For McCandless, it was innate to break the norm, to go against the grain, and to ultimately push himself to the extreme, whether it was sneaking out of the house as a child—“At the age of two, he got up in the middle of the night, found his way outside without waking his parents, and entered a house down the street to plunder a neighbor's candy drawer” (Krakauer 106)—or pushing other teammates and himself to be better cross-country runners: “He was really into pushing himself,” explains Gordy Cucullu, a younger member of the team. “The whole idea was to lose our bearings, to push ourselves into unknown territory. In a certain sense that's how Chris lived his life” (Krakauer 112). The McCandless family took to the road every chance they got on weekends or when school was out; Walt, Chris McCandless's father states that “Chris loved those trips, the longer the better. There was always a little wanderlust in the family, and it was clear early on that Chris had inherited it” (Krakauer 108). McCandless's inherent love for nature can even be linked through genetics, from his grandfather, his mother's father: “The old man's backwoods savvy, his affinity for the wilderness, left a deep impression on the boy” (Krakauer 109). At a very similar age Krakauer (age 23) and McCandless (age 24) both had youthful desires to experience nature in its rawest, harshest form with no regard to death:

At that age of my youth, death remained as abstract a concept as non-Euclidean geometry or marriage. I didn't yet appreciate its terrible finality or the havoc it could wreak on those who'd entrusted the deceased with their hearts. I was stirred by the dark mystery of mortality. At the age of twenty-three, personal mortality—the idea of my own death—was still largely outside my conceptual grasp. (Krakauer 151, 155)

Krakauer's connection to his own experience in the wild helps readers to crystalize the idea that the need to experience nature as unadulterated as possible is not necessarily a disorder but a youthful desire that conspires within the spirit of both McCandless and Krakauer—and quite possibly many others. Even McCandless's parents were aware of his extreme nature, stating that: “He didn't think the odds applied to him. We were always trying to pull him back from the edge” (Krakauer 109). The youthful desire to live to the extreme is a trait that friends and family noticed in McCandless from a very early age and a trait that Krakauer justifies due to his own extreme experiences in nature.

Krakauer's novel, *Into the Wild*, delivers readers a first-person narration of his experience of the true harshness of nature. In his narrative, Krakauer does not aim to represent nature in a negative or positive light; he simply states the facts of his struggle to survive in the icy Alaskan mountains: "Early on a difficult climb, especially a difficult solo climb, you constantly feel the abyss pulling at your back. To resist takes a tremendous conscious effort; you don't dare let your guard down for an instant" (142). Media tends to manipulate the targeted audience to attract potential buyers for a specific product or idea. Therefore, if the particular goal of the given media source is to attract buyers to outdoor gear or traveling to, say, Alaska, then a story of a near death experience in nature will not entice buyers to purchase the product. Krakauer recounts his troubling, near death experience in the abandoned, unadulterated, uncivilized Alaskan wilderness, exactly the place that McCandless idealized: "If only I had a cigarette, I thought, a single cigarette, I could summon the strength of character to put a good face on this fucked-up situation, on the whole fucked-up trip. Beyond shame, I cradled my head in my arms and embarked on an orgy of self-pity" (151). Krakauer's "fucked up situation" is that he was unprepared for the treacherous terrain in the Alaskan mountains, and though he was able to achieve his goal to climb to the top of the Devil's Thumb, he struggled tremendously to survive the Alaskan experience. Krakauer's time spent in the Alaskan wilderness was not an enjoyable experience because, much like McCandless, he was ill-prepared. Even for a savvy nature enthusiast, such as Krakauer, the Alaskan wilderness became nearly impossible to survive. Krakauer's undesirable experience in the Alaskan wilderness is exactly the type of story media avoids highlighting, and therefore emphasizing such experiences would detour potential buyers. In essence, if more stories like Krakauer's were, in fact, portrayed throughout media, tragedies such as McCandless's could have been avoided, because McCandless would have not only had references of the positive aspects of nature but references of the true harshness of nature as well. Krakauer being the only reference of a true nature experience within *Into the Wild* highlights how multiple forms of literature misguided McCandless along his journey.

Unlike Krakauer, who gives an honest first-hand account of his wilderness experience, Jack London, one of McCandless's influences, romanticizes the nature experience. Through the placement of epigraphs in his novel *Into the Wild*, Krakauer allows readers to grasp the nature idealization that McCandless had internalized as he began his Alaskan odyssey. London was not a man who had experienced the nature stories he writes about but simply a man who romanticized the nature experi-

ence. The trouble with McCandless idealizing the writings of London is that London was not a man of integrity, ironically a trait that McCandless expected most from people. Krakauer's novel *Into the Wild* highlights a profound point concerning London that McCandless neglectfully overlooked: "London himself had spent just a single winter in the North and that he'd died by his own hand, a fatuous drunk, obese and pathetic, maintaining a sedentary existence that bore scant resemblance to the ideals he espoused in print" (44). London had no true experience in nature; therefore the only reputability that London could maintain was his "works of fiction, constructions of the imagination that had more to do with London's romantic sensibilities than with the actualities of life in the subarctic wilderness" (Krakauer 44). Despite London's lack of morality and despite London's lack of experience in the wilderness, McCandless chose to admire London and his nature writing, so much so that carved into a piece of wood discovered at the site of McCandless's death was the phrase "Jack London is King" (Krakauer 9). Through his nature writings, London had a way of captivating an audience:

A vast silence reigned over the land. The land itself was a desolation, lifeless, without movement, so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even that of sadness. There was a hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness—a laughter that was mirthless as the smile of a Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility. It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life. It was the Wild, the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild. (Krakauer 10)

By no surprise, McCandless became enamored by London's beautifully written nature writings. However, what London fails to include in his fictitious and misleading work is the brutal side of nature, the side that can kill an unsuspecting victim slowly and painfully. London was not a man who spent a remarkable amount of time living or experiencing nature; he simply put words on paper romanticizing the view of nature. Because McCandless fell victim to London's romanticization of nature, he died in the "the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild." London's enticing nature writings glorified the nature experience and entrapped McCandless's youthful desire to experience the rawness of nature.

London is not the only nature writer who deceives readers by enticing them to embark on a life that *seemingly* offers more value than their cur-

rent conventional existence; Leo Tolstoy, too, wrote about denouncing the average life for a more enticing one. Highlighted in one of the books found with McCandless is a brief passage by Tolstoy that insists one should divert away from the average lifestyle: "I wanted movement and not a calm course of existence. I wanted excitement and danger and the chance to sacrifice myself for my love. I felt in myself a super abundance of energy which found no outlet in our quiet life" (Krakauer 15). Paired with London's romanticization of nature and what Krakauer referred to as "youthful desire," it was inevitable that McCandless would end up somewhere in the Wild Northland living beyond the average, mundane, lifeless existence, but instead a life of excitement and meaning. McCandless never fit into conventional society, and therefore a passage such as this justifies his need to break-free from the monotony of ordinary existence. Much like London, Tolstoy romanticizes the human experience by pushing McCandless to harness that deep desire to *truly live* and not just exist.

Along with misrepresentations of nature throughout media and nature writings, scientific texts, such as the one McCandless relied on while in the Alaskan bush, misrepresent nature, as well. Jon Krakauer's passion for McCandless and the unanswered questions surrounding the death of McCandless recently yielded the true story of how McCandless died in the Alaskan bush. In 2007 Krakauer published an article in *The New Yorker* titled "How Chris McCandless Died." Krakauer's interest in McCandless's story sent him on a fifteen year quest to unearth the true reason why McCandless perished so suddenly while on his great Alaskan odyssey. From studying McCandless's journal entries and the edible plant book found with McCandless's decomposed body, Krakauer originally claimed in his novel *Into the Wild* that McCandless had accidentally mistaken the poisonous wild sweet pea seeds for a similar looking nonpoisonous seed known as wild potato. Because McCandless had specifically stated in his journal that he was "EXTREMELY WEAK. FAULT OF POT[ATO] SEED. MUCH TROUBLE JUST TO STAND UP. STARVING. GREAT JEOPARDY" (Krakauer 189), it was easy for Krakauer to attribute McCandless's death to unfortunate coincidence of mistaking the two similar looking plants. However, Krakauer's initial hypothesis of why McCandless died so suddenly contested McCandless's journal entry because no one seemed surer of McCandless's death more than McCandless himself. McCandless's journal entry pushed Krakauer to define the exact reason why a plant that botanists claim to be nonpoisonous suddenly made McCandless so deathly ill. Further research by Krakauer examines how the plant thought to be non-toxic is

in fact toxic, under certain circumstances. Krakauer's discoveries about McCandless's death are nothing less than astonishing:

To establish once and for all whether *Hedysarum alpinum* is toxic, last month I sent a hundred and fifty grams of freshly collected wild-potato seeds to Avomeen Analytical Services, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for H.P.L.C. analysis. Dr. Craig Larner, the chemist who conducted the test, determined that the seeds contained .394 per cent beta-ODAP by weight, a concentration well within the levels known to cause lathyrism in humans. (Krakauer, "How Chris McCandless Died")

According to Dr. Lambien, a Belgian scientist who coordinates the Cassava Cyanide Diseases and Neurolathyrism Network, "individuals suffering from malnutrition, stress, and acute hunger are especially sensitive to ODAP, and are thus highly susceptible to the incapacitating effects of lathyrism after ingesting the neurotoxin" (Krakauer, "How Chris McCandless Died"). McCandless was, in fact, living in the Alaskan bush under stressful and malnourished conditions, making him highly vulnerable to the toxin ODAP found in the wild potato plant. Yet, the edible plant book "Tanaina Plantlore / Dena'ina K'et'una: An Ethnobotany of the Dena'ina Indians of Southcentral Alaska," by Priscilla Russell Kari, which McCandless heavily relied on for survival while in the Alaskan bush, completely neglected to inform McCandless as to which plants were edible and which were not, inevitably leading to his unfortunate death. "Tanaina Plantlore" claims that the wild potato plant is edible and only warns readers and nature enthusiasts of the possibility of mistaking the nonpoisonous wild potato for the similar looking poisonous plant wild sweet pea. Nature, therefore, is misrepresented by publications which claim to be factual guides for the uses of plants as edible or non-edible.

