Here, at the End:

Contemporary North American Ecocritical Dystopian Fiction

by

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Abstract

"Here, at the End: Contemporary North American Ecocritical Dystopian Fiction" argues that a distinct speculative subgenre has arisen within current dystopian fiction—one that contains some properties comparable to the "critical dystopia" identified by Tom Moylan and others as having emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, but with considerations unique to the present moment. In a sense, this new subgeneric permutation, which I am calling the "ecocritical dystopia," is an extension of that earlier form. Yet thanks to its attention to the environmental, it also reminds us that dystopian literature is perhaps always, at its root, concerned with changes to the environment and subsequent changes to society. This last aspect is the process highlighted by ecocritical dystopianism, which articulates its near-future alterations through the use of real-world place known in some way to the reader as different from the completely fictionalized settings common to some other sf work, such as with off-world narratives or even locations with fictive names that do not correspond to the geographical and instead resonate with the issues of the times. With its emphasis on environmentally-changed places, the ecocritical dystopia lessens our sense of cognitive estrangement, which means that the near-future crises of a narrative are brought into focus much more closely as issues that already affect the present. The conclusion is that problems encountered now will be magnified in the future as our sense of places is physically altered through changes to ecology, weather, climate, biomes, etc. Human society, always environmentally entangled to some degree, will also be affected. Ecocritical dystopianism therefore imparts a sense of urgency with its narratives, which bring the abstractions of something like anthropogenic climate change down to the more-focused local or even regional perspective. My study's intervention through delineating and investigating this contemporary dystopian subgenre insists that, in this time of the Anthropocene, we are actively and

aggressively driving changes to our future that will dramatically alter coastlines, living spaces,

agricultural processes, and freshwater sources, as well as displace millions of people and further

the ongoing Sixth Mass Extinction. But this study also demonstrates that ecocritical

dystopianism has been in development nearly since the inception of the critical dystopia, with

potential analytical applications prior to both. To examine the recent emergence of this new

dystopian movement, this dissertation analyzes the complex generic resonances of Octavia

Butler's Parable books (*Parable of the Sower*, 1993; *Parable of the Talents*, 1998), Margaret

Atwood's MaddAddam series (*Oryx and Crake*, 2003; *The Year of the Flood*, 2009;

MaddAddam, 2013), and Thomas King's novel *The Back of the Turtle* (2014), with references to

other texts emerging in the subgenre as concerns about the dystopian now become increasingly

vocal. Through their ecologically-focused, placed-based imaginings, the ecocritical dystopias,

though set in the near future, underscore that our present moment is already in crisis, and that we,

too, are connected to its narratives.

Dedication

"Here, at the End" is for those who will inherit the spaces and places upon which we affix value:

make of them what you will, change them how you will, but consider them and all lives they

sustain or fail in your day-to-day, and in your speculations about your future.

Foster an environmental community.

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Back of the Turtle

"and now he saw the familiar wide river beside the path differently. He saw all of the light and

color and history it contained and carried in its slow-moving water; and he knew that there was

an Elsewhere from which it came, and an Elsewhere to which it was going."

— Lois Lowry, *The Giver* 131

Introduction

Fictions for the Anthropocene

In 2015, in Atlanta, Georgia, a diorama entitled "Will the Story of the 6th Mass Extinction Ever

Include the Role of its Sponsors?" was exhibited at the American Alliance of Museums' Annual

Convention as part of a project called *The Natural History Museum*. This visual work by the

collective of artists, activists, and theorists called Not An Alternative features a human skeleton

pointing to an allosaurus skull[1] in the setting of the David H. Koch Dinosaur Wing of the

American Museum of Natural History (Dean). By propelling our perspective an unknown

number of years into a post-apocalyptic future, the diorama puts a present-day audience within

the role of observing its own, doomed outcome, just as we have continually observed and

pondered the doomed past of the dinosaur ages and other bygone, deep geological times. In the

diorama, humanity is the skeleton observing its dependence on fossil fuels, and the irony of a

wrist and finger angled and pointing but failing to connect (much like the biblical Adam's in

Michelangelo's 1512 *The Creation of Adam*) undercuts any potential for continued creation or

energy, since the visible outcome is death. But perhaps the most deep-set element implied by the

diorama combines environmental factors and a consideration of spaces and places. What with the

possibilities of anthropogenic climate change[2] and the increasing precarity of global coastal

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[1] The Not An Alternative collective was kind enough to identify this specimen (*Natural*). Philip
Currie also kindly corroborated their assessment for me, and added that "[t]here are several
specimens of this animal at the American Museum of Natural History, so it is no surprise."

[2] While I use "climate change" and other, connected terms for this study, in May 2019, *The
Guardian* took a valuable stance on language use regarding climate issues as an approach to
challenging a perceived lack of urgency involved with social change. That is, their "style guide"
shifts from using "climate change" to "preferred terms" like "'climate emergency, crisis or
breakdown'" and "'global heating,'" because they want to be "'scientifically precise, while also
communicating clearly with readers on this very important issue'"—though they indicate that
"the original terms are not banned" (Carrington, "Why").

living, the geographical and topographical local setting of the diorama is relevant to the imagined

future of a much larger portion of humanity. The indicated portion of the American Museum of

Natural History is on the fourth floor of its New York building, roughly at the corner created by

Central Park West and West 81st Street (see the "Museum Map" for the American Museum of

Natural History). Though the Dinosaur Wing itself might seem elevated above the likelihood of

diminished coastlines exacerbated by the overconsumption of fossil fuels, the only guarantee

with future sea-level rise is that it will not be much more than 80 metres in elevation, given the

estimated volume of major planetary ice reserves (Poore, Williams, and Tracey), and barring

gross misunderstandings of future thermal expansion in ocean waters affected by warmer

climates. Keeping in mind the extent of current coastal habitation, potential sea-level rise

implicates us in the crux of our own knowledge about past mass extinctions of flora and fauna

both on land and in the water. In part, the diorama implies that we have entered a time of such

environmental alteration and biodiversity loss that humanity will be affected by the ongoing 6th

Mass Extinction; the iconic urban setting is crucial to considering processes such as

anthropogenic climate change driven sea-level rise. The diorama is an indictment of figures like

the Koch brothers themselves in their role as sponsors of public spaces like the museum's

dinosaur wing, since they are also prominent capitalists involved in the fossil fuel industry as it

continually pumps the hydrocarbon remnants of those past ages out of the ground for profit while

altering both the stratigraphy and the geography of the current world. Ultimately, the work asks

whether we, like the denizens of the dinosaur and earlier ages, are to become but fossilized,

carbon-form memories of our former glory, cultures, knowledge, and blunders.

The diorama, in its role as an art piece, situates a known, real-world place in a dystopian

scenario. The act of our backwards-glancing perspective is interrogated within the diorama, as

well as the location within which we perform this kind of action. The American Museum of Natural History is featured in this dystopian setting as both an intellectual space and a physical place in the world. With the inclusion of such geographic referencing, it is clear that some dystopias are not merely composed of fictional elements; they straddle a conceptual bridge between reality and speculations about the physical make-up of the future. They ask how we might identify with what will no doubt be a mixture of the recognizable and the strange, and involve what Peter Fitting names a "dystopian mood" or "a sense of a threatened near future" (140) that is also not accurately a sense separate from that of the present. As "William Gibson implies," dystopia "is equally applicable to a fiction genre and the real world" (Grubisic, Baxter, and Lee 19). Gibson, Octavia E. Butler (Streeby 24-25), and other writers suggest that dystopia is now—an idea played out in contemporary dystopian fictions, which exhibit the realities of the current day and how they can extend forward in imagined time. These new subgeneric contributions, which I am calling "ecocritical dystopias," do not hide from the terrible environmental destruction currently being wrought or the questionable social mores that perpetuate class systems even in the supposedly progressive structures today. They do not shy away from how rampant energy demands and technological advances actively shape our social systems, but incorporate such factors as active agents that form the landscapes of tomorrow based on activities today. While many dystopias sometimes seem detached and alien since they are set in the future and filled with aspects either unknown or perhaps even merely representative of the contemporary moment, this more recent body of texts is instead distinctly rooted in that which drives the present—and strikes a chord of dismay and detachment precisely *because* any reference to current geography and/or ecology therein seems unexpected and disturbing. These newer ecocritical dystopias deliberately involve the real world in some fashion, which infuses

speculative fiction (sf), or the consciously "literary" generic umbrella that includes science fiction literature, with the pressing concerns of the modern day. They resonate in their treatment of what Gerry Canavan outlines as "the reality principle that adheres to our real conditions of existence" when he describes Darko Suvin's terminology of sf's "cognitive estrangement" ("Suvin" xviii). These dystopias include bad future place displayed through both fiction and the world of the present, and within this relationship, the fictional element seeks, much as the apocalyptic mode does with its etymological roots of uncovering, to allow its audience to more clearly see their reality for what it is, and what it might become.

This dissertation argues that a distinct speculative subgenre has arisen within contemporary dystopian fiction. The term "ecocritical dystopia" not only emerges from concerns about ongoing environmental degradation as current social processes increasingly drive future changes, but works to insist that our present activities in altering environmental factors are, in turn, directly impacting oncoming societal alterations. One aspect of the issues under consideration is a focus on geographical features recognizable from our time, but the ecocritical dystopia allows us to further speculate about how related environmental conditions are entangled with social transformations that, in part, correspond with the availability and viability of both living spaces and resources. Social dynamics and hierarchies therefore affect and are affected by the alterations to places and spaces within these fictions. The ecocritical dystopia emerges as both a significant development and a rethinking of the priorities of dystopian literature, since it contemplates how the actions of present society directly interconnect with the possibilities and drawbacks of the future. In its role of imagining ecological, stratigraphical, and geographical shifts from the time of modern society, this body of fiction draws from both science- and

humanities-related concerns to enrich our contemplations about the future and ponder why our

current social undertakings might actually matter in grave, and sometimes irreversible, ways.

In the Introduction to their 2014 critical collection *Blast, Corrupt, Dismantle, Erase:*

Contemporary North American Dystopian Literature, Brett Josef Grubisic, Gisèle M. Baxter,

and Tara Lee ask what "literary dystopias reflect about the times" (7), and offer "[o]ne ready

answer" in "that their very abundance indicates publishers expecting a substantial audience for

authors foreseeing threatened near futures and writing cautionary, activist tales in reply" (7-8).

The editors see fit to divide their examination of North American[3] dystopian writing into specific

categories, "from the end of oil to the sunset years of humanity, [with] a variety of focal points

within the genre and the tonal consistency" (3). But it seems clear that the authors writing this

dystopian fiction at least "after the mid-1980s" (10)—which Grubisic, Baxter, and Lee cite

following Tom Moylan's application of "critical dystopia"—are channeling similar concerns at

the root of their variety of narratives. That is, the pre-millennial anxiety followed by a "post-

millennial disquiet … compounded by ongoing economic, political, and environmental crises"

(Grubisic, Baxter, and Lee 5) shares at least some of the attention to the environmental distress

that has been visible since well before the first wave of social action countering human effects on

nature in the 1960s and 1970s. Examples from this earlier time, Shelley Streeby reminds us,

include J.G. Ballard's "four disaster novels" and their "prophetically imagined drought, floods,

and other climate changes in most cases caused by industrial pollution and human activity" (22).

Contemporary dystopian literature, from even before the time that Moylan and Grubisic, Baxter,

and Lee pinpoint for the genesis of the "critical dystopia," reflects how necessary it is that we

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[3] By North America, in this study, I indicate Canada and the United States not in order to exclude
Mexico, but as a move to capture the self-image of the first two nation-states, which propagate
distinctly Utopian rhetoric as they work to represent their roles in the modern world.

understand that environmental concerns are integrated into social reflections on other issues. Whether a text highlights the "ends of water, oil, food, capitalism, empires, stable climates, ways of life, non-human species, [or] entire human civilizations" (Grubisic, Baxter, and Lee 11), the conversation is already about environmental factors—though these are not always explicitly stated. It is with this in mind that "Here, at the End: Contemporary North American Ecocritical Dystopian Fiction" works to parse the environmental nature of these contemporary dystopias, and I suggest and understand this element of contemporary dystopian work as ecocritical dystopianism.

Chapter 1 will go into more detail about what, exactly, the "ecocritical dystopia" is and how it figures within our current cultural history and conventions of analyzing literature; there, I will expand upon how this term resonates with literature, modern culture, the real world, and speculations about the future, but it is useful here, albeit briefly, to sketch my sense of the term. Unlike Moylan's "critical dystopia,"[4] with which authors essentially speculate about future scenarios that are somehow representations of or stand-ins for the world at the time of their writing—futures aping or satirizing the zeitgeist, but also ones not precisely hinging on realism—the ecocritical dystopia positions itself with imagined elements either directly following from the current day, or at least set in futures that could reasonably extend from aspects of the present. The language of the critical humanities complicates my use of both "representation" and "realism," which I acknowledge are problematic terms. But I position my

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[4] It appears from my reading Moylan alongside Lyman Tower Sargent that Moylan originally suggested the term, that Sargent reacts to it ("Three" 9), and that Moylan expands his discussion (188), though Raffaella Baccolini and Moylan together later imply that Sargent "suggested that these new works might usefully be understood as 'critical dystopias'" ("Dystopia" 3) even while they had also "each begun independent projects on the dystopian turn" (4).

use of realism in the sense of how Canavan parses the Suvinian "reality principle that adheres to

our real conditions of existence and thereby keeps the imagination honest" ("Suvin" xviii).[5]

"Representation," however, can perhaps be expressed best through Fredric Jameson's discussion

of his antinomies, for which he says he will "operate as though" they are "a *symptom* of a

contradiction" where "depth forms … tend to be projected up upon the surface in the anamorphic

flatness of a scarcely recognizable afterimage" (*Seeds* 4). For me, this last is the precise function

of critical dystopian representation of issues from the present: we cannot superimpose one world

over the other as with ecocritical dystopianism, but with the critical dystopia instead must,

through Jameson's phrasing again, "swim in both … worlds at once; learn to work the remote-

control glove within the contamination chamber; posit a noumenal shadow world of

seismographic movements and shoulderings that inscribes itself with grotesque delicacy as

minute and pencil-thin lines on the graph" (4-5).[6] The critical dystopia displays a future that is

symbolic of the issues affecting the current day, whereas ecocritical dystopianism extrapolates

the current situation by adapting its literal ecologies, geographies, etc. forward and offering,

instead, an environmental palimpsest.

    The ecocritical dystopia is not simply any terrible, cautionary society positioned in

separation from us by the gap of time (thus leaving us ample opportunities to mend our

deplorable ways), or one conceived as a mirror intended to show us our flaws, but is much closer

to the problematic heart of how we live now. In many cases, time is running or has already run

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[5] In discussing "ideology," James H. Kavanagh adds that it "is a social process that works on and through every social subject, that, like any other social process, everyone is 'in,' whether or not they 'know' or understand it. It has the function of producing an *obvious* 'reality' that social subjects can assume and accept, precisely as if it had not been socially produced and did not need to be 'known' at all" (311).

[6] Another way to visualize this is through W. J. T. Mitchell's "triangular relationship," "where representation is always *of* something or someone, *by* something or someone, *to* someone" (12).

out to effect the necessary social changes required to alter the ongoing present so that the

(prognosticated) near or oncoming future will, in turn, be free of the inherent environmental

problems that many increasingly encounter in the day-to-day, and especially under which those

at a disadvantage in our global society already suffer. Many members of our global village

already live on the crumbling edge of (or past) what much of Western society would deem

acceptable living conditions: some, even here, live in the dystopian now.[7] This is not a

speculative departure from reality. It seems a rather assured truth that the future will become

increasingly dystopian for many more people (and nonhuman animals) as human populations

grow, resources dwindle, and environmental conditions shift. As Jacob Silverman says,

"somewhere along the line, 'the future' has gone from a promise to a threat, stripped even of the

caveat that the righteous shall be saved." Frank Kermode also maintains the idea that "history

and eschatology" have become "the same thing" (25), which Joshua Gunn and David E. Beard

take up in their configuration of the imminent apocalyptic versus the immanent apocalyptic, and

while the ecocritical dystopia does not configure itself within the religious roots that drive

narratives about apocalypse, it intervenes by recognizing that contemporary dystopia connects

more with immanence than imminence. Or perhaps it is better put that ecocritical dystopianism's

imminent mode demands that we focus more clearly on the present, ongoing issues. That is,

ecocritical dystopianism critiques our current "cynicism," which, for Slavoj Žižek, consists of "a

disarming frankness [where] one 'admits everything,' yet this full acknowledgement of our

power interests does not in any way prevent us from pursuing those interests," since our society

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[7] The phraseology of the "dystopian now" is already propagating in various forms and is not my own term. Alternatively, Larissa Lai and Rita Wong suggest the "long now" (see their 2008 *Sybil Unrest*; see also their 2014 Orlando Lecture at the University of Alberta, "'all multiple and shattered and singing'"). While I adopt the "dystopian now" here, their term certainly has cachet.

seems to have transitioned into a mode best encapsulated by the adage, "'they know very well what they are doing, yet they are doing it'" (8). We know, for instance, that climate change and plastics affect our environments negatively, but we still continue to live in the same ways that alter the climate and use and discard plastics. Moreover, as a society we are all entangled in the problems we continue to create, which resonates with Silverman's assertion, since it is a departure from the notion that moralistic behaviour will provide escape from oncoming earthly ills cemented within the outcomes of the Anthropocene epoch.[8] Accordingly, the ecocritical dystopia channels the reality principle of the dystopian now in formulating its ensuing future societies, environments, living concerns, and physical places.

  Space and place "remain fundamental to the geographical imagination" (Hubbard and Kitchin, "Introduction" 7), and are central to conceptualizing the ecocritical dystopia, which, fittingly, resonates with the "idea that culture not only takes place, but makes place" (8). As we produce cultural impressions within particular geographical milieux—and this production includes something as vast as the Anthropocene and its related markers[9]—understandings of and engagements with places also transform. The intellectual, disciplinary tradition of geography registers such reconfigurations, and has shifted from considering "space to be a neutral container" (4) to "a rather different interpretation of spatiality, whereby space [is] deemed to be

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[8] Many thinkers have been critical of the "Anthropocene" nomenclature, for many reasons, and a wide variety of alternative terminologies have been suggested. A few key contributers to this discussion are Jason W. Moore, Donna Haraway, Bernard Stiegler, Edward O. Wilson, Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, and T.J. Demos, among others.

[9] Following from Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), "place does not have any particular scale associated with it, but is created and maintained through the 'fields of care' that result from people's emotional attachment" (Hubbard and Kitchin, "Introduction" 6).

inherently caught up in social relations, both socially produced and consumed" (5).[10] Henri

Lefebvre suggests that "place emerges as a particular form of space, one that is created through

acts of naming as well as the distinctive activities and imaginings associated with particular

social spaces" (Hubbard and Kitchin, "Introduction" 6; see also Alan Latham on Ed Soja). That

is, "being 'in place' involves a range of cognitive (mental) and physical (corporeal)

performances that are constantly evolving as people encounter place" (7), which perhaps leads to

Steve Pile's work on the unconscious and the psychoanalytic when he "explores the more

unpredictable effects of feelings of the uncanny in the formation of habitus as sense of place

through ideas of ghostliness and being haunted by places in the city" (Bridge 78; Pile). This

resonates with the ecocritical dystopia's use of loss and disappearance of known places alongside

our conceptions of those named and understood geographically and experientially, for our

understanding still resonates with how we have envisioned and experienced them. It is important

to also recognize that places are "relational and contingent, experienced and understood

differently by different people; they are multiple, contested, fluid and uncertain (rather than fixed

territorial units)" (Hubbard and Kitchin, "Introduction" 7).[11] This understanding builds out of a

reminder to geographers (starting in the 1970s) about the "sensual, aesthetic and emotional

dimensions of space" that rethinks "place as subjectively defined" and concludes that "what

constitute[s] a place [is] seen to be largely individualistic, although attachments and meanings

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[10] Robert T. Tally Jr.'s *Spatiality* (2013) is a thorough consideration of spatiality and its associated critical shifting.

[11] Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine acknowledge Doreen Massey's contributions to such formulations ("Editor's")—and to her, Hubbard and Kitchin add John Urry, Tim Cresswell, and others ("Introduction").