If nature is so harsh as to take the life of such a likeable, enthusiastic, well-educated boy as McCandless, then why are so many people still venturing out to bus 142 on the same path that McCandless travelled over twenty years ago? In the article "The Chris McCandless Obsession Problem," Diana Saverin tells of how many people today have the same desire to experience nature in its most pure and rawest form—exactly as McCandless did many years ago. In the subtitle of her article she asks the daunting question: "Why are so many people willing to risk injury, and even death, to pay homage to a controversial ascetic who perished so young?" As mentioned previously, Krakauer describes the need to

explore nature as “youthful desire.” The article tells of countless stories of hikers who followed in the footsteps of McCandless on the Stampede trail leading to bus 142, some adventurers are successful but most are very unsuccessful in reaching bus 142. Despite McCandless’s death, nature enthusiasts are still drawn to the area:

The troopers told me that 75 percent of all of the rescues they perform in the area happen on the Stampede Trail. “Obviously, there’s something that draws these people out here,” one of the troopers, who asked not to be named, told me. “It’s some kind of internal thing within them that makes them go out to that bus. I don’t know what it is. I don’t understand. What would possess a person to follow in the tracks of someone who died because he was unprepared?” (Saverin)

Even though Saverin, the author of the above mentioned article, is aware of the endless dangers of the Teklanika river, she and her boyfriend decide they, too, have to experience the bus 142 fascinations: “We soon felt the story’s pull. I was 20, Jonathan was 22, and McCandless’s uninhibited adventures spoke to both of us.” Saverin recounts many stories of backpackers’ failed attempts to successfully cross or cross back over the Teklanika river. Despite the constant negativity surrounding McCandless’s story, the bus is full of inscriptions that applaud his courage and tell of how McCandless’s story significantly changed their outlook on life. One inscription, by an unknown author, found in bus 142 reads:

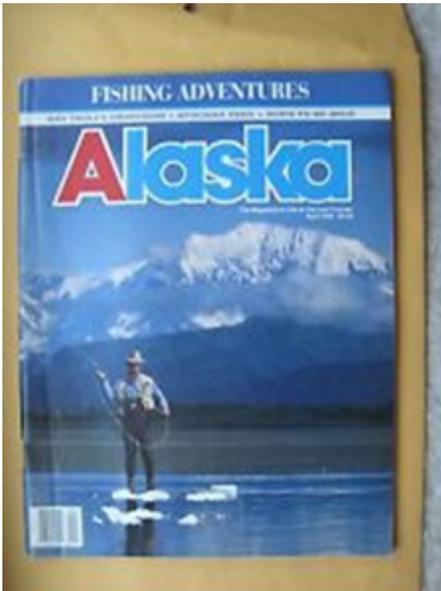
He was braver than I am. I think I live according to my own values, but I’m still in society. I still have a job, I still make money. I go to work ten months out of the year, and I play for the other two. I’m still in the box. I’m not strapped to it, but I’m still in it. And he had the courage to step away from it. (Saverin)

Many people have visited bus 142 over the years; some visitors admire McCandless’s bravery and some claim he was idiotic. But for this particular visitor of bus 142, the story of McCandless’s courage highlights the scripted lives people live, working day in and day out, not because they are forced to, but because it’s simple and less daunting than the alternative—the life of Christopher Johnson McCandless, living free of mundane, social constructions. The story of McCandless deeply impacts many people; whether the results are positive or negative depends on

their personal outlooks concerning nature. The most lingering legacy of McCandless's story is that in every aspect of why McCandless died so unfortunately leads questioners back to the issue that multiple forms of literature misrepresent nature.

In essence, McCandless's unfortunate story highlights the trouble with misrepresentations of nature throughout media, fictional writing, and scientific texts. Influences such as Thoreau, London, Tolstoy, and many other nature writers shape the way readers interpret nature and ultimately these conceptions of wilderness influence the reception of McCandless's story as well. In a brief interview with an anonymous man who visited bus 142 nearly twenty years after McCandless's death, he states that "The bus is where McCandless's journey ended and the rest of ours begins" (Saverin). McCandless's legacy goes beyond the ill-fated story of a boy who died too young. His story represents the issues with media, fictional nature writings, and misleading scientific texts and how these sources of literature misrepresent nature as less than the harsh environment that it truly is—and as it will always remain.

## Appendices



Appendix I



## Appendix II

### Note

1. The quoted passage in this epigraph is from Henry David Thoreau's narrative "Walden" on page 892 in *The Norton Anthology American Literature*.

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# Future





**“Ape Home. Human Home.”**  
**The Construction of a Habitable**  
**Environment in *Dawn of the***  
***Planet of the Apes***

Brandon Rummel



Former Governor of Washington and active proponent of nature preservation, Jay Inslee, once questioned, “What is a bird without a tree to nest in? What is a fish without a river?” (brainyquote.com). The answer to this question is that these specific environments define the animals that inhabit them. The animals’ existence depends upon the capacity of its environment to provide for and protect them. The *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, the sequel to the *Rise of the Planets of the Apes* movie, clearly conceptualizes the elements associated with a habitable environment. Furthermore, the movie juxtaposes two environments, the ape and the human communities, in order to show the individual assemblies of each post-apocalyptic society. The comparison of the two established communities in the film identifies the elements which are essential to the survival and the evolution of the two populations. These common elements vary somewhat between the two species of beings; however, the similarities that exist between them identify the key core essentials of physical existence.

One must initially understand the background of the formation of the ape and human communities. Apocalypse is the catalyst that separates the two species in the movie. The film opens with and describes an apocalyptic disease that kills hundreds of millions of people. How does the definition of an epidemic help one to understand its relationship to environment? According to the Center for Disease Control’s government website, investigators of a potential outbreak must develop a case definition which consists of, “the pathogen or toxin, symptoms, and the

geographic range such as residency in a state or region” (cdc.gov). The last part of the Center for Disease Control’s case definition is defining the geographic range or residency of the disease. In other words, even a disease needs an environment so that an investigator of epidemic diseases may identify it. In *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, the apocalyptic disease known as the Simian Flu affects the geographical region and the population of both the ape and human communities of the United States of America. However, the epidemic then spreads to the entire world. This sickness originates in the laboratories where humans practice animal testing on the apes. The epidemic is the causal agent responsible for the separation of the two species in the movie. The movie’s reason for the separation stays congruent with the original plot of the *Planet of the Apes* series, according to Eric Greene’s text *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race and Politics in the Films and Television Series*:

The *Apes* films are dystopian and apocalyptic. They are dystopian in that rather than offering a symbolic resolution of cultural tensions and fears, they magnify and extend those tensions to a fearsome conclusion. The [original] *Apes* films arose during a time of perceived crisis, or perhaps more precisely a time of perceived heightened crisis, and such conditions are fertile ground for apocalyptic responses. They are apocalyptic films in that they imagine a dramatic, definitive break with past and present social configurations and depict a radical reorganization of power dynamics (Greene 24)

Greene’s words further establish apocalypse as the element that catalyzes the separation of the species in all of the *Apes* movies. The statement also suggests that the apocalypse magnifies the tensions between the races. The separation forces both species to individually evaluate the power structure of the environment. In order to gain power in the post-apocalyptic space, both species must establish a community from which to operate and gain the necessary power to attempt to establish superiority over the opposing species. Steven B. Sloan further analyzes how the movies in general separate opposing species in the event of an apocalypse:

What imagined future horrors help us understand observable unhappiness in the present? Many stories of the future ask the same question: Is human nature the predominant force, the prime mover, that determines the human condition? And

in most stories, the answer is the same. Human nature may have determined the human condition in the past. But the man-made disasters of the past will convince the leaders of the future that the human propensity for self-destruction must be controlled. (Sloan 23).

Sloan furthers the notion about the catalyst nature of apocalypse by identifying humans as the main cause of it. His words also work to establish the fact that within a post-apocalyptic environment, a void exists in the spot of the dominant force. With regard to the story, the apes must now establish an environment that puts them in the position of control. Furthermore, the humans, according to Sloan, destroy themselves eventually. Sloan asserts that leaders of both races eventually come to this conclusion. In other words, the ways in which both species establish a habitable environment in the post-apocalyptic world determines how much agency each individual species has within that specific environment.

The first element of a habitable environment portrayed in the film is the need for subsistence. In other words, one needs food. A species needs to be able to have a sole source of food and nutrition. How does the species accomplish the task? It is a very multifaceted answer. Firstly, the species needs to have an opportunity to catch the animal that would be considered a natural, nutritional meal. Both the apes and the humans have their own specific way of accomplishing this first task. The primary scene of *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* opens up to a landscape in which the apes, which escape from an unnatural and scientific environment, hunt for a large species of deer. The scene shows a group of apes communicating with one another in order to signal when a potential kill is imminent. The apes arm themselves with sharpened wooden sticks, and they hunt in their natural habitat. Everything, with regard to food and substantiation, is available to them in their environment, unlike the human race. An interesting element of survival that incorporates itself into the scene is that of safety in numbers. One may analytically observe a scene in which a bear challenges two apes to a fight over a deer kill. The scene shows two apes that kill a stag, and the bear bursts out of the bushes in an animalistic rage in order to establish the challenge. The apes then use their communication in order to convene a group of murderous individuals with the sole purpose of killing the bear. How is it that these individual apes know to kill the bear? How does one explain the essential element of physical existence at play here? Raymon

Firth's *Elements of Social Organization* suggests that "the associational standard is applied to the way in which it affects social relations; partaking of food [and hunting for that matter] together may have a value for social co-operation" (Firth 43). In other words, the concept of food transcends the action of simply eating. The hunt and the partaking in the consumption by a group enhance group cohesiveness. The adversary, on the other hand, symbolizes a threat to the apes' source of food, and their feelings of happiness and safety in their own environment. As discussed later, the human civilization has many of the same needs which further establish the core essentials of a physical existence. In order for a species to gather and consume food, that particular species, regardless of which, must have an established order, a strategy for survival and subsistence, and a very effective leadership structure.