[are] often shared" (6).[12] As John Agnew explains in simple terms, "space refers to location somewhere and place to the occupation of that location. Space is about having an address and place is about living at that address. Sometimes this distinction is pushed further to separate the physical place from the phenomenal space in which the place is located. Thus, place becomes a particular or lived space. Space then refers to the fact that places cannot but be located somewhere. Place is specific and space is general" ("Space: Place" 82). The latter formulation of place resonates most with the ecocritical dystopia.

Place-building, however, is easily subsumed by such projects as politicized and class-based agendas; Steven Hoelscher explains that "specific 'forms of imagining' are utilized by elites to produce place and community identities. These local 'imagined communities' are, [he] demonstrates, often contested by non-elite groups" (Hague 22; Hoelscher 538).[13] This can be seen in the ecocritical dystopia through how the privileged re-cast urban spaces and places to their advantage, or even engage in larger (and self-serving) geoengineering-related projects. The elites configure their ideas of the world, regions, and localities very particularly, and critics contest that "the boundaries of place are … contingent, their seeming solidity, authenticity or permanence a (temporary) achievement of cultural systems of signification that are open to multiple interpretations and readings. Within geography, significant attention has therefore been

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[12] Kevin Lynch aligns with this shift when he considers "what one can see, how it feels underfoot, the smell of the air, the sounds of bells and motorcycles, how patterns of these sensations make up the quality of places, and how that quality affects our immediate well-being, our actions, and our understandings" (8). Lynch's work "allowed him to develop a deep appreciation of the significance of place within a city" (Gold 293), and he contributed to ideas about the perception of cities—notably concluding that familiarity, detailed knowledge, and landmarks play a strong role in connecting people to urban place (294), and "the close relationship between place and the formation of community identity" (295).

[13] This work by Hoelscher (and work by others) is partly in response to Benedict Anderson's ideas of "geographical imagination" and "imagined communities" (Hague).

devoted to the way that some taken-for-granted ways of representing the world (e.g. maps, atlases and aerial photographs) are in fact partial, distorted and selective, offering a particular 'way of seeing'" (Hubbard and Kitchin, "Introduction" 8).[14] In contrast, thinkers largely concur that the "humanistic use of methods that evoke the multisensory experience of place (i.e., its visual, aural, and tactile elements, as well as its smells and tastes) provides one means by which this bodily geography of place has been evoked," and from this perspective, "place is involved with *embodiment*" (Hubbard and Kitchin, "Introduction" 6; Thrift) in a direct manner that speaks of full immersion in one's environment.

The ecocritical dystopia mirrors ecocriticism's attention to the significance of setting in its treatment of place and location, for, as Michael J. McDowell states, "[w]riters dealing with landscape tend to emphasize their sense of place and to create narratives that are so geographically rooted, that so link narrative and landscape, that the environment plays a role as important as the roles of the characters and narrator" (387). This foregrounding of the environmental also connects with the reader when Neil Evernden argues that "the only … really relevant … discussion of man [sic] and environment is *the relation of self to setting*" (99).[15] This entanglement of the human with setting is crucial to how we contemplate ourselves in the future—a concern underpinning ecocritical dystopias. It is not enough to merely observe and document in an attempt to manage nature; we must interpret and (re)imagine our role as contributors to lived environments. As Evernden says, "Environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning" (103). Ecocriticism's scope therefore moves beyond that of ecology.

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[14] This follows from a rejection of "universal definitions of 'place,'" which insists "that places are real-and-imagined assemblages constituted via language" (Hubbard and Kitchin, "Introduction" 8).

[15] Here Evernden is applying Francis Sparshott's discussion of the nature of relationships toward ours with the environmental.

Especially in this time of anthropogenic climate change, while we contemplate whether to prolong our current ways of living through technology, reconceptualising our relationship with the environmental is key. As Glen A. Love suggests, "[w]e become increasingly aware, as our technological world begins to crack beneath our feet, that our task is not to remake nature so that it is fit for humankind, but as Thoreau says, to make humankind right for nature" (234). Ecocriticism insists that, while we seem to continue along with established social projects, at the core even these are rooted in engagements with setting; this rootedness indicates a need to rethink how we approach viewing environment, or "nature." As McDowell implies, a transition of human understanding is only really made meaningful through the power of story,[16] and Evernden highlights a "connection between the individual and his [sic] particular place" since the relationship between human and environment fosters a "recognition that the establishment of self is impossible without the context of place" (101).[17] Ecological crisis is therefore caught up in our environmental sense of self.[18] Environmental change is a factor relevant to the future and how we interact with it, as Dana Phillips reminds us by commenting that, if Bill McKibben "is right, nature may soon begin dictating a new worldview of its own, setting harsher limits to our thinking, and our behaviour, for us" (219). Phillips argues that, in the face of future

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[16] In discussing "Pueblo oral narratives," Leslie Marmon Silko explains that "[l]ocation, or 'place,' nearly always plays a central role …. Indeed, stories are most frequently recalled as people are passing by a specific geographical feature or the exact place where a story takes place" ("Landscape" 269). Though the ecocritical dystopia functions somewhat in reverse to this relationship and recalls distinct cultural places through narrative, it builds on a similar foundation of geographical recognition.

[17] Evernden argues that we achieve a "sensation of knowing, [a] sensation of being part of a known place. Perhaps it is a cultural simulation of a sense of place" (100).

[18] Love highlights "what appears to be nothing less than an ecologically suicidal path by the rest of the culture" (233).

environmentally-driven events (and, the ecocritical dystopia suggests, present ones), it would be

"an historically original act" to treat "the imagination of the real as real" (219).[19] Within this

understanding about how we might engage with the real in terms of imagination, the moment of

the ecocritical dystopia resonates with Phillips's suggestion about the future, for the

contemporary dystopian subgenre works directly to consider alterations to the real with which

we have already formed our sense of identity. It is with drastic environmental shifts to our

identified places that we must also adapt identity in order to learn to live in harmony with the

"natural," which only makes sense, since we are already natural elements ourselves.

The ecocritical dystopia involves speculative alteration(s) to familiar places, or at least

our sense of them, which could play out in several ways—including fluctuating or extreme

temperature gradients, alterations to local and regional weather patterns, and/or shifts in flora and

fauna populations in a bioregion. Whether physically articulated as a carving out or depositing of

new geographies, or otherwise conveyed as a myriad of environmental impressions and

absences, these ecocritical dystopian future elements always extend present conditions into

tomorrow's potential permutations. Such a connection with the current day does not rule out the

ecocritical dystopian possibilities of fictional societies set even further into the future; the

specific separation of time does not quite matter as much as a connection to the familiar and how

that conception of the real might have been altered through a given process of change. For

instance, though I hesitate to immediately call a text like H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895)

an ecocritical dystopia in its own right, clear environmental transformations have occurred in the

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[19] Phillips discusses "what Jameson has called 'the practical reconquest of a sense of place'" that "he terms 'cognitive mapping'" as an "establishment of 'an *imaginary* relation to the *real*'"—which Phillips "understand[s] to mean the imagination of the real as real, as something the *matters*" (219).

narrative from Wells's time and thus forward "more than thirty million years" (Wells 110)—and these alterations reflect the future of southeastern England through the Time Traveller's suggestion of "London" (Wells 64, 88), "the Metropolitan Railway" and the greenspace "[a]bout London" (64), and "Banstead" in the distance, in the direction of "Combe Wood" (68).[20] But Wells's text is not particularly focused on presenting changes to places and spaces as main drivers of plot or the social shifts from Victorian England to the times of the Eloi and Morlocks and beyond. The ecocritical dystopia's insistence on referencing specific geographic developments highlights how we are creating environmentally-based dystopian concerns through our actions; even if we do not see these ourselves, our descendants will unavoidably see them. That is, the contexts of environmental shifts in the ecocritical dystopia are directly related to those of the present day—and not only in spirit as in the mimicry of the critical dystopia, but in terms of conditions directly lived today, and inescapably experienced in some fashion in the future.

In this time of the Anthropocene, fiction and other creative media (e.g. film, poetry, visual art, and so on) are key to imagining how our world is changing, and will change—and the ecocritical dystopia is an integral tool in narrating the potentialities of the future. These works tell stories that situate themselves in known locales and regions, which in turn affect audiences differently than does purely data-based information told matter-of-fact about the world in

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[20] While Benjamin Beard is correct when he says that "Banstead is a small village outside of London" (127), he incorrectly states that "Combe Wood is an area in Shenley" (127). The current day Combe Wood is inside the M25 ring-road in the north of Greater London (in Shenley), but Wells's book is actually referring to what is now called the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Both Banstead and this natural area are situated in the southern part of what is now Greater London—now separated by the M25—which places the Time Traveller closer to central London.

general.[21] The strength of the ecocritical dystopia is an understanding about the real-world

experience that is narrated and offered up through an intertwining of realism and speculation.

This subgenre works to refocus thinking about environmental alteration toward the personal

region and / or locale, and thus the personal experience—a shift from the vaster, more planetary,

and more abstract environmental concerns of previous dystopian contributions. The emergence

of ecocritical dystopian fiction emphasizes a more localized and personalized configuring of how

the future might be imagined or affected, which is crucial to influencing current engagements

with our living environments. In contrast, the difficulty of teaching climate-based science is

explained in a post-2016 United States election *New York Times* article about secondary school

students in Wellston, Ohio, which considers how a connection to the real-world is an important

factor in guiding opinions. As one initially-skeptical student put it upon witnessing alterations to

"a local stream," it "was the realization that she had failed to grasp the damage done to her

immediate environment … that made her begin to pay more attention" (Harmon). The success of

this lesson was in telling a narrative about how such an abstract concept as climate change is

relevant on a localized dimension. The comparable value of the ecocritical dystopia is in working

to highlight the importance of imagining such close engagements with not only current

geographies, but more accurately with the associated ecological systems altered through the

vehicle of story anchoring the present to tomorrow. This body of fiction considers the

interconnectivity of human social systems with environmental ones as both are projected into the

future, and its pairing of fact with speculation drives its relevance in the current moment.

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[21] A hybrid text in this area is Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway's *The Collapse of Western Civilization* (2014), in which a future historian looks back to our time through the lens of a scientific background. The book also contains ecocritical dystopian elements in how it maps out "New York City in the twenty-fourth century" (34), for example.

Fiction imagining current and future socio-environmental issues allows its audience to contextualize their own position in relation to both the present and that which might ensue. As Mike Hulme asserts, it is important to re-examine climate change "start[ing] with contributions from the interpretive humanities and social sciences, married to a critical reading of the natural sciences, and informed by a spatially and historically contingent view of knowledge" (39). One outcome of such a reconfiguration is the creative production of fiction that handles the natural sciences knowledgeably and sets its narratives within future iterations of real-world place rife with a background of ecological, geographical, geological, and cultural histories. This process has long been under development. Stefan Skrimshire underlines the importance of the creative humanities in speculating about the future when he references a seminal scientific study from the 1970s called *The Limits to Growth*. Skrimshire even recalls that one of the contributors, Donella Meadows, asserts that, "as scientists, the authors of *The Limits to Growth* had ignored the centrality that mythic, dramatic and narrative ways of communicating possible futures have played, and continue to play, even in the imagination of 'secular' human cultures" (Skrimshire, "Introduction" 1). Meadows explains that (along with her colleagues) she was focused purely on scientific inquiry: "we had not thought much about the culture in which we were speaking, though we ourselves were part of that culture. But we were at MIT; we had been trained in science. The way we thought about the future was utterly logical" (qtd. in Skrimshire 1; Meadows). One motivation for my study of the ecocritical dystopia is this realization that a narration of the implications of scientifically-"predicted" and/or speculative futures achieves a more well-rounded understanding of the connected issues—or at least engages an audience in modes of investment that resonate within their ingrained cultural registers. As Meadows recognizes, a connection to narrative, to imagination, is an essential element missing from

merely a presentation of data; those on the receiving end of story are more moved by how something fictional makes them reflect on their current situation and their personal future than they are by mere statistics. This is of course not to say that other information is not important, but fictions (and comparable forms of the creative humanities) call for audience self-reflection and therefore make us feel the impacts of related changes. In short, the manner in which facts are imparted, even through the subgeneric vehicles of fiction, is of great importance.

Perhaps in response to this quality, but certainly in response to the myriad environmental crises of the present day, the ecocritical dystopia works to bridge gaps between narrative or creative work and Western technoscientific understandings of the world. Important scientific work enmeshed with cultural considerations from a humanities perspective is that much more relevant and valid as a register of the real world, since the combination works to add a deeper understanding to the issues at hand. The implication is that critics and theoreticians from both the social and natural sciences need to value creative work as a means of interpreting, speculating upon, and, in turn, informing contemporary discourses—whether those are cultural or scientific. These narratives imbue that which we will leave behind with the residues of the present day, critiquing our present while speculating about the future. In the latter sense, fiction imagining the future has already demonstrated its capacity for affecting the present. The science fiction of the late Isaac Asimov, for example, has actively influenced contemporary robotics and information technology (Clarke, "Asimov"). Moreover, today, as Paul Graham Raven argues, "science fiction [i]s a representational tool for energy and climate research, or more particularly for 'energy futures research'" (1), and offers its specific modes of thought toward narrating social structures and processes as permutations of the future in which our current climate and energy concerns continue to impose significant pressures. The ecocritical dystopia, in particular, contextualizes

the importance of the present in influencing the future, and its writers thus imagine the gravity of

our eco-sensitive activities not only as they trouble us in the current day, but as they are

magnified forward in time. This contextualization is essential in terms of conveying a deeper

understanding of contemporary environmental issues to society in general. The related

consideration of forthcoming cultural registers is essential in imagining how deteriorating

environmental scenarios will affect the places in which we live. That is, by contemplating how

culture and society will transform in response to alterations to familiar places and spaces,

ecocritical dystopian fiction foregrounds the urgency with which our social changes should be

considered in order to mitigate potentially negative outcomes.

In the abstract, the ecocritical dystopia works to incorporate the large-scale events and

processes of our time into particular milieux, though, as both social and natural scientific inquiry

have been establishing, the future has a complex system of residues that our society will leave.[22]

In what science writer David Quammen calls a long view of time that is "paleontological in

scope" ("Planet" 163), through the lens of the Anthropocene we see that, "in many of Earth's

processes, the influence of humans—prosthetically extended through technology and fossil-fuel

energy—is eclipsing that of the rest of nature" (Szerszynski 169). Actual effects of our presence

on this planet have become recognizable today and in the geologic record. The ecocritical

dystopia registers this in terms of our sense of familiarity with geographic and ecological

markers as they adapt to the stratigraphic changes imposed by human industry and society.

Spaces and places in the world have been physically altered by our activities and processes in the

modern world, and ecocritical dystopian fiction plays a part in imagining these phenomena

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[22] For a related discussion of American politics and culture, see Brent R. Bellamy's "Residues of
Now" (2014).

extrapolated into the future. Interpreting research in the natural sciences for a cultural context, sociologist Bronislaw Szerszynski discusses four alterations that are happening to the physical world that are "less about what humanity is doing" and more about the "*traces* that humanity will leave behind" (169). Such a mode of thinking is not only the purview of the ecocritical dystopia, but transcends this body of fiction to register with the evidence that paleobiologist Jan Zalasiewicz and his co-authors employ to argue for the acceptance of the Anthropocene as a formal geological epoch: "*lithostratigraphic signal*[,] a trace in the actual composition of the rock being formed"; "*chemostratigraphic signal*, comprising layers of pollution and altered geochemical composition"; "*biostratigraphic signal*"; and "'*sequence stratigraphic' signal*" (Szerszynski 169-70; Zalasiewicz et al., "Stratigraphy"). The first involves an alteration of sedimentary patterns as waterways and the coastal boundaries change, as well as "the creation of novel strata such as cities and transport infrastructures, mines, wells and boreholes, excavated or in-filled ground, and preserved artefacts" (Szerszynski 169). The second indicates the many processes by which the chemical compositions of the natural world are altered, and reaches to even the planet's deepest waters (the Mariana Trench), which have been marked by the traces of our activities (Joyce, "Pollution"). The third shift involves "the widespread replacement of natural vegetation with agricultural monocultures; the alteration of marine biotic communities by trawling; increased rates of species extinction, species migration and invasive species; and the effects of anthropogenic chemical change on ecosystems" (Szerszynski 170). The final alteration suggested is produced by a severe alteration in ocean levels. Clearly, geological evidence is a key aspect of thinking about any new marker on earth's timescale, and the naming of the Anthropocene was envisioned to imply newness imposed by human activities. In a similar logical framing of thought, the ecocritical dystopia articulates newness in our familiar places and

spaces, in our familiar environmental systems, but also posits how these changes affect our social interactions and mores, thus working to make concrete the fact that we are altering our surroundings constantly, and are doing so to such an extent and such a rate that we may look back at even the 2010s as those halcyon days before the world, and even North America, became really and dramatically altered.[23] For instance, the October 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, "Global Warming of 1.5 °C," argues that only twelve years remain to alter future, dire climate effects—though even this does not address the role of potential "tipping points" (Harvey).

Authors of the ecocritical dystopia imagine how the physical world will look and how people will live in a future where we have altered even these stratigraphical elements. Ecocritical dystopianism poses the question that is not only relevant to the North American regional and local near-future, but even to its present. The genre asks, what if the canary in the coal mine is not so distant spatially, as it is likely also not temporally? What if the alarm must be sounded in your local town or city? What if the strident call actually comes from all around, and even affects you? While Emmalie Dropkin argues that "our inability to imagine large quantities—or distant futures—in concrete terms may doom us all," and I admire the desire for positive, healing creative work rather than the potential of an ostensible "End," the ecocritical dystopia does the work of making the future tangible in our experiential places, and thus removes the conceptual distancing that previous dystopian or apocalyptic fictions perpetuated.

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[23] We talk about Houston, we still talk about New Orleans; these are both ongoing and important today. But one problem with our self-referential mode of focus is in eclipsing our larger impact. While Harvey brought biblical-style storm rains to Texas and then Louisiana, "[a]t least 1,200 people [were] killed and millions … left homeless following devastating floods that … hit India, Bangladesh and Nepal … in one of the worst flooding disasters to have affected the region in years" (Farand; Kaphle). "Here, at the End" focuses on Canada and the United States, but these issues are more broadly wide-ranging than what happens on one continent, and just as real.

These fictions for the Anthropocene, these ecocritical dystopias, work to help us question how we live in the world, just as the *Natural History Museum* diorama is set up to do. The difference, however, is in a clear articulation of how our current social places and spaces will be physically affected by the environmental transformations imposed. How will our municipalities and urban sprawl, our environs and "Greater" city expanses, our locales and regions, our natural haunts and panoramas, our energy and material resources, and our land and environment-related relationships acclimatize as we increasingly witness the far-reaching effects of how we have been living? We are all aware of the excesses that Western society perpetuates upon the earth's systems—even if one is a climate change denier[24] or fossil energy apologist[25]—and it is not that North America is alone, *per se*, in its industrial ravages, or that other social systems located in other parts of the world, with different ideologies and civil frameworks, are without impact. All humanity affects the systems of the earth in some way, to some degree, even if one's community lives as sustainably as possible. The reasoning behind identifying the ecocritical dystopia is not to point to only North America in blame, though it does not pull back from a hard, necessary, self-reflexive look at its involvement in the ongoing problems. The dystopias here are not just fictionalized, wholly imagined creations that stand in for the ills of one particular ideological bent, as with fictionalized critiques of totalitarianism. But the ecocritical dystopia interjects with the important consideration that North American culture and the places and spaces that that culture straddles are not exempt from the changes introduced by the human lifestyles being led.

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[24] As "97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree" (NASA), these alterations are human-caused. In fact, as climatologist Rasmus E. Benestad and others have assessed, the holdout 3 percent of published papers that deny an anthropogenic cause are fundamentally flawed in some way (Benestad et al.; Foley).

[25] Such an approach assumes that we are so doomed that no change is necessary; with this logic, proponents argue for an *increase* in fossil fuel usage.

The ecocritical dystopia, as a body, functions to indicate that individuals living in today's self-involved culture cannot divest themselves from either acknowledging an impact on the rest of the world, or feeling the effects of that process. The ecocritical dystopia tells us that no one is exempt from those effects, anymore. Ultimately, though, it hopes that we will work to mitigate its speculations, and to adapt humanity to a better engagement with the places and spaces it affects. It is true that, in recent times, we seem to have started investing in social elements with a hope to lessen our impact on our "Environment," but this sense of the word is one often co-opted to indicate something distant from us, whereas, in reality, it denotes our very surroundings. The ecocritical dystopia, despite its aims at effecting altruistic socio-environmental shifts, also acknowledges that we are, at this very moment, completely plugged in to a global social framework that does not function in concert with planetary systems.