The next essential element, and perhaps the one with the most agency, is the establishment of a leader. After initial confrontations between humans and apes occur in the movie, both populations immediately show signs of discontent and anger toward their respective leaders for allowing the other species to know of their existence. The societies begin to become chaotic, and it appears as though an overthrow of an established order may be imminent. The actions of both species in the film establish the leader as a necessary element to a habitable environment because doing so ensure the survival and protection of the community. Firth's *Elements of Social Organization* also suggests, with regard to leaders, that "all community life involves methods of grouping and grading people for the effective carrying out of the various types of activity demanded by the common existence (41). Firth highlights the true vital quality of the leader in a small community. The fact that the establishment of the leader affects the way in which the community carries out its activities proves that the upper level hierarchy of all communities inherently has the agency needed in order to survive. The community must have a leader to both enforce the rules and bear the brunt of the backlash that comes from an unhappy population. Without leadership, the community will not survive. According to multimillionaire and *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today* bestselling author Kevin Kruse's *365 Daily Inspirational Quotes: Daily Motivation for Your Best Year Ever*, General George Patton stated that "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality" (Forbes.com). How does Patton's understanding of the capacity of leadership help one to understand the need for leadership in a primitive community? Caesar, the appropriately named leader of the apes, actually speaks to his fellow community members and says,

“Home, family, future” (21:13). The community recognizes the necessity of Caesar as a leader because he understands the importance of these three concepts and has the ability to communicate their meanings to the other apes. So, in order for a community to survive and prosper, its leader must have a vision of the future. There exists a problem in the human leadership structure, however. The fight for power between the two human leaders creates chaos, misunderstanding, and possible uprising of the human community. Because a struggle for power is the main human focus, the articulation of the future with regard to the human colony becomes blurred. The way in which the humans fail to establish one true leader, compared to the way in which the apes clearly succeed at the same task, proves the effectiveness of a well-constructed hierarchy within a small society. That being said, According to Firth’s *Elements*, “The social structure does not, then, merely impose limits on freedom of action; it offers positive advantages to the individual who conforms to its principles” (56). Firth’s words highlight the fact that the rules set forth by a diligent leader have a very tangible positive effect not only on the community, but also on the individual. In other words, Firth suggests the healthiness associated with having an established rule and order.

Another interesting element of survival that exists in both communities is that of transportation. The humans need their trucks and cars in order to travel to the woods to gather resources and food. The apes surprisingly use horses to travel. Only the privileged apes use the horses, however. The differences in types of transportation reveal the vast separation between the two communities. The human transportation is loud, obnoxious, potent, and damages the environment, which characterizes the basis of all human necessities. The apes, true to their natural form, use horses in order to transport themselves from one place to another. C. Daryll Forde’s *Habitat Economy and Society* clearly articulates the evolutionary story about the use of animals in a natural habitat:

The introduction of the horse did not basically change the culture of the western Plains, but it widened the range of activities, greatly increased success in hunting, and provided a wealth of food and leisure and a form of personal property which gives impetus to a wide range of modifications. (46)

Daryll’s assertion provides the viewer of the film with the fact that the apes use the horses in order to widen their possibilities with regard to hunting, gathering, and most of all, transportation. The apes use the wild

horse as their personal property; however, the introduction of the horse to their community allows them to open up their minds to contemplate other uses and ways to utilize their unique form of transportation. Interestingly, the humans must continue to feed their transportation with man made things in order to utilize them for their limited sole purpose whereas the horses feed off of nature and have the capacity to fulfill a wide range of essential tasks. The ape's transportation perpetuates the cycle of nature or the natural order of things. The manmade vehicles damage the air and destroy the soil and the plants when used.

Another very important core essential element of an established community is the need for weaponry for use in hunting and protecting. Guns level the playing field for an inferior race. In the movie, guns separate the apes and the humans from one another. While the apes do not have any need for the use of guns, the humans rely on the power of weaponry to feel safe in their community. The scenes in which humans wield firepower establish guns as dominant force of the human world. After the initial confrontation between apes and humans, the apes travel down the mountain upon which they live in order to be the first to physically confront the other species. The apes use sharpened sticks as their form of weaponry. Once again, the apes use the environment in order to arm themselves from other predatory civilizations. Adversely, every single human in the movie has a firearm in their hands. Even when fighting is not imminent, the humans have a firearm on their person. The confrontation scene in which the movie displays the vast repertoire of weapons available to both species simultaneously shows how having these different weapons affects the minds of the weapon holders. First, one must consider why weapons, or any type of material weaponry for that matter, have importance to a community. Firth's *Elements* concludes that materials and weapons, "crystallize and incorporate expenditure of effort; they serve as reservoir of effort against future needs; they are the object of property relations, of holding and transfer; they are the object of emotional attitudes" (42). In other words, weapons provide both the humans and the apes with a way to put their actions in motion. They also provide a sense of security and contentedness. The introduction of weaponry takes the concept of property in a community to different level. Transportation, while it is property, has little to no effect when it comes to hand to hand combat. Guns, however, are property that allows the user to put overflowing emotions into action. When Caesar, the armed leader of the apes, first confronts the humans, he screams and emphatically states, "Apes do not want war, but will fight if we must" (21:59).

Caesar's reluctant words work to show that the apes want feelings of peace and safety in their lives. Furthermore, the statement surprisingly shows the ape's willingness to trust the other species, despite the fact they have been displaced because of that other species. The apes approach the humans and Caesar points to the woods and bellows, "Ape['s] home" (21:59). He then points to the fortress in which the humans live and says, "Human['s] home. Do not come back" (22:06). Caesar's words, while armed, establish the boundaries of the communities. He identifies the woods as having the identity of the apes, and the manmade structure as having the identity of the humans. In other words, Caesar recognizes that both species of living beings have a need to feel safe and protected. The weapons that his species yields do not affect his judgment one way or another. His apes have weapons, but the strength in numbers and determination drive their purpose. After the encounter, the leader of the human population speaks to his people and, in doing so, shows that the humans feel frightened and therefore forced to act. The leader of the human colony states, "If they [the apes] aren't gone in three days, we are going to go up there and kill every last one of them" (15:16). It is interesting that the humans, who have the guns, feel forced to use them strictly because they fear the other. The more primitive species enacts a compromise, while the supposedly more evolved species instantly fears the other. The human leader immediately speaks of demolishing the entire ape population simply because his people fear something that they do not understand. The guns, which should make the humans feel safe, ultimately force them to feel anxiety. What does this say about weapons as core elements of habitable environment then? The scenes show that man-made things, which make humans feel comfortable, equally make the humans feel vulnerable. The apes are content with staying separate and equal. However, because the humans know of the apes' existence in the woods, the humans must immediately establish dominance over the opposing society because they are able due to their lethal property.

When one sees the ways in which the necessities of life are similar and are the same between both the human and ape species, one must consider the layout or look of the territory that each species occupies. In other words, how do these essential necessities of life shape and form each specific species' environment? What does the look and feel of the environment say about the occupants? The ape's position their habitat in the middle of a jungle setting. They immerse their habitat in wood and leaves. The environment has a very naturally appealing aesthetic. The initial scene in which the movie reveals the ape habitat shows a very

fort-like structure, very jagged outcroppings of wood, and an impenetrable fortress of solitude made completely out of the materials in the woods. In other words, the apes have the essential items that they need to build their ideal establishment right underneath their fingertips in nature. Interestingly, the colony contains many familiar structures such as dining areas, a weapons stash, and even a learning annex of sorts. Everything in the ape habitat has a “nature perpetuating nature” feel to it. The apes utilize the nature around them in order to further their natural existence. The human habitat, however, displays a very different environment than that of the apes. The humans use old, torn down, dilapidated buildings in order to provide shelter and protection from the outside world. Understanding the layout of the human community helps one to understand the reason why humans have the unique goal and need to establish electricity.

The concept of electrical power plays perhaps the most important role when one begins to distinguish true differences between humans and apes in the film. The film shows the viewer that the humans have one need that surpasses all others. The need for electrical power draws the humans to ascend the mountain in order to initially confront the apes. The humans wish to utilize an old water plant that used to generate power for the entire community. What does power mean to the humans, and how does this meaning produce an important point about the apes as well? The main human character, Malcolm, states that “If we could only get that generator to work, we would be able to recover just a piece of what the old life was like” (41:15). The main character speaks about the life that he and his fellow human beings had before the apocalypse exterminated the human population. The thought of a simple light coming on gives the human characters in the movie the ability to see beyond their having to revert to a very primitive existence. That small piece of nostalgia, that is to say the lighting of a light bulb, provides enough hope for the humans to continue on their quest to acquire a life much like the past. Interestingly, the apes have no need for this source of nostalgia. This brings up a very important trope of the *Apes* movies as Eric Greene discusses in *Planet of the Apes as American Myth*. Greene questions, with regard to power, “who gets it [in the film]? How do they get it? What do they do with it? What are the ramifications for those involved?” (6). A very specific scene in the movie answers these questions through the words of a lesser known character. One assistant human traveler sums up the important issue that lies in the distinction between those who need and those who do not need electricity. The assistant says that “[the

apes] do not need power or heat. That is what makes them stronger than us” (01:18). The assistant’s statement points out that because the apes already live in a natural setting, they become accustomed to feelings of vulnerability. In other words, they adapt to the natural elements which humans find uncomfortable and unsettling.