Dissertation Overview

Each of the texts chosen to structure this thesis locates its plot on North American soil, beach, swamp, streets, prairies, deserts, or waterways, and so on—and each presents an environmental concern narrated from some potential point in our world's future. While I focus on three primary authors to direct my discussion, I interpret their works in relation to other relevant works of dystopian fiction, many of which include the contemporary concerns of issues like climate change, energy futures, resource availability, and Indigenous futurisms, and the problems in these narratives demonstrate that we have altered the connection of future life with the places we know today. With a vast body of dystopian writing pertinent to such discussions, I have structured "Here, at the End" alongside two guiding principles. First, the relevant texts of my three focal authors progress forward in publication time toward the present day, with the last

chapter discussing the most recent text and my concluding section itself imagining future

dystopian and related speculative fiction through the lens of today's cultural and critical

registers. Second, this structural arrangement parallels my discussion and its consideration of a

generic shift from previous dystopian forms toward the "ecocritical dystopia," which is first

analyzed in Chapter 1, The Ecocritical Dystopia. This chapter delves into both the relevance of a

new subgeneric dystopian term in relation to previous dystopian forms and the developments

into the present day, then parses the term with an eye to unpacking its roots in the concerns of the

contemporary moment.

This ecocritical dystopian formulation denies its characters as they seek the sanctuary of

fully Utopian[26] outcomes in the face of disaster, alters known landscapes through environmental

catastrophe (sometimes nearly beyond recognition) even while the given society attempts to

overcome the effects of these alterations through the use of technology, posits major shifts in

human social structures as biomes themselves change, and interrogates how environmental crisis

in the contemporary day can be so heavily influenced by social, political, economic, and resource

demands. My central texts themselves interrogate the future in different stages, with the rather

near tomorrow of Octavia E. Butler's Parable books, the not-so-distant future and then even

further future of Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam novels, and then a return to what is practically

the present with Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle*. All three fictional worlds have distinct

resonances with the real world in ways that the authors either likely wish they had not been

prescient about, since the implied changes often bring the turmoil of violent social and ecological

upheaval, or that they deliberately included to indicate those burgeoning elements already rooted

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[26] Following Tom Moylan's example, I will employ capital "U" Utopia when referring to a
worldview or political idea, and utopia or utopian when indicating the associated fiction.

within present-day society. We are already well into the geoengineering processes of the Anthropocene epoch, after all. While my study explores the nature of speculative future spaces and places of North America through its discussion of the primary texts (just as the texts do themselves), the last chapter brings the critical lens back to a discussion of issues relevant to a sense of home place—which for the writing of this dissertation as well as some parts of the last novel, is partly the province of Alberta, with its controversial economic and energy reliance on fossil fuel resources.

This final movement of my project also makes a deliberate point of interpreting our conceptions of North American landscapes through the perspective of Indigenous literature, though I am not a person of Indigenous descent and like others in my position, to borrow Norah Bowman's phrasing, "am a settler colonial scholar and continue to benefit from settler colonialism in my role as an academic and an ally" (26). Notably, the novel analyzed here is a work of homecoming that also tries to find a place in the modern world despite all the pressures of contemporary Western society and the transformations that it has already wrought to the locales and regions with which we identify. I also work to conclude on a more hopeful note, in looking toward the future and forthcoming speculative works in the vein of editors Ed Finn and Kathryn Cramer's anthology *Hieroglyph: Stories and Visions for a Better Future* (2014).[27] My study therefore engages with the relevant topics in a deliberately structured manner, not only progressing forward in a chronological fashion of the times of publication, but also ending with a work and connected discussion that represents a near-future closest to the contemporary day. This is apt, since the ecocritical dystopia ultimately seeks to reduce our sense of separation from speculative futures by setting its narratives in locales and regions at least nearly recognizable.

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[27] Vandana Singh's story "Entanglement" is often referenced as such a hope-giving narrative.

The crux of the matter is, of course, that while we readily think we can recognize these places, some significant change has been enacted, and they are materially altered from our expectations. This is the occurrence that alarms us, because it is a tangible suggestion that we will also experience the environmental fallout of today in our future.

After detailing the parameters of the ecocritical dystopia and theorizing its generic depths, this project moves on to examining three case studies, essentially, in the progression of ecocritical dystopianism. Each presents an important consideration in the development and aesthetics of the genre. Chapter 2, The Ecocritical Dystopia and Cultural Exodus in Butler's Parable Series, fields our inability to find truly Utopian places in the age of the Anthropocene and its associated environmental shiftings, or at least to truly escape catastrophe en route to regions and locales with such potential. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) form the backbone of this discussion, as the action in the novels shifts the overall crisis from a purely social one to gain outside perspective on the driving forces behind that upheaval. With her fiction, Butler imagines the rise of the demagogue in the United States, but as a result of how social tensions related to natural resource scarcity and environmental instability uncover extreme elements always present in society, such as racially-motivated violence and social control. The chapter examines how *Sower* and *Talents* present disaster and exodus in both novels through the extended impacts of climate shift on the places and environment of the American West Coast. The environmental changes occurring in Butler's novels become more clearly visible, and more firmly rooted in recognizable geographies, as the original narrator Lauren leaves her familiar territory in search of the succor of a new home. In this movement, Butler shifts from a previous iteration of dystopian generic qualities to that of the ecocritical dystopia, since the landscape encountered on Lauren's journey also indicates the real-world,

albeit transformed. Importantly, this chapter also reconfigures how previous critics have read the first novel, *Sower*, at least, and demonstrates its work as one of the earlier elements of the ecocritical dystopia—thus placing Butler's speculative thought once again at the forefront of innovative fiction about the future, and these texts at the earlier end of this subgeneric spectrum.

Having established Butler's Parable books as formative in a consideration of how North American places and spaces might be environmentally altered in the future, "Here, at the End" continues with a contemplation of writing that both incorporates and eclipses semantic knowledge about locales and regions understood in current times. This is the tension at the heart of Atwood's first MaddAddam novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003), at the very least, in which the character Snowman is revealed to have once been called Jimmy, before an unspecified cataclysmic event ostensibly rendered him the "last man" in a world full of genetically-engineered fauna and anthropogenically-driven environmental alterations. With narrated flashbacks as well as an eventual physical journey on foot, Snowman travels back to the site of both his personal trauma, and that of the human world. Chapter 3, The Ecocritical Dystopia's Revealing of Place in Atwood's MaddAddam Series, interprets *Oryx* through its obscuring of place and the place-related psychiatric understandings of trauma, and analyzes how the narrators of the series (*Oryx*, *The Year of the Flood*, *MaddAddam*) interact with place both pre- and post-disaster—especially *in situ* on the already-altered eastern seaboard of the United States, as a previously more-global and continental knowledge is eclipsed, and the suddenly more-local perspective enters into conflict with an increasingly-present natural world. This re-reading of *Oryx* is essential as *Flood* (2009) features two narrators who handle the catastrophe differently than does *Oryx*'s narrator, and the first of these (Toby) mostly carries on from that "second" book into the "third" (*MaddAddam*, 2013), though other narrative voices interject into the final

installment. While an understanding of a physical and social environment relatable in the present day is finally lost in the MaddAddam books, our connectivity to the narrative is nonetheless preserved by the ecocritical dystopian mode, and contemporary concerns about ecological landscapes are carried forward even as extreme events unfold. This third chapter features speculations about how changes to the near-future will affect those living in that time, when the processes that are already in motion today have wrought a world so very different, and yet so easily connected to what we are familiar with in our lives. The chapter asks what happens to the familiarity of a place within the psychological trauma that is likely to accompany such a dystopian future.

While the world of Atwood's MaddAddam books produces a society disconnected from the geographical and cultural markers of the present, King's *The Back of the Turtle* (2014) drives home the importance of our association with environmental communities and their disruptors being created even now. In King's novel, ecological crises are presented as events resonant with both today and the very near future of the British Columbia coast, the Athabasca oil sands, and the periphery of suburban Lethbridge, Alberta. Chapter 4, The Dystopian Now: Placing Indigenous North America in King's *Back of the Turtle*, retracts from speculative outcomes of climate change run rampant through our society's use of nearly all fossil fuel resources, and returns the focus of near-future dystopian speculations to a time that is almost, but not quite, today.[28] In doing so, this project allows for a reflection on not only the very near future, but also the past and how it has led to the present day. Such contemplations, in fact, are demonstrated when the character Gabriel undergoes a realization about his role as a scientist working for a

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[28] Though perhaps the suggestion is that the narrative allows us to imagine a further time when the characters must live without fossil fuel resources, in a North American environment harshly altered by processes associated with climate change.

transnational corporation with a very shady environmental record. After having disappeared, he is journeying back to his matrilineal roots on the Canadian West Coast, but this process is one of mourning as he also goes to contemplate his personal role in the ecological catastrophe inflicted on the regional flora and fauna, which was a direct result of his company's activities in the fossil fuel industry. Gabriel, an Indigenous man, is experiencing a homecoming to where disaster has worked to depopulate and deculture his familial place, and he blames himself as the originator of the environmental destruction. This chapter thus features not only our current economic, industrial, and energy resource trends but also the tropes and concerns of dystopian speculations in North American Indigenous fiction. King's novel is relevant to the impacts of both colonial actions post-Contact and the aggregate of environmental crises that have been foisted upon the unique ecological landscapes of the continent since then. In particular, this section analyzes the environmental toll both observed and speculated about for the regional Alberta fossil fuel industry as it pushes continually to shift extracted products out of land-bound areas toward ostensibly more desirable coastal points of egress, and thus foreign markets. *The Back of the Turtle* is a story of the damage we inflict upon our own home places in the name of current social and economic systems, and Chapter 4 will read King's text through an ecocritical dystopian lens that situates it in the blurry space of time between the present and tomorrow.

With this last text, my dissertation caps off its project of reading dystopias about environmental transformations to place as also affecting a sense of the temporal. Some of these novels are set well into the future, and some are not so distantly located, but the crises of place within them also distort our separation from those speculative future events, making the potential catastrophe that much more vital to our consideration of the present world, and the North American landscape in particular. The concluding remarks of "Here, at the End," despite the

study's sustained discussion of dystopian fiction's form from roughly the 1990s to the present

(the "ecocritical dystopia"), direct its efforts to speculating future moves in the genre and related

areas as our current world continues to transition into increasingly showing elements displayed

in some of these narratives. As the chapters themselves will examine, our real-world, North

American spaces and places are already being altered by environmental processes of change.

How, then, might the future iterations of this fiction imagine their own potential futures?

Paradoxically, in these final comments, I highlight the utopian registers within ecocritical

dystopian fiction, though I earlier demonstrate that the classic expectation of Utopian spaces and

places is rendered negligible or even void in these newer critiques of altered landscapes. The

Utopian registers of ecocritical dystopia are, in fact, not caught up in a reliance on the

preservation of landscapes and culturally iconic or relatable regions and locales. Rather, the

survivors of these dystopias—those who carry the hope of the future with them, or as the dying

father in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) indicates to his son, those who "'carry the fire'"

(278)—are the only Utopian promise in these devastated, or at least vastly altered worlds. This is

as true of the scions of Lauren Olamina's Earthseed religion in Butler's *Talents* as it is of

Atwood's Craker character Blackbeard in *MaddAddam*, or King's Mara and Gabriel in *The Back

of the Turtle*; importantly, each of these characters must continue to live in the world past a time

of catastrophe. The speculative future is not devoid of Utopian potential, but this facet cannot

continue to rely on preserving the old order, the trappings of a society that has pushed itself to

the brink. The "end" in this project is not simply a nod to the supposed finality of apocalyptic

processes—rather it is an assurance and even an assertion that the "here" each of us inhabits will

undergo modifications in the future, and that to survive that process, we must pay close attention

to the inherent revelations being made available by the changes themselves. We must imagine

how we might fit into or be disconnected from the environmental community of the future. The spaces and places of today *will* be altered in the years ahead, and ecocritical dystopian literature is nothing if not honest about that fact, even if these shifts are articulated in speculative, fictional ways. It is up to the communities of the world to consider the potential directions we can hope to go and still continue to survive, and ecocritical dystopianism queries how we think we might possibly take that survival for granted, given the multifaceted and damaging modes of living with which we have ingrained our modern selves. These considerations are written as much for the present as they are for those who will follow, but it is for them, for the inheritors of our contemporary times, that ecocritical dystopian fiction considers the injustices and detrimental processes of the present day.

Chapter 1

The Ecocritical Dystopia

This project interrogates a new brand of dystopian fiction I am labelling the "ecocritical

dystopia," which incorporates environmental alterations to spaces and places known in the

present within what we now call North America, and offers specific perspectives on not only

cultural but also geographical futures.[29] While previous dystopian fiction has, of course,

incorporated real world settings, the engagement between the narrative and these places has been

of a different kind. Mary Shelley's speculative novel *The Last Man* (1826)—often billed as an

early specimen of science fiction alongside her earlier *Frankenstein* (1818)—involves events in

Windsor, London, Constantinople, Rome, and other real-world places, but it does not really

imagine physical alterations to the places that the narrator Lionel Verney and his companions

experience. The focus is not on the social impacts that transformations to locale or region might

bring (or vice versa), so *The Last Man* is not quite an ecocritical dystopia. Only the distant,

"foreign" landscapes of the Americas (169) are affected by such upheavals, and not the European

settings within which Verney experiences the seeming end of humanity. In fact, Shelley's

narrative does not work to consider the narrative's physical settings in the 2070s and beyond at

all, unless of course the acceleration of history paradoxically reverts social constructs by that

time to what is arguably a society poised upon the brink of the Industrial Revolution, without

ever reaching it. Even so, there would only be traces of Shelley's society. A feudal or even post-

feudal society in the 2070s and so on would be but a palimpsest of that time, not to mention our

day, but not being clairvoyant, Shelley could hardly have known the elements of our society,

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[29] I say geographical here, though the implications are deeper and more wide-ranging, since alterations to geography also suggest alterations to elements like geology and ecology, for instance.

with its rampant technological changes. This palimpsestic aspect is one of the lessons of both

Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*

(1980), though the former, at least, does not seem to focus on a specific place in driving the

alterations from the author's contemporary time to the future. In a similar fashion, while E.M.

Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1909) describes a future society living underneath the surface of

areas of human habitation that once were, like Wessex and Brisbane (which have obviously

become quite modified places that include a diminished or poisoned atmosphere of some kind),

the emphasis is not really on the environmental alterations to the landscape, but the changes to

the society that lives underground. The difference for more recent, ecocritical dystopian fiction is

that a social adaptation to the physical environment of the near future is allotted more sway in

the plot.

The ecocritical dystopia suggests that we take our concerns about global issues and focus

our attention on specific localities and regions perhaps as a means to bring about social

revelation, or perhaps even as a means to document our long, slow slide into an irreversibly-

altered world through the effects of the big-picture, environmental players such as climate

change, ocean acidification, and the other Nine Planetary Boundaries.[30] Increasingly, in trends

relating to fiction, these transformations wrought to the North American landscape feature not

only the typical iconic cities, but also the obscure, the remote, the type of locale where previous

narratives might have created a sense of utopian refuge from the vast, apocalyptic events

affecting the outside world. No longer is the out-of-the-way place exempt from crisis and

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[30] As 28 internationally-recognized scientists indicated in 2009, there is a set of nine boundaries beyond which we "could generate abrupt or irreversible environmental changes" ("Planetary"; Steffen et al., "Planetary"; "Quantitative"; "Nine"). These "nine planetary boundaries" indicate that human activity is implicated in ongoing environmental degradation around the globe. The nine planetary boundaries are comparable but not equal to "earth system boundaries" ("Earth").

disaster, what with the all-encompassing destructive processes of the modern world. Even texts such as Kim Stanley Robinson's 2017 *New York 2140*, which examines the titular, iconic metropolis, often refines its lens to specific neighbourhoods within the city superstructure and to how future alterations have affected the resident populace. These fictional responses draw on the fact that people and their communities tend to identify with the supposed stability of their localities and regions. As Doreen Massey asserts, "the search after the 'real' meanings of places, the unearthing of heritages and so forth," is partly "a response to desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of all the movement and change. A 'sense of place,' of rootedness, can provide … stability and a source of unproblematical identity" ("Global" 172). But the world is dynamic and resists that "fixity," and a given place in the modern world is never culturally in stasis; nor is it environmentally or even geologically immune from alterations. As globalized society grows further into the resource-consumptive and technocentric assumptions of modernity, these shifts seem to accelerate. What does it mean when that acceleration reaches an endpoint in conflict with social elements that desire communal preservation? Perhaps this is the notion of crisis. Perhaps this is the origin of a resonance like that in Nicolas Dickner's *Apocalypse for Beginners* (2010), which articulates the culture of fear about constant catastrophe that permeated the end of the Cold War and the subsequent fallout, with decades of conflict and environmental threats constantly on one's horizon. The question, however, really is more about what followed out of that era of concerns and transitioned into a more modern set of foci on potential catastrophes.

Authors of ecocritical dystopias speculate about how the machinery of modern society will affect our near future in ways we do not want. These processes introduce changes under which our increasing blight on ecological systems assumes a sense of permanence—as with the

accumulation of fertilizers and associated agricultural runoff creating "Dead Zones" in areas like the Gulf of Mexico beyond the Mississippi River terminus, or increasingly in Lake Winnipeg, one of the world's largest freshwater lakes. Some types of shifts we have already made are indeed irreversible, or nearly, which is why the altered strata of the planet have led scientists to propose the new geological epoch of the Anthropocene. In response to such sweeping environmental alterations, communities tend to foster the resilience of cultural, historical, and other sociological institutions. But while many people seek to preserve a sense of local identity, Massey interprets at least the communal ideas of stasis "as an evasion[,] as a retreat from the (actually unavoidable) dynamic and change of 'real life,'" and argues that, on her "reading, place and locality are foci for a form of romanticized escapism from the real business of the world" ("Global" 172). Yet I would partly critique this last, as a perpetuation of "the real business of the world" is unfortunately simple code for entrenched global capitalism, which unquestionably is an ongoing factor that drives destructive environmental and social transformations. From an ecocritical perspective, attachment to place is a resistance to capitalism's damaging excesses, to hypercapitalism's reordering of spaces into a system of conduits and in-between dead zones (Evernden 100-103; see also both Henrik Spohler's and Edward Burtynsky's photographic work for visual presentations). This is not to say that other ideological systems cannot and do not affect environments with their technological and resource-extractive approaches, but in North America, at least, we are currently yoked to an array of economic, governmental, and social policies that value monetary flow over living in harmony with environmental factors.

It is also important to note that, though citizens often embed value in their communal identities, some of the elements of the related physical localities are also the faces of the social processes that are bringing about adverse effects. Nostalgia can be a powerful factor even for

those people who recognize how detrimental human impacts have been on the planet, from the large-scale to the local. Perhaps it is therefore both in the sense of the romanticizers and preservationists of how places feature in social and cultural traditions that some contemporary speculative fiction turns to ecocritical dystopianism, since established social spaces often feature artificial or manufactured environments whose footprints have not only erased natural landscapes but are also dependent on a continual flow of capital, without which they will deteriorate into dilapidated wayside attractions marking changes in economic and cultural attention. This process is as true of the amusement park as it is of the national monument, yet can also apply to how our modern society often engages with the land, such as with Harold Johnson's parody of social attention given to receding glaciers in his ecocritical dystopian novel *Corvus* (2015), where British Columbia mines "the last of the Columbia ice fields" to transport "'to Vancouver [so] it won't go to waste'" while others consume fossil fuels and spew greenhouse gases as they drive up to see "the last of the great glacier" disappearing "'because of climate change'" (178). The environments of the present will become altered whether we want them to or not, and often through our collective social actions. The ecocritical dystopia, in response to nostalgia, ultimately critiques the business-as-usual system that drives non-expanding enterprises to fade and fail while demanding greater uses of resources and spaces for the emergence of larger-scale, more "advanced" and "efficient" undertakings. The writers of the newer environmentally and place-focused ecocritical dystopian fiction thus imagine how such a process, with its modifications of landscapes from the real world, will both continue to geoengineer and catastrophically fail through unsustainability, causing further transformation; but with such alterations or destruction, their ecocritical dystopias also contain some distinctly *utopian* (or perhaps eutopian) elements. If, as Massey says, change is necessary, then perhaps we should

hope for change—yet the nature of this shifting is also essential. The ecocritical dystopian view insists that we should demand a systemic overhaul rather than effects to which we merely, and continuously, react. Those invested in community simply do not want that process to be a detrimental one, but it is also important to expose contributors to our sense of place that are, in fact, contributors to or enablers of aspects like ecological devastation. For example, while some individuals might not feel as if they are implicated in what the scientific community says is the ongoing 6th Mass Extinction, it is impossible to separate individuals from that equation. We, in this modern day of consumption and waste, are all involved, and will remain so until we have collectively, culturally, and ethically learned to live in symbiosis with our environment.