When one views the movie *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, one sees the construction of a habitable environment through witnessing the development of two very different communities. Due to the post-apocalyptic nature of the movie, the viewer is able to clearly articulate just exactly what it takes to construct a flourishing environment. The ability to hunt and gather food, first and foremost, is and always will be the main concern of any environment. In order to secure the nutrition provided by the food, the community must have weapons in order to gather and procure it. Transportation plays a very important role as well in distinguishing the superiority and versatility of one species over another. The ability to move about and relocate when necessary provides the capacity to adapt to change in the post-apocalyptic environment.

A leader who has the ability to articulate the goals and future of the community is also vital to the construction of rule and hierarchy in a small community. The similarities and the differences between the apes and the humans in the movie allow the viewer to understand who he or she is as a part of his or her own community. The comparison of the two helps the viewer to understand that the concepts of family, future, and comfort transcend the differences between species, and unite all beings (with/in) one common understanding.

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## Show Home: Fannish Spaces as “Dwelling” in *Stargate: Atlantis* and *Written by the Victors*

Ember Zimmerman



“Dwelling’ is not a transient state; rather, it implies the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work,” Greg Garrard writes (ch. 6).<sup>1</sup> Garrard’s idea of “dwelling”—the closeness of humans to locations, to land, what it means to embed one’s culture in location, and to embed one’s location in culture—consistently permeates science fiction literature, particularly works which deal with settlement outside of Earth. How better to explore what it means to truly belong to a place, than to write about humans with nowhere to belong, trying to find a home? Popular TV show *Stargate: Atlantis* is one of many contemporary works currently available which throw a handful of humans into space exploration with little to no chance of returning home. Instead, the explorers are forced to make a home on the new planets they explore. In this case, in the lost city of Atlantis herself. Little time is left after the action and excitement of space battles for philosophical writings about what it really means to call a place home, though; instead, the wondering is left to the fans of the show.

Speranza is the author of one of the most popular fanworks in the *Stargate: Atlantis* fandom. She wrote *Written by the Victors*, a work which exemplifies what it means to create, from the ground up, Garrard’s concept of “dwelling.” Through close examination of the source text, *Stargate: Atlantis*, and through the more concrete example of fans’ communal contributions to the *Written by the Victors* text as a whole, we see that the purpose of *Written by the Victors*, and fanfiction in general, accord-

ing to Liesbet van Zoonen, is “relating [shows and characters] to [fans’] own lives” (45). The discussion and creation of fan works—fanfiction, fanvideos, fanart—according to van Zoonen, “is conducted in a general sphere of friendliness and consensus seeking” (45-46). Van Zoonen further notes that “such practices of community building are part of a social process that concerned observers have seen disappearing from social and political life in recent decades” (46). Fans, van Zoonen seems to say, are creating a separate space in which to build community—not a physical space, but using language to create a figurative dwelling based around the community surrounding fannish involvement with a television program.

Catherine Tosenberger corroborates van Zoonen’s claims regarding community-building and relating texts to fans’ own lives in the circumstances of slash fiction, which is a reinterpretation of characters in homosexual and/or homoromantic relationships, stating, “Dissatisfaction with the source text is an equally compelling motivation to write fanfiction, and fans . . . explore the possibilities of other lovers for [characters], and invent alternate universes where [they] can be happy and in love” (204). As a text constructed as a community effort, the centerpiece written by Speranza, read and reviewed by another person—a beta reader—and then allowed to be opened to the general public so that other fanfic writers could contribute to the alternate universe through fanart, fanfiction, or homemade audiobooks (called podfic), *Written by the Victors* is certainly a text which prides itself on a “general sphere of friendliness and consensus seeking” (van Zoonen 45). Additionally, because it is firmly in the realm of slash fiction (with a bit of polyamory), Speranza’s work shows elements of disagreement with the source material in the characterization of the main characters, and with the organizations that *Stargate: Atlantis* allies itself with, particularly the American military complex. Speranza brings to the surface discussions of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, (which was still in effect in 2007, when *Written by the Victors* was published), addresses the way that *Stargate: Atlantis* treats its minority characters (often as exoticized ass-kickers and eye candy), and even attempts to confront some of the faulty science within the show—primarily the idea that the main character, Lt. Colonel John Sheppard appears to have a stronger expression of the Ancient Technology Activation gene (or ATA gene)—by instead presuming that most, if not all, Ancient technology, (especially the city of Atlantis) has some level of sentience and adoration for him.

Alongside the imagining of a so-responsive-it’s-nearly-organic A.I., *Written by the Victors* challenges the idea that a home is based on loca-

tion, on the insistence of living on Earth, alone. In the *Stargate: Atlantis* canon, the expedition to Atlantis is an international scientific expedition, featuring scientists from around the world (though it is funded and backed by the American Air Force, which means that the military presence in Atlantis is entirely American) attempting to discover more about a lost race of people called the Ancients by exploring one of their leftover citadels and copying some Ancient technology for the general progression of Earth humans and the American military, still locked in a secret war back home with alien species with more advanced technology.

In *Written by the Victors*, conflict arises when Earth commands the Lanteans (made up of Earth colonizers and Pegasus Galaxy refugees living out of the leftover city of Atlantis) to pack up Atlantis (a spaceship as well as a city) and fly her back to Earth to be used in another intergalactic war. Because the Lanteans feel responsible not just for protecting the city of Atlantis and her current inhabitants, but protecting their home and the indigenous peoples of the Pegasus Galaxy, many of the Lanteans, including the quartet of main characters in *Stargate: Atlantis*, refuse to leave. The Lanteans' attachment to the Pegasus Galaxy reconfigures the concept of dwelling previously assumed: that Earth natives would want to return to Earth, and replaces it with the idea that "dwelling," though "not a transient state" according to Garrard, is also not an entirely static one, either (ch. 6). Earth wants the resources and technologies the Lanteans have collected, insisting that the Lanteans return instead of allowing them to stay in Atlantis and help the Pegasus Galaxy natives to defend themselves from a predatory humanoid race of aliens called Wraith, which were woken from hibernation by a U.S. air force major. The Lanteans, who spent the last few years trading with and occasionally fighting against or alongside the locals, take issue with their orders and opt to stay. The narrative alternates between fake academic articles from Earth written about the Lantean conflict, and the narrative, which follows *Stargate: Atlantis's* central quartet of Lanteans, who manage to not only survive without Earth's aid, but thrive. Finally, the mobile nature of the city of Atlantis gives Lanteans a physical "dwelling," but the real home is in the community of survivors and indigenous humans united against the Wraith and the colonizing American military that hopes to take all the Ancient technology home for a different Earth humans vs aliens war.

By exploring the conflict between Earth and Atlantis, between home and outside, rather than limiting itself to Earth vs. alien invaders as the source text does, *Written by the Victors* exemplifies the difference of depth between fan works and their source text. Van Zoonen writes that "fans

have an intense individual investment in the text, they participate in strong communal discussions and deliberations about the qualities of the text, they propose and discuss alternatives which would be implemented as well if only the fans could have their way” (2004, 46). Van Zoonen’s article discusses fans’ activism, as spurred by their love of a show or celebrity and their desire and willingness to work together, underlining once more, the idea of community as an intangible version of “dwelling,” and paralleling the usage of Speranza’s interpretation of the Pegasus Galaxy and its inhabitants being the real home, not just the physical city of Atlantis. Fans’ personal investment in source texts and in works spawned by source texts may seem deeper than that of the source texts’ writers, simply because they have no obligation to remain neutral on civil or social issues in order to maintain a certain number of readers or viewers, or listeners. In contrast, because a source text, especially a TV show, has ratings standards to follow in order to continue airing, viewership is prioritized over personal and social exploration, which prevents the same kind of organic communal effort of creativity from occurring except in parallel space, far away from the show’s writers, directors, and actors.

As a further example of prioritizing generic accessibility to a broad, and clearly American audience over a more sincere or creative attempt at writing, Scott Simpson and Jessica Sheffield discuss how the *Stargate* writers keep the series subtly insistently, almost offensively moderate toward American political ideals. Firstly, the series holds an undercurrent of Judeo-Christian focus. According to Simpson and Sheffield,

[T]he Christian God is almost never mentioned in the shows. Gods that *are* mentioned are framed as ‘false’ or explained away as alien races . . . [the characters] often unmask the ‘magic’ of false gods as technology . . . [which] implies an alternative . . . and serves as a subtle form of religious imperialism. (87)

Simpson and Sheffield further their accusation, adding, “Most [pseudogods in the *Stargate* universe] were the gods of people who were subjugated and colonized at some point . . . Polytheistic religion thus stands for barbarism in the narrative of the show” (88). Simpson and Sheffield quote R. Shome, in their commentary about postcolonial critics, mention, “subjugation occurs discursively through representations of the ‘first world’ (positive representation) and the ‘developing world’ (negative representation)” (76). The show stays away from issues of gender, as well, except when the issue can be dramatized. To elaborate, “a mediated ver-

sion of liberal feminism is deployed in contrast to ‘other’ cultures’ sexist practices, thereby intersecting with race,” (Simpson and Sheffield 93). Similarly, *Stargate: Atlantis* avoids the topic of homosexuality entirely for the duration of the show. The only acknowledgement that fans receive of queer characters even existing is a blog post released by one of the show’s writers a month before the final episode aired: “According to him, Captain Alicia Vega . . . was supposed to be a vying for the affections of Dr. . . . But alas, the scene where Vega asked Keller out on a date was cut” (Woerner). The article mentions, “Another character on the show is secretly gay, and we’ll probably never find out who he is. Here’s a hint from [the writer]: ‘there has been one recurring character who, in my mind, is gay, but there has never been an opportunity to confirm the fact’” (Woerner). The *Stargate: Atlantis* writers’ decisions to remain moderate in issues of religion, gender, and sexuality is entirely at odds with the fannish desire to relate shows to fans’ own lives.