This emerging ecocritical dystopian body of literature redefines dystopia itself. Though previous dystopian fictions have been heavily involved in unpacking the extents of social *topos*, thus contributing to the literary theme of bad societies, and though a dystopia has always been understood as representing a bad place *in comparison with* the real world, the ecocritical dystopias gravitate toward a conceptual lodestone of considering "place" that contributes etymologically to our understanding of the genre. The added "eco-" prefix, despite currently referring to ecological systems or even "green" solutions and the like, descends etymologically from the ancient Greek *oîkos*, denoting a "house," "dwelling," or "residence" ("ecology"; Montanari's "*οἶκος*").[31] Oxana Timofeeva contemporizes this etymology by comparing the world to

> a human habitat, with its composite inner and outer spaces connected by doors
>
> that lead in and out[.] In ancient Greece, the [inner] part of this structure was

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[31] My intention here is to avoid greenwashing the sense of "eco-"; instead, my use of the prefix adapts the use of "critical" in its reference to dystopian futures, and also presents.

called *... oikos*[,] … [which] has several meanings—a house, a household, a family, but also a family's property, up to and including slaves. Today these meanings are maintained in the paronymous words 'economy' and 'ecology.' Both economy and ecology are concerned with nature—either as a living world, environment … or as a source and resource. They are conjugate—beyond ecology there is always economy, and vice versa: this is our earthy home, here we keep slaves and exchange oil for money.

For Timofeeva, the *oîkos*/"eco-" of modern times displays a distinctly counterproductive relationship that is also true from the perspective of ecocritical dystopianism, within which environmental disruption is also a destabilization of what might be called home. An indication of alterations to familiar living places is highlighted in the etymology of the ecocritical dystopia, and such a strategy with language-use is not without precedent in speculative fiction. The first epigraph to Ernest Callenbach's classic *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (1975) etymologically dissects his title in much the same fashion, and provides the same Greek root of "home" for "eco-" that I have here (with the addition of "household"). The second of Callenbach's three epigraphs also indicates that the meaning of "-topia" is "from the Greek [for] *topos* (place)" (as does Montanari's "τόπος"), and the two halves combine, as within the larger structure of my terminology, to indicate a home-place. This paratext situates Callenbach's commitment to providing a solidified theoretical basis for his speculative future society in which future humans live in harmony with their environment. The fact that the essence of his term "ecotopia" holds up only strengthens his fictional speculations. It is in much the same vein that I propose my terminology of "ecocritical dystopia."

With a referencing of "house," "dwelling," "residence," and/or "household," the etymology of "eco-" at least refers to the space and place in which members of non-nomadic, permanent-settlement cultures spend much of their life subsisting. But since the "eco-" in "ecocritical" denotes both the sense of our domiciles and of ecological issues, this etymological root suggests nothing other than the environment we inhabit, whether that is a room that we occupy, a structure in which we dwell, a community we interact with, or a locale or region in which we live. That deeper understanding of the term not only includes so-called modern cultures with permanent settlements, but also more traditional ones either pre-agriculture or incorporating multiple land uses over diverse areas. Ultimately, the "eco-" depends on one's definition of a "dwelling," which could consist of a tent, a cave, a lean-to, or any space related to "home," really. After all, one's dwelling space, in the physical sense, is really a matter of definition and personal or cultural preference, just as a utopian or dystopian sense of the world depends on perspective. As an aside, the anthologist John Joseph Adams is right to mention "the roots of the word dystopia[,] ... from the Ancient Greek for 'bad' and 'place'" (Introduction 1), which in a binary sense can stand in for a modern contradiction of Sir Thomas More's pun (with his coinage of "utopia" through the 1516 title of the same name). "Dystopia," in fact, is a modern word purportedly not appearing in Ancient Greek since it is cobbled together from "dys-" and "topos."[32] However, in *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, Franco Montanari defines "dys-" as "bad, difficult" ("δὐσ-"), and the closest entry to "dystopia" in the *Brill Dictionary* is "δὐστοπος," which I read as "dystopos." Unless there actually was an Ancient Greek word with the same meaning as our term dystopia, it is unclear to my limited understanding of the language why the term does not translate to "bad place."

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[32] "Cacotopia" was also suggested by Jeremy Bentham in 1818 (Budakov).

In ecocritical dystopian terms, the deeper sense of "eco" is a repurposing that speaks directly to its social and environmental lens. That is, while a suggestion of our immediate local and even regional environments as wrapped up in the prefix is really not that far off from our current usage of "eco-," through this specification, more of an emphasis is given to our sense of places carried forward into the time of the dystopian narrative. But the "ecocritical" here does not perform the work of "ecocriticism," *per se*, even if the term cannot escape such a reference. Nor should it. As Cheryll Glotfelty writes, "[s]imply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" ("Literary" xviii); while the ecocritical dystopias are not a "study" in the same way, the link "between literature and the physical environment" is still prominent within the meaning implied. The terminology indicates not only the common suggestion that ecological systems are related to the "ecocritical" terminology, but also that the entirety of one's surroundings is being analyzed and critiqued as an interconnected whole. In the contemporary moment, for example, this includes human cultural spaces and places from the remote and rural to the congested and urban, and not simply an assumption of distant natural spaces. My suggestion of "ecocritical dystopia" as a taxonomic nomenclature for the most contemporary dystopian fictions therefore hits a double register of attention to place and a discussion of environmental surroundings in its iteration of place having become essentially "bad" in desired qualities.

From Critical to Ecocritical Dystopia

An emphasis on the critique of place, space, and distinct localities and regions is increasingly gaining tangibility, form, and heft in recent dystopian fiction, whereas dystopias of the past were of the "classic" variety where the protagonist resists the will of the State or were of the "critical"

kind that is a metaphor for the inequalities of the writer's contemporaneous world (see Moylan's

lengthy discussion in his 2000 *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*).[33] For example, Moylan asserts that

"classic dystopias" involved a resistance to "social reality" that the subsequent "sf dystopias …

were expressions in and of," and argues that from these latter expressions, the "critical dystopias

emerge in the hard times of the 1980s and 1990s" (182). Correspondingly, writers of the "critical

dystopia" "reworked it in the context of the economic, political, and cultural conditions of the

decade" (186). Moylan explains that "the critical dystopias give voice and space to …

dispossessed and denied subjects (and … to those diminished and deprived by the accompanying

economic reconfigurations)." As he frames it, these narratives "go on to explore ways to change

the present system so that such culturally and economically marginalized peoples not only

survive but also try to move toward creating a social reality that is shaped by an impulse to

human self-determination and ecological health rather than one constricted by the narrow and

destructive logic of a system intent only on enhancing competition in order to gain more profit

for a select few" (189). Some of this definitely resonates with the ecocritical dystopia, but the

critical dystopia is less interested in the role of either geographical content or relationships

between future and present than the newest dystopian development, despite how the earlier

iteration may, of course, contain such elements. It is important to highlight that the critical

dystopias "depict fictional realities which are, to different degrees, *discontinuous* with the

contemporary 'real' (although such realities are drawn *in relation* to, and as a critique of, the

world as we know it)" (Cavalcanti, "Articulating" 13, my emphasis; Moylan 192). The "critical

dystopia," according to both Ildney Cavalcanti and Moylan, is often satirical, but certainly

comprises *representative* place to critique the zeitgeist instead of hinging upon extensions of the

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[33] Moylan's text is named after the closing phrase of Forster's "The Machine Stops."

real-world into the near-future. Instead, though ecocritical dystopian literature extends from the work of the earlier "critical dystopias," it departs from the construction of fictional place that is but a stand-in for the *feeling* of the present day, and displays the tangible nature of the near-future, experienced even in the current moment.

That is, the "real" altered within the ecocritical dystopia refers to the geographical as it is adapted from a given contemporary form and setting into its speculative iterations depicted through sf narratives, while the "representative" of the critical dystopia presents place that is either wholly fictional, or at least not as self-invested in a tracking of geography morphing through time, and thus invests in a reflection of society more than an extension of setting forward into the future. A recent example of the former appears in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), which not only imagines Toronto as it succumbs to a plague then breaks down, but also the future of an area "back and forth along the shores of Lakes Huron and Michigan, west as far as Traverse City, east and north over the 49th parallel to Kincardine" and down "the St. Clair River south to the fishing towns of Marine City and Algonac" (37). All of these landmarks can be located on a present-day map. Mandel even chooses to bestow fictional place names upon some of her locales—like St. Deborah by the Water and New Petoskey—which logically are just new names for communities that are already in Upper Michigan today. But this use of fiction is different from her invention of Severn City and its airport, for which Mandel explains the following: "Severn City's not based on any real place; I just wanted to set some of the action in a larger airport than actually exists in the region, so I made up a fictional city to go with my fictional airport. Visually, I imagined it as a miniaturized version of the Detroit airport: imagine if DTW's Terminal A were broken up into three much shorter terminals, each with about 15 departure gates, with the same high walls of glass and the same dusty fake trees in

planters" (Mandel, "Emily"). This airport and the urban setting of Severn City, with their

representative natures, are therefore examples of critical dystopian elements in a book that more

often functions in an ecocritical dystopian mode of extrapolating place-changes into the near

future: the difference between each generic aspect is within its role in Mandel's narrative.

I extend my intervention from some of the qualities inherent in Moylan's terminology,

and the newer, place-based ecocritical dystopias emerge from this history with some of the

critical dystopian qualities, but they also distinguish themselves in distinct ways. These dystopias

are both the site of questioning the social and cultural problems of today, and engaged with

understanding the future of our modern world through a focus on place. In this new form of

dystopian literature, an escape to the outliers and thus unknown possibilities is rendered

implausible, because all places and spaces are increasingly affected by the machinations of the

modern world and the looming global ecological crisis that is not now in the future, or even in

the near-future, but already upon us. In contrast, following Cavalcanti, Moylan explicates how

critical dystopian "texts open up traditional dystopian narrative to name a utopian elsewhere that

resists becoming filled in by a determinate content" (191; Cavalcanti, "Articulating" 207-208).