Significantly, fans prioritize the representations of minority groups, including but not limited to racial and sexual groups. Since *Stargate: Atlantis*, like many contemporary shows, opts out of dealing with social issues, *Written by the Victors* takes up the mantle of representation for itself. Speranza writes,

Because of the high-risk nature of the Atlantis mission, preference was given to those with few or no family ties. Not one of the original 200 expedition members was married; not one had had children . . . The goal was to select relatively unattached people in case the entire expedition was lost or killed, but . . . it also served as a filter for gays and lesbians . . . some estimates [claim] that more than 65 percent of the population were bisexual or demonstrated clear homosexual tendencies. I.10

This claim, made by one of many fictional academicians in *Written by the Victors* exemplifies the fandom’s tendency to view the source text in a way that makes it more accessible to fans involved in the queer community. According to a survey of over 4,000 fans, only 38% of fans self-identify as heterosexual, which makes the fannish desire to write slash fiction—thereby reflecting themselves in their reactions to a source text—all the less surprising (centrumlumina).

However, sexuality is not the only field in which fans are more socially liberal than the source text. The contrast between “first world” and “developing world” is stark in *Stargate: Atlantis*, where even when the

Pegasus Galaxy residents who possess some level of technology, Ancient or otherwise, live in dirt huts with sad, meager lives, constantly in fear of the Wraith. Simpson and Sheffield describe Teyla Emmagen, *Stargate: Atlantis*'s first obligatory alien team member, and leader of the first non-Earth humans that the expedition encounters, as having a use of the "English language that is more than perfect. In [her] perfection [she is] exoticized and marked as different" (91). Though Simpson and Sheffield mostly focus on *Stargate SG-1* in their analysis of postcolonialism in the *Stargate* universe, their descriptions of Teal'c (the only minority in the main cast of *Stargate: SG-1*) are interchangeable with those of Ronon Dex: "strong, taciturn and aggressive. If something is not working, [he] is likely to hit it or shoot it when all else fails" (90). In *Stargate: Atlantis*, the Lanteans find Ronon as the Wraith are hunting him for sport, tracking him using a signal beacon implanted in his body. He is the second Pegasus Galaxy native team member and second person of color in the main cast. As a result of his status as somewhat of a challenge to his Wraith hunter, the *Stargate: Atlantis* writers characterize him as "strong, taciturn, and aggressive" like Teal'c, and rarely, if ever, address that it likely took some amount of intellect and thought to evade the Wraith until the Lanteans destroyed the tracker and took him in (Simpson and Sheffield 90). Despite the show's insistence that Ronon is part of a culture that managed to develop enough technology and weapons for the Wraith to consider them a threat to eradicate (more specifically, Ronon's home planet developed various, unnamed weapons on par with, or even superior to those of the Genii, while the rest of the Pegasus natives, excepting the Genii, use a combination of leftover Ancient weapons, usually some kind of stunning laser gun, and homemade technology on the level of slingshots and long sticks), Ronon is often reduced to being no more capable than a caveman when it comes to technology or human interaction in the show (*Stargate: Atlantis*). Despite the fact that the weapons technology on Ronon's home world was at least as advanced as Earth weapons (possibly moreso, given the planet's laser focus on war against the Wraith and the Ancient technology they likely based their weapons around), and the fact that his intellect and resourcefulness should be just as prominent character traits as his ability to hit things until they fall down, Ronon, like Teyla, is treated as lesser for not being from Earth, as part of what Simpson and Sheffield refer to as a "developing world" country, ready for subjugation by the Earth forces (76).

In contrast, *Written by the Victors*, having been written by a community of people for pleasure and personal fulfillment, rather than profit,

adopts a firmly post-colonial stance on the interactions between indigenous space peoples and Earth citizens. Rather than focusing on how Earth can rescue as many of the Pegasus Galaxy inhabitants as they can fit in the city, as *Stargate: Atlantis* often does, *Written by the Victors* features a slow integration into and preservation of Pegasus Galaxy culture. *Written by the Victors* emphasizes not just rescuing unwashed natives from Pegasus perils, but instead, allowing the Earth-based Lanteans to be absorbed into a Pegasus Galaxy culture, until the last few segments of the story are increasingly difficult, and then finally impossible to translate from Lantean language.

Much more attention is paid to the construction of characterization through culture in fan works, reflecting what van Zoonen states about how “[fans] participate in strong communal discussions and deliberations about the qualities of the text” and “discuss alternatives which would be implemented as well if only the fans could have their way” (45-46). For example, in *Written by the Victors*, Dr. Rodney McKay repeatedly and mockingly refers to Ronon as “our Minister of Culture” when Ronon makes suggestions about how better to integrate the now-seceded Atlantis into her physical and cultural surroundings in the Pegasus Galaxy, but the title becomes more serious and less sarcastic as the piece progresses (II.2).<sup>2</sup> In fact, Ronon is the person who suggests to Sheppard, “You should marry Teyla” (Speranza III.11). A political marriage between a Lantean Earth expatriate and a Pegasus Galaxy leader, known for her far-reaching diplomatic relations with other Pegasus Galaxy tribes and societies, functions as political marriages typically do: an effort to unite disparate nations. According to an Earth historian, “Immediately after the wedding . . . Sheppard and Emmagan embarked upon a series of formal visits to various heads of state . . . This post-wedding tour was, unsurprisingly, orchestrated by Dex, who continued to show impeccable political judgment” (Speranza IV.1). The difference, then, between what Simpson and Sheffield describe in *Stargate: Atlantis*’s simplified characterization, and the version of Ronon that Speranza writes is staggering. Ronon in the show is characterized by a kind of caveman masculinity with little emotional or intellectual depth, while Speranza writes a person who has had to learn, like Teyla, a certain level of diplomacy and community for having traveled throughout the Pegasus Galaxy and its civilizations himself.

Characterization does not occur without basis, though. In order to come to the conclusion that Ronon would know things about what might please the general public, *Written by the Victors*, like many

other fan works, molds Ronon into a character that fans can relate to, a character who is more than a stereotype of a caveman, a character who belongs to the fans and the fannish community. Speranza first attempts to build an idea of what his home planet's culture must have been like, based on the few cues the show is able to give in its limited time allotment (good at fighting Wraith, unwilling to submit or hide from an enemy that clearly outmatched them), and who Ronon must have met and how he must have survived before the Lanteans found him, before the destruction of his home world: Ronon never cooperates with others for long, in case the presence of the signal beacon stuck in his body endangered them, but surely did not survive entirely alone in a wide galaxy he knows well. Because of the extrapolations made by Speranza, (that Ronon fights Wraith and runs, he meets many people, and that his home planet did not exist in a vacuum away from trade and interaction with other Pegasus Galaxy civilizations), in the context of *Written by the Victors*, Ronon manages to come across as knowledgeable, well-traveled, and still a capable fighter who enjoys a brawl. Speranza's interpretation of Ronon's characterization refuses to corrupt his image as the muscle of *Stargate: Atlantis's* central quartet, but adds depth. Further, Speranza critiques lazy interpretations of the show's only two consistent persons of color in the main cast through the lens of an Earth academician criticizing popular readings of Teyla and Ronon's roles in the Earth-Lantean war:

Teyla Emmagan, who, despite being the leader of a people whose survival is a testament to their social cohesiveness and intellectual creativity, is repeatedly rewritten as some kind of intergalactic Pocahontas . . . The only characterization more offensive is "the amazing strategic brilliance of Ronon Dex"; no matter how often this story is told, Dex's brilliance apparently never fails to be surprising. (V.1)

Simpson and Sheffield make a similar criticism, adding, "Teyla herself can be seen as an amalgamation of the Pocahontas and Sacagawea myths of Earth—a female native who helps the white explorers out of friendship" (91). In addition to lampooning the way that television characters often lose depth as often as they gain it, for example, by exaggerating character traits like Ronon's lack of knowledge about Earth customs and technologies into a more general lack of knowledge about anything more complex than pulling a trigger or punching something, Speranza makes

ridiculous the idea that Ronon's intellect is limited only to his muscle. *Written by the Victors* illuminates the way that shows abbreviate versions of characterization (Ronon as hulking, violent, and/or stupid, or Teyla as an "intergalactic Pocahontas") rather than critically examining characterization (Speranza III.11). Paul Booth states, "active fans who create fan fiction [sic] regularly transgress the boundaries of the original text, by adding new material, creating new readings, or providing alternate takes of the plot of the original," essentially, as van Zoonen suggests, relating [shows and characters] to [fans'] own lives," the foundation of fannish community (2, 45). Indeed, through Speranza's work, one can see that character interpretation is an integral facet of fan writings. Speranza does not just experiment with what-might-have-been, but uses alternate character interpretation as a basis for critiquing both the source text's own presentation of characterization and popular interpretations of characters' behaviors. Speranza's usage of a plot that diverges from that of *Stargate: Atlantis* gives the opportunity to the fans, to not only Speranza, but also the collaborators who added their works to the universe in which *Written by the Victors* takes place, to explore characters, and their identities in space, their concepts of home as not a place, but a community of like-minded individuals united by their desire to live in peace, and to browse the possibility that one's birthplace is not the only opportunity for Garrard's concept of "dwelling."

In addition to exploring ideas of cultural identities and sense of dwelling within the narrative, *Written by the Victors* itself functions as a communal effort and a shining example of fannish community. In fandom, Speranza's work is beta read by friends and peers, not edited by someone who is paid for the job. Friends and strangers draw fanart to illustrate significant scenes in the text, and add to the *Written by the Victors* universe by writing additions and alternate takes. Though the official word count of *Written by the Victors* is only around 53,000 words (the size of a short novel), Speranza mentions on her website that the universe now spans closer to 363,000 words of collective contributions, both her own addendums and sequels, and pieces of connected fan works composed by others. Though fanfiction, fanart, and fanvideos all occupy a legally-gray area (not formally a part of "fair use" in copyright law, but also not yet properly litigated to either legitimize or demonize it), writers and showrunners rarely try to eradicate it. In fact, they rarely even acknowledge the existence of fan works. Fandom itself, however, not only allows communal works, but often encourages them. The podfic community, for example, requests permission from fanfic

writers to record an audio reading of a fanfic, which is then linked on the page of the original and/or archived on podfic-specific websites for blind fans or fans who prefer audio files to the written word. Speranza cites thirty-six names in the credits of the podfic for *Written by the Victors*, which extends over five and a half hours in length, cementing not only the universe as open to contributions, but the central work as an effort by the community.<sup>3</sup>

The community surrounding *Written by the Victors* creates a separate source text, parallel to *Stargate: Atlantis*'s themes, continuing characterization, and plot points, which give fans the opportunity to create not just an atmosphere of "friendliness and consensus-seeking" as van Zoonen suggests, or a way to more deeply identify with the text, but a way to create a text that identifies with them (45). By creating a separate place in which to co-exist, and a text that writes back as it is being written, fans are not only writing about the settlement of humans in space, a new frontier, but also carving out a spot for themselves in cyberspace to interact with one another. Garrard's concept of dwelling is deeply rooted in the realm of the physical when he describes a "long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work" (ch. 6). However, despite a lack of physical space to claim, and despite the fact that a "long-term imbrication" of any kind would be impossible in fan works, which are often so insistently contemporary, the way that the fannish community intertwines to reclaim an interpretation of television programs for themselves is nonetheless amazing (ch. 6).

## Notes

1 Kindle copy does not have pages. Some kindle versions of books do! This is not one of those.

2 Though there is technically a downloadable PDF if you go to the Archive of Our Own copy of *Written by the Victors*, which would give you page numbers, this method of citing by section is more precise and also more efficient.

3 The podfic for *Written by the Victors* spans over five and a half hours, took 36 fans collaborating over the internet from various parts of the world to create, and has its own FanLore page--a wiki for documenting accomplishments, notable events, and general fandom culture.

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## “Man’s [Assault] Upon the Environment [through] Contamination:” The Portrayal of an End which becomes the Beginning in *The Book of Eli*

Angela Walker



The prediction of the end of the world is not a new idea, yet people have long been missing their marks about when the world will end. Kevin D. Williamson, author of “Apocalypse Soonish,” argues that “Roman sages predicted that their city would fall in 634 B.C., and when that didn’t happen, they revised the figure to 389 B.C.” (35). Also, Williamson points out that “the Jewish revolutionary Simon bar Giora predicted that his battle against the Romans in 66 B.C. announced the final chapter in world affairs” (35). And let people not forget more recent predictions seen in movies like *Independence Day* and *2012*, which in their own way, put folks on edge about the world’s end. Since no one seems to be able to correctly predict the world’s end, predictions should, then, be seen as simple forecasts which provide no guarantee. Because of the lack of guarantee, not all predictions direct attention towards pinning down the time an apocalypse will happen. While an apocalypse takes place in *The Book of Eli*, directed by Allen and Albert Hughes, the film focuses on events which happen after an apocalypse. Specifically, survivors and their actions become important focuses of the film. *The Book of Eli* raises the question of whether or not people maintain hope and rebuild a better world or use the tragedy for selfish gain and the imprisonment of others. In order to form a conclusion and fully grasp the significance of the film, first, people must understand the critical premises of apocalypse and the causes of this type of catastrophe. According to D. Thompson’s *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium*, an apocalypse is the unveiling or revealing of a world

as it transforms from one state to another, and this transformation becomes the result of a fight between good and evil (qtd. in Garrard 94). Although there are several types of apocalypse,<sup>1</sup> the most significant for this study is the man-made apocalypse because not only does this unnatural yet devastating event show a strong relationship between man and his environment, but the event also provokes people to pay closer attention to this relationship as humans play a major role in the survival of mankind and nature. Krista Karyn Hiser, author of “Pedagogy of the Apocalypse,” insinuates the importance of “[staying] in the realm of the recognizable world” when focusing on post-apocalyptic literature (155), an accomplishment the Hughes brothers amazingly reach through utilization of a dark setting in *The Book of Eli*.

*The Book of Eli* furnishes grayscale images in the opening scene, which takes place in a dim forest and creates the illusion of a natural disaster by presenting images of the after-math. The directors pull the task off by omitting narration of the events which cause the tragedy, but later, the film reveals the apocalypse as “man’s [assault] upon the environment [through] the contamination of air [and] earth [...] with dangerous and even lethal materials” (qtd. in Garrard 103). According to Blain Brown’s *Cinematography: Theory and Practice*, grayscales, although numerous in types, “all have one thing in common: they vary from black to white,” (203) which gives this particular film a look of solemnity that matches the horrifying events. The camera slowly moves, shifting focus from falling ashes and burnt trees to an ash-covered ground where a corpse lies, and then, to a skinned cat which approaches the lifeless body of a victim of an apparent gunshot. Because bright colors tend to represent vitality of life, and the entire scene lacks color, the grayscale represents dark times or human fall, which in this case, includes environmental destruction and death. The woods also represent a place of darkness, as trees block sunlight and create shade. Images of falling ashes, burnt trees, and an ash-covered ground insinuate that a fire has taken place, stripping the trees and ground of their natural essences and making them sterile. The skinned cat’s genetic makeup is also altered through the loss of hair, which may be the result of getting in close proximity of the intense heat which erupts from a fire. As far as the dead body is concerned, the gunshot wound to the head and the gun lying not far from the body indicates that the person may have ended his own life. Either the victim’s fear of death by war-induced toxins and desire to determine his own end is a plausible reason for the victim’s suicide. The suicide, then, becomes

a suggestion of a person's mental contamination, resulting from a loss of hope, which manifests from the contamination of Earth.

After presenting the Earth as poisonous, the film highlights the first sign of human life in a tainted world and demonstrates how a survivor avoids exposure after war. The survivor wears a gas mask to help ensure safety. The utilization of the gas mask, then, suggests the circulation of toxic pollutants, which hints at a man-made apocalypse. If the Earth's atmosphere is tainted by man as suggested, the future does not look promising. Garrard utilizes the following statements from Rachel Carson to explain the problem:

This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible. In this now universal contamination of the environment, chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world—the very nature of its life. (qtd. in Garrard 103)

These comments suggest that the environment changes for the worse and may be ruined beyond a repairable state. The claim of a universal impurity alludes to the idea of world-wide uncleanness. The fact that pollution is linked to evil implies that circumstances will get much worse before times get better as wickedness and immoral behavior in humans affected by war may proliferate. This evil manifests in a character named Carnegie and his hand-picked hijackers. From this perspective, *The Book of Eli* tells a horrifying story which hints at an insanely bleak future, but then, the tale offers an alternative to permanent ruin in the form of a man named Eli who, through his remarkable capabilities, represents more than just “a man.”

The scene in which Eli is introduced differs considerably from the forest scene, as the shot reveals another remote location which turns out to be an extremely dry and unquestionably hot, yet ash-free desert. However, the significance in this scene is Eli's relationship with the clouds. Eli fits perfectly into this picture because of his mysterious nature and physical position of a solitary figure, but a moment of transcendence quickly elevates Eli to a spiritual position as he walks into this private space filled with clouds. The clouds take up the entire background as the white cottony mass spreads from the top of the screen to the bottom. As the clouds appear to touch the ground, the image offers an ethereal

appearance. While Eli walks toward the left of the screen, he fades as if he walks into the clouds and disappears. This scene provides the notion that Eli passes through heaven or heaven passes through Eli. In either case, the cloud scene creates a connection between Eli and God. One can also interpret the moment as a conversation between Eli and God in which God gives Eli a path to follow. At a later point in the movie, Eli confesses to a young girl named Solara (who decides to tag along with him on his journey) that in the midst of wandering around and trying to survive, “one day, [he] heard a voice” that is beyond explanation, yet the voice “[came] from inside of [him]” (Hughes *The Book of Eli*). The voice, according to Eli, “led” him to the last Bible and told the prophet to “carry the book out west,” using the path set for him and he, now, the messenger, will be protected. The voice signifies the voice of God, and the idea of going west is significant because, as Stanley Corkin states in his article, “Cowboys and Free Markets: Post World War II Westerns and U.S. Hegemony,” “the [west] [is] well-suited to convey important ideological rationales” and “American expansion” (66). Also, “westerns [...] willingly involve themselves in the depiction of history and are thereby illuminated in important ways by being considered as history” (80). “One of the justifications for colonization has always been the God-sanctioned impulse to take the light of civilization to those living in darkness, to give men with no recognized history the benefits and order of those who have enjoyed advances and progress,” as Constante González Groba cleverly states in “Planting Civilization in the Wilderness: the Intersections of Manifest Destiny and the Cult of Domesticity in Elizabeth Madox Robert’s *The Great Meadow*.” Therefore, the west represents history but also becomes a place for new beginnings, restoration of important values, and the rebuilding of communities. In other words, people can advance and progress in the west. Also, “by using the [west] as a framing device,” the film questions the “morality and social effect” of an apocalypse in the east (Corkin 78). González quotes Frederick Turner with notions about the west: “this great American West [...] [teaches] [...] a new way of looking upon the destiny of the common man [and trains] them in adaptation to the conditions of the New World” (62). This statement points to the idea that the west becomes a lesson which offers a new perspective about the fate of man while also preparing man for life in the western area.

The directors of *The Book of Eli* also reveal important image in another scene: the glimpse of the sky which is shown from Eli’s perspective. This important moment displays a bond between Eli and God. In this

beautiful scene, Eli has a moment of silence in which he looks toward the night sky for comfort. On the surface, the image is merely a huge circle with the moon in the center and clouds floating gently around the Earth's natural light source. However, on a more spiritual level, this visual symbolizes God's eye looking down on Eli, which backs up Eli's claim that he is being watched and protected by God. Furthermore, Solara asks the traveler how he knows the path he walks is the correct way, and Eli answers with confidence, "I walk by faith, not by sight." Eli's statement becomes significant because the concept drives Eli's behavior throughout the whole movie. By revealing that Eli is blind, the film further pushes the notion that Eli walks by faith rather than by sight. The comment also points to the idea that Eli shares a real connection with God who guides him, as faith is not a tangible object but a belief or hope which exists outside of the average person's understanding. Throughout the film, Eli consistently makes references to the Bible he carries, which further shows evidence of his faith. With his life, Eli protects the Bible as he carries this unique tool toward the west, and Eli's Bible becomes a symbol for leadership and hope, concepts which are also common in apocalyptic films like *The Road* and *Earth Abides*. As Hillel I. Newman, author of "Dating *Sefer Zerubavel*: Dehistoricizing and Rehistoricizing a Jewish Apocalypse of Late Antiquity" asserts, the "study of apocalyptic texts [...] demands the thorough identification of parallels" (326). Hiser's article notes that "the boy's father in [the film] *The Road* is obsessed with fire for their survival and also as a flicker of hope carried with them, and Ish from *Earth Abides* carries a hammer, which symbolizes leadership" (155). The demonstrations of hope and leadership in the previously named films share a similarity to the hope and leadership Eli's Bible offers him, and Eli's desire to carry the Bible west as instructed leads back to the notion of faith. The Bible, then, offers the idea that an apocalypse is not the end; rather, this catastrophe aspires a new beginning.

Because new beginnings are often threatened by the chain of evil, the Hughes brothers utilize Carnegie to help people understand this chain of evil or immoral aggression and how the act affects a society which struggles to rebuild after an apocalypse. In *The Book of Eli*, Carnegie represents both an identical and the opposite figure of Eli. This evidence shows in the scene in which Eli has a bowl of water, and when Eli touches the water with his finger, the camera shows Eli's reflection in the bowl and then the rippling effect of the image of Eli changing to Carnegie's face. Two events take place simultaneously during the reflection scene.

Eli and Carnegie are reflected as similar figures because both men want to utilize the Bible to spread the Bible's message to people who are lost. The two men are presented as opposites because Eli wants to spread the word for good reasons while Carnegie wants to turn the Bible into a tool for wrongdoing. Therefore, unlike Eli, who symbolizes good, Carnegie symbolizes an evil figure. The reflection scene further offers the idea that in a time when evil becomes prevalent through Carnegie, the forces of good manifest in Eli. In other words, with good comes evil, and with evil comes good because one cannot exist without the other. The doubling of the faces also hints at the notion that good and evil might be blurred if not for strong leaders. As Carnegie exemplifies evil, which grows in moments of desperation, Carnegie becomes more powerful in this world which has fallen upon dark times. This is shown when Carnegie is presented as a corrupt human being who owns a bar and hotel and has become the leader of a newly established "civilized town." Carnegie's beliefs revolve around controlling the town's weak and recruiting the desperate to carry out his unprincipled orders in exchange for rewards such as opportunities to "live better" than everyone else and have access to "clean water." Through his manipulative ways, Carnegie "[has organized] people around a cause" and "[has imposed] order on them" (Williamson 37). To further highlight Carnegie's reign, the movie focuses on a scene in which Carnegie has given young Solara instructions to seduce Eli and try to convince the traveler to stay and team up with the source of evil. In this moment, Solara confirms Carnegie's ability to control, and the young beauty explains that Carnegie "[will] hurt [her] mom" if the girl does not comply because Solara and her mother "belong to him." In this instance, Solara and her mom have not only become prisoners, but the two women have become property. The two women are possessions owned by Carnegie, but Solara is a little more; she is also a commodity.

Because Eli possesses strength unlike Solara and her mother, Claudia, who are confined to a space assigned to them by Carnegie, Eli refuses to become a possession, partner or prisoner to Carnegie's system of terror. Claudia recognizes this profound quality in Eli when she delivers food to the loner's room, and the woman goes back and says to Carnegie, "[Eli's] different than the others. You're not going to be able to make him do what you want him to do." In this moment, the Hughes' brothers accomplish a couple of tasks. The directors utilize Claudia to simultaneously present Eli as unshakable, which "Others" him, and shows Claudia as a cautionary figure through appointing her to warn Carnegie with a

prediction of the crook's failure to corrupt Eli. The scene suggests that Claudia, who is also blind, uses a more powerful tool than her eyes to see into Eli's spirit, and the directors' decision not to reveal how Claudia knows Eli's character makes the moment ambiguous. Leaving the moment ambiguous suggests that faith leads the blind. Claudia, then, represents a divine figure like Eli does. Typically, the purpose of "Othering" a person is to highlight negative differences between the person and the rest of a community, and Eli would normally be "Othered" because of his blackness. However, in this scene, Claudia's decision to "Other" Eli makes the act positive based on his spiritual position which makes him a godly man in the midst of ungodly folks. Nonetheless, while "characters who have lost their humanity ... appear in *Earth Abides*, ... *The Road*," and *The Book of Eli*, Eli becomes the one character who holds tightly to his humanity (Hiser 157). Eli does not plan to go in a "southerly direction," and his humanity sends a message "for those [...] who do not believe" in the humane treatment of others (Williamson 35). Quite the opposite, Carnegie's notions clearly lead him down a nefarious path, and this figure of evil evolves into a more sinister being when he realizes Eli has possession of a Bible. Carnegie wants the Bible, and his aggression grows as he makes the following confession to Eli:

I grew up with [the book]. I know its power, and if you read it, then, so do you. That's why they burned them all after the war. Hey, just staying alive is an act of faith; building this town is an even bigger act of faith, but they don't understand that. None of them. And I don't have the right words to help them, but the book does. I admit, I've had to do things, many, many things I hate to build this; I confess that. But if we have that book, I wouldn't have to. Now, imagine, imagine how different, how righteous this little world could be if we had the right words for our faith. Well, people would truly understand why they're here and what they're doing and wouldn't need any of the uglier motivations.

Through Carnegie's speech, he reveals his knowledge of the Bible's agency, which is unusual for a man with such evil ways. As he stands in a western setting surrounded by men with guns who are ready to fire at Eli upon the order, Carnegie displays a man who is willing to kill for his own agenda, but the murderer acts with hypocrisy by pretending he cares about the townspeople and their understanding of faith and righteous-

ness. The unrepentant Carnegie goes on to confess that he has sinned, yet he justifies his wicked ways by claiming he has no choice. In his speech, the evildoer blames his actions on not having a Bible even though his plans are to use the book as a “weapon” against the townspeople. In the moment, Carnegie’s speech sounds almost like a blasphemous prayer, as he turns to Eli and asks the man of God to literally deliver the word (the Bible) to him. However, because God guides him, Eli is able to refuse to hand over the Bible to Carnegie, which further displays him as unshakable, just as Claudia warns.

In addition to showing Eli as unshakeable, the Hughes brothers use Eli to expose the economic and natural consequences of the apocalypse. Eli becomes a man who emphasizes the decline in the value of money by exchanging goods for other goods and services and showing a disregard for the once almighty dollar. When Eli first stumbles upon the town which Carnegie runs, the lone man walks into a business which resembles a pawn shop. To pay for the charge of a Fathom 900 (audio equipment), Eli utilizes a cigarette lighter and three KFC towelettes. Eli also offers the owner some cat oil. The owner shows interest in some toys and chapstick, but Eli has neither to give. Then, Eli goes into the bar and asks for water, which according to the bartender, “[is] the good stuff” and “it [don’t] come cheap.” Eli trades a small blanket and leather gloves for a canteen of water. In these two developments, the exchanges show the insignificance of money and the importance of bartering. The increased value in bartering stems from the scarcity of resources after the war. However, unlike the material items such as the cigarette lighter, KFC towelettes, cat oil, and the other items mentioned, which are not items needed for survival, water is an absolute necessity, as water is used not only to bathe, but to nourish the body. Although water is an element of the Earth, not all water is accessible or clean after an apocalypse. In *The Book of Eli*, the issues of accessibility and cleanliness contribute to limitation, making water even more valuable to the townspeople. The scene, then, demonstrates how quickly the value of material items change based on environmental conditions.

*The Book of Eli* also demonstrates how the need for resources such as water can make people vulnerable. The, the film shows how Eli stands his ground in the face of darkness. While Eli waits to get clean water, one of Carnegie’s hijackers approaches him and accuses him of showing the guy’s cat off the bar, an act which is petty in comparison to the current tensions of an apocalypse after-math. Before the man can grab Eli, Eli slams the man’s face into the bar and gives the sinner a warning:

“I know who you are: a murderer of innocent travelers on the road. You are going to be held to account for the things you’ve done.” In the moment, Eli suggests that this murderer will be punished for his sins. Then, Eli sums up his message by calling the guy “brother.” In this situation, the notion of good versus evil is illuminated. And Eli’s message constitutes a warning of future judgment and a sermon for onlookers. As Eli preaches to all who listen, he says, “cursed be the ground for our sake. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for us. For out of the ground we were taken from the dust we are, and to the dust we shall return.” Eli’s message underscores several ideas. One idea is that people’s true origin is the ground, and when people die, they will go back into the ground. Also, thorns and thistles are objects which bring pain because of the sharp or pointy ends, but the structures are also protectants of the plants to which they become attached. On a different note, thorns and thistles can make land useless, just like weeds. Also, when Eli calls the enemy “brother,” he insinuates that all men are God’s children, even the hijacker. In this case, the message Eli sends is that all men can become repentant and righteous and forsake their wicked ways or be punished.

Redridge, Carnegie’s lead hijacker, underlines the idea of repentance. This idea surfaces when Redridge is involved in a wreck and somehow gets stabbed in the chest with a huge knife. The long-time sinner pulls the knife out, exits the vehicle, and drops down on his knees. Then, the man removes his glasses, looks up toward the sky, and dies in this humbling position. Since the sky represents God’s dwelling, the image of Redridge down on his knees looking towards the sky becomes indicative of a man who reaches out to God in an attempt to ask for forgiveness. Redridge’s regret for his wrongs is not difficult to foresee because he shows signs of hesitation in the preceding scene. Although Redridge plays a major role in Carnegie’s apprehension of Eli and Solara and the theft of Eli’s Bible, Redridge hesitates before deciding to hand the Bible over to Carnegie. In this instance, Redridge contemplates slight resistance, which indicates his conscience is trying to take over and guide him to make the right choice. The scene demonstrates how people like Redridge struggle with the choices they make and further shows how difficult making the right decision can be when surrounded by people who promote wrong doing. However, after setting up the notion that Redridge will not change for the better, the film tears down this idea by allowing Redridge to repent just before his death. In this moment, the scene offers a perspective that it is never too late to repent. However, as Carnegie watches his right-hand man in disbelief, the villain never once hints that he has a guilty

conscience or intentions to abandon his wicked ways. In other words, while Redridge experiences spiritual growth, Carnegie does not. With all of these ideas, the scene reveals that people like Redridge may repent while others like Carnegie will not.

Carnegie's unrepentant ways take him to a place of which no man should go, causing him to try to prove God is not the "good" god in which Eli believes. After Carnegie robs Eli of the Bible, the murderer waves the Bible in the air, calmly says, "ask, and you shall receive," and commences to smell the Bible. The treacherous man then addresses Eli by saying, "God is good, is he not?" When Eli replies "all the time," Carnegie declares, "not all the time" and shoots the prophet in the chest at point blank range and leaves him to die. In this horrifying moment, Carnegie carries out several awful tasks. In waving the Bible in the air, Carnegie boasts as if claiming victory. By saying "ask and you shall receive" and "God is good, is he not," the power stricken man mocks the Bible. Through the act of shooting Eli, Carnegie believes he accomplishes the task of showing Eli that God is not always good and that Eli is not protected by God. The decision to leave Eli on the ground to die demonstrates that Carnegie feels no regret for shooting an innocent man. But little does Carnegie realize that murderous people will pay for their sins, a biblical principle Eli states in an earlier incident to the hijacker in the bar. This punishment set forth for Carnegie begins to play out as he unlocks the Bible and sees a book full of language his eyes cannot comprehend. Because the Bible is in braille, Carnegie tries to make Claudia read the messages in the Bible and relay the information to him. Once again, Claudia becomes a tool for Carnegie to utilize for selfish gain. However, this moment is different. Claudia slides her hands across the pages, smiles, and claims she has forgotten how to read braille. In this scene, Carnegie loses his authority, and Claudia regains her power by being the only person who can read the Bible. Claudia demonstrates her power by refusing to recite the words in the Bible to the long-time tyrant. Also, in this scene, Claudia reveals that Carnegie's days are numbered through noting she can smell his deformed leg and feel his fever. Claudia continues to talk, and the divine woman sounds judgmental when she makes the following speech:

You worked so hard for that book. [You've] sacrificed so much, so many men. More than you could spare. Now, all those people who were too scared to even say your name, they're down stairs tearing up the bar right now. Did you know that? And there's

no one there to stop them. And you are feverish! I can't imagine what it must feel like to have what you want so close, [and] it might as well be a million miles away.

This speech confirms Carnegie's loss of power. The speech also confirms release of the hold Carnegie has kept over the woman until now. In her speech, Claudia scrutinizes Carnegie for the energy put into acquiring the Bible and the lives unnecessarily taken in vain. Carnegie's devious acts are all for nothing because although the murderer has the book, the pages have become useless to a man who cannot read a single word.

While the Hughes brothers employ Carnegie to allude to the notion that evil does not prevail, the directors reinforce the idea that good wins by allowing Eli to survive long enough to complete his journey west. Although Eli is very weak from his gunshot wound, the prophet and Solara take a boat and travel across the salt-scented ocean, and the two eventually arrive at Alcatraz Press. This printing press is similar to Alcatraz Island in the sense that both places are remote locations accessible mainly by boat. Also, Alcatraz Press and Alcatraz Island are located to the west. The difference, however, is that Alcatraz Island is home to an abandoned prison, which is meant to maintain order by taking away freedom. Alcatraz Press is meant to restore order by printing books which are lost in the war and giving back freedom. Therefore, the lost Bible becomes significant in the end of Eli's journey because in spite of Eli no longer being in possession of the book, the messenger carries every detail of the Bible in his heart. By being able to recite the entire Bible from memory, Eli establishes agency. Also, when Eli becomes clean-shaven and changes into a white button-down robe which looks like a cassock, the prophet resembles a clergy. Since clergymen are religious leaders, Eli's close resemblance to religious leaders hints at his role as a religious leader. After Eli recites the Bible and the printing press begins to print the book, Eli begins to pray: he starts with, "Dear Lord, thank you for giving me the strength and the conviction to complete the task you [...] entrusted to me." Eli continues, "thank you, for guiding me straight and true through the many obstacles in my path. And for keeping me resolute when all around seemed lost." Eli thanks God for his "protection" and "signs" and ends his prayer by saying, "thank you for any good that I may have done, and I'm so sorry about the bad." As Eli reaches the closure of this prayer, the camera focuses on a rock which has the name "Eli" written on top to show that Eli has died. In his prayer, Eli acknowledges that his strength and conviction come from God, and

by thanking God, Eli gives God proper credit. In the act of thanking God for guidance, Eli acknowledges that God has watched over him. Since resolute means unwavering and Eli never gets off the path, the mention of his resolute state when all around seemed lost suggests that Eli has remained faithful. The protection Eli talks about refers back to his fight against the evils of Carnegie and his men, specifically the bar scene and the shooting. Had God not been protecting Eli, he probably would have died long before carrying out God's will. The signs Eli mentions possibly refer back to the extraordinary use of his senses because, with the loss of one sense, the remaining senses often heighten. While Eli recognizes his good qualities, which place him in a position of the blessed and highly favored, the messenger apologizes for his reprehensible behavior. In this moment, Eli admits the he falls short, and in looking back to an earlier scene, his shortcoming is evidenced when he confesses to Solara he "got so caught up with keeping [the Bible] safe that [he] forgot to live by what [he] learned from it," which relates to "[doing] for others more than you do for yourself." Although Eli states that he does not live by what he has learned from the Bible's message, the prophet travels from the east to the west to deliver the words of the Bible to a printing press so the Bible can again be in circulation for people who need the messages contained therein.

The evidence in this study clearly shows that some people heed the lesson of an apocalypse and seek to establish a new and improved world while others devolve and take advantage of the weak. *The Book of Eli* shows that Eli rises to a category of divinity by putting God's will ahead of his own, thereby, creating an image of a "protagonist in the traditionally male plot of the outward journey" west (González 57). Carnegie, on the other hand, remains in the east and terrorizes people, creating an image of evil. And while Eli's journey is no simple task, the prophet has God on his side, and the Almighty watches over Eli and keeps him safe. As Eli stands against Carnegie and his hijacking men, Eli's devotion to God and persistence to protect the Bible causes the wicked to rob and shoot the messenger, leaving him for dead. However, Eli's time is not up until God says so, and the proclaimer of the will of God survives and finishes his journey. After all of Carnegie's attempts to use the Bible to maintain power over the townspeople, the wrongdoer ends up in a town of chaos as he loses control of the people, and on top of his positional decline, Carnegie experiences a decline in health. Although Eli makes a confession the he has faults and claims to not have followed the Bible's teachings whole-heartedly, his sanctity remains undeniable

because he endures suffering for the greater good and carries out God's will. So, what, then, are the Hughes brothers trying to say about people like Eli? What are the directors suggesting about people like Carnegie?

### Note

1. See Garrad, chapter 5, for detailed information on the different apocalypse.

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## Notes on Contributors

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Angeline Bullington plans to graduate in the Spring of 2015. She plans to pursue a Master's in English and eventually become an academic librarian. While obtaining the degree, she hopes to work full time as a graduate assistant. She enjoys geeky things, her evil Boris the Cat, and long walks on the beach.

Ali Martin is an English Major with a Creative Writing Minor. She plans on graduating in April of 2015, and after graduation she will pursue a Master's Degree in English.

Taylor McAnally is a senior in the English Education program at the University of West Georgia, planning to graduate in the Spring of 2016. After graduation she plans to teach English Language Arts at a middle or high school while she attends graduate school for a Master's in English. She enjoys young adult literature, studying French, and spending time with her dog and husband.

Gail McClain is a mother, homemaker, companion, and student, and once all of her daytime duties are complete she finds joy in crafting or just relaxing while reading a book. Her life pursuits consist of graduating from the University of West Georgia in fall 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts in English Education and shortly after starting a career in secondary education, where she hopes to encourage young adults to discover the wonders to be found in reading books. As an educator she hopes to inspire students to read not only in the classroom but to help them understand that the world is a place to be read, as well.

Kendria Patterson is graduating with a Bachelors of Arts in English in December 2014. After graduation, she plans to pursue graduate studies in Nonprofit Management and Social Enterprise.

Caitlin Pittman is an English major with a minor in Marketing. This is her fourth year here at UWG, and she plans to graduate in the Summer of 2015. She is an animal lover who has two rescue cats and a dog, who is also a rescue. After graduation she plans to pursue a career in a marketing agency where she will utilize the analytical and creative skills she has acquired in her English studies and marketing strategies learned from the Richards School of Business

Brandon Rummel is an English major.

Angela Denise Traylor-Walker is an English major with a concentration in education. She plans to graduate in the spring of 2016. After graduation, her goal is to teach high school English and Language Arts. She loves to write, and writing essays is what she has enjoyed the most during her college experience.

Ember Zimmerman is an English major and aspiring writer. Ember can be found at all times attached to a phone, either reading, researching, or hastily copying down a typo-ridden idea. She spends all of her free time reading and writing both original and fanfiction. She specializes in creative nonfiction and space fantasy. Ember graduates Fall in 2014 and will immediately dive into the publishing industry at the first opportunity