Essentially, as a body, and through its focus on alterations to real-world places, this emerging

ecocritical dystopian fiction presents the idea that the environmental concerns typically posited

as affecting the near-future are already a force integrated within our lives—and not only at the

distant planetary poles or in a faraway land of refugees, but also here on the North American

continent, at home.

The contemporary, place-focused, environmental dystopias require a new nomenclature

to situate them within the taxonomical system of the larger historical body of dystopian fiction

(and related permutations and extrapolations). While the history of naming previous dystopian

fiction types is complex, to my knowledge the terminological suggestion of the "ecocritical dystopia" is unique in efforts to historicize and categorize particularly environmental and place-focused aspects of dystopian fiction—with the exception that it deliberately extends from the work of its predecessors as a conceptual move. The "critical" in my term thus not only acknowledges the history of contemporary dystopias previously suggested by Moylan and others to link these new works in a progression, but also functions as a reminder that even though environmental change is highlighted, social elements are still affected. I do not mean "ecocritical" to draw only upon the practices of ecocriticism, exactly, but to encapsulate an important departure from the style of dystopias come before, as the ecocritical dystopia finds a new and productive way for writers to imagine our potential futures in direct progression from the concerns of the present. As Robert T. Tally Jr. asserts, the task of the somewhat associated field of literary geography resonates partly with how Frank Kermode perceives the role of the critic, which is to "mak[e] sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives" (Kermode 3; Tally 100). The ecocritical dystopia intersects with a literary geographical approach and helps those in the contemporary day question the sense of their lives—as does the critical dystopia, in a way—but the ecocritical dystopian approach is also wrapped up in an ongoing interaction with the places occupied, given substance to, and physically impacted by individual lives. Through this engagement, readers are not so subtly encouraged to question whether their lifestyles and worldviews are indeed leading toward the concerning environmental outcomes authors variously imagine for the future. The message is that the current world will indeed result in such speculative outcomes. My term therefore moves beyond the fact that specific dystopian fictions have already been analyzed through the lens of ecocriticism, as well as beyond the critical dystopian form Moylan says emerges in the 1980s and 1990s; the term "ecocritical dystopia"

works to encapsulate a social resonance of dismay alongside the clear environmental upheavals that have regained a focus in the realistic concerns of the present day.

The earlier critical dystopia is in a very concentrated manner a close critique of contemporary culture—though, as with the ecocritical dystopia, the critical dystopia does not perform literary-critical work, but comments instead on social elements in future-based scenarios as a reading of the current day. The inception of the term also articulated a need for theoretical redefining of dystopia and its attendant terminologies at the time. Moylan explains that this resulted in "the moment of the dystopian turn in the 1990s [when] a more substantial clarification of [utopia and dystopia] finally emerged. The times, it seems, again produced the theory required for their critique" (134). Referring to the play between these two terms and a host of other related expressions that have been employed, Moylan also enters into a sustained and well-informed discussion of the history of texts that have been called utopian, eutopian, anti-utopian, and dystopian (*Scraps* 111-45). The purpose of this project is not to redraw these lines or contradict careful contributions by Moylan and others about the emergences of past subgeneric forms; however, while my focal texts hone in on newer dystopian elements, this is also not an attempt to ignore the other qualities such narratives might possess. Rather, a complex sense of genre is important in how I am figuring current dystopian forms in terms of a reliance on places and social and cultural interconnects with environments. With this in mind, the ecocritical dystopian terminology does not obscure additional or concurrent elements, but instead reads a specific set of criteria in relation to other qualities. This move is not unprecedented. Moylan situates the emergence of "'the classical dystopia'" with works such as Forster's, arguing for "the underlying utopian quality of this new textual strategy" that "clearly represents a creative step beyond the utopian satire of the previous centuries even as it draws on the qualities

of the popular anti-utopian text" (133). He asserts (and I agree) that these "are not *anti*-utopian but now something else entirely. As *dys*topias, they are not texts that temperamentally refuse the possibility of radical social transformation; instead, they look quizzically, skeptically, critically not only at the present society but also at the means needed to transform it" (133). Moylan's adoption of the "critical dystopia" as a term therefore both draws on the functional role of earlier dystopian forms and suggests a development worthy of new terminology. While the contemporary ecocritical dystopias weigh the changes that can (and probably will) transform present society and, as with the critical dystopia, provide perspectives that look "quizzically, skeptically, [and] critically … at … present society," they also, more specifically, extend from current experiences. My discussion of these contemporary works flows from Moylan's assertions about the categorizations of utopias and dystopias, but though the critical dystopia represents its "critique" as an echo of the given current society, the ecocritical dystopia accomplishes its modes of questioning by extending the current moment forward into further social and environmental problems. If anything, the ecocritical dystopia is even more closely concerned with the developments of the present moment, as some of its tenets hinge on realism.

Moylan's categorization of dystopias starting in the 1980s and 1990s marks a moment when the spirit of the times began to more closely impact dystopian narratives—despite how we might infer a certain level of influence from the zeitgeist with any dystopia. For example, a novel like Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921) can hardly be divorced from social developments of the time. But, through the resonance of fictional future societies with issues rooted in the present, the critical dystopian terminology parses social concerns in more depth than with the "classical dystopia." With the critical dystopia, however, the temporal and conceptual separation from the contemporary time to the world of the future is still distinct. The ecocritical dystopia reduces

such gaps if only through its focus on places in the real world, but, importantly, in combination with the extrapolated social processes of the current day. The most recent iteration of place-focused dystopian fiction emerged from such processes as the dystopian turn, but it is also fundamentally a dystopia of changing or antagonistic environmental conditions that have roots in our present understandings of the world.

Of course, there will be exceptions to this ecocritical development in the contemporary body of North American dystopian fiction; moreover, a study such as Moylan's *Scraps*, through its publication in 2000, did not have the benefit of incorporating some of the fiction mentioned here, since much of it was published later. Moylan's work is invaluable precisely because it does the labour of providing a complex history of what came before, and also happens to examine narratives that fall right around the transitionary point when the focus on places was gaining mass and form.[34] Since our current environmental disruptions have become so prominent both globally and locally, the ecocritical dystopia is uniquely suited to capture such a change in sf perspectives. In more closely connecting contemporary North American dystopian fiction with the real-world landscapes of the present moment, I am, however, pushing against Moylan's move (which is in dialogue with the work of Lyman Tower Sargent and Darko Suvin) to distance a given dystopia from "the society in which th[e] reader live[s]" (Sargent, "Three" 9) or "the author's community" (Suvin, "Utopianism" 170; Moylan 155). While many dystopias have

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[34] Tally adds that "Although it would be difficult, and misleading, to identify a particular date or moment when this occurred, a recognizable spatial turn in literary and cultural studies (if not the arts and sciences more generally) has taken place. One cannot help noticing an increasingly spatial or geographical vocabulary in critical texts, with various forms of mapping or cartography being used to survey literary terrains, to plot narrative trajectories, to locate and explore sites, and to project imaginary coordinates" (11-12). He points out the large amount of scholarship that has drawn attention, "in recent years," "to matters of space, place, and mapping, and the spatial or geographical bases of cultural productions" (12).

incorporated such aspects, it is also true for the ecocritical dystopian categorization that the reader's and/or the author's societies are heavily implicated in the near-future events being imagined. This is fiction, to be sure, but these fictional worlds are less "non-existent" (Sargent 9; see Moylan 155), than, say, a speculative society discovered by the first explorers to reach the moon or one accidently decimated in advance by humans travelling to Mars.[35] Rather, the spaces and places we inhabit now are fundamental to the newer dystopian narrative. A combination of many factors, which include society, culture, history, geography, topography, geology, and ecology (and perhaps other forces) combine to form our environment—a term that avoids the divisiveness of "nature" (Morton) or "wilderness" (Cronon), or the indication that a single source (such as the government) is responsible for negative surroundings. When "place" is threatened by not only social forces, but also the environmental ones driving social interaction, and the ideal conditions for inhabiting familiar places begin to collapse, the human experience becomes increasingly dystopian. The ecocritical dystopia aims to capture such conditions through its narratives.

While the critical dystopia requires a corollary in subgeneric terms, Moylan does not completely rule out environmental considerations, even though his terminology does not hinge so tightly on their role. Perhaps a sense of real-world place being indicated in dystopian literature is present in Moylan's contemplations when he discusses the ideas of feminist theorist Raffaella Baccolini: "Since the text opens *in media res* within the 'nightmarish society,' cognitive estrangement is at first forestalled by the immediacy, the normality, of the location. No dream or trip is taken to this place of everyday life. As in a great deal of sf, the protagonist (and the reader)

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[35] Here I am referring, respectively, to the lunar, ant-like colony in H.G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) and the doomed Martian people in Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950).

is always already *in* the world in question, unreflectively immersed in the society" (Moylan 148).

This explanation of the "dystopian form itself" (148) intersects more readily with the role of

places in the ecocritical dystopia than that of the critical dystopia; the success of the former is

that the real world of the present is not only being critiqued, but is being driven toward a more

concerning iteration fueled by environmental deterioration. Our feeling about dystopian

circumstances is conditioned by the awareness of environmental factors in distress, whether that

involves a response to social control as a facet of altered environment, or to a devastated future

landscape.

These environmental-to-social impacts are more the concerns of the modern ecocritical

dystopia than of the recent critical dystopia or even the late classical dystopia.[36] Unlike newer

developments in the genre, and even including Moylan's misgivings about Fredric "Jameson's

underestimation of the utopian potential" (141) in the latter's now oft-repeated description of

dystopia,[37] the critical iteration continues to resonate more with the concern that something will

happen soon, rather than extend from a focus on the dystopian now. Jameson highlights a

dystopia that is "always and essentially what in the language of science-fiction criticism is called

a 'near-future' novel: it tells the story of an imminent disaster—ecology, overpopulation, plague,

drought, the stray comet or nuclear accident—waiting to come to pass in our own near future,

which is fast-forwarded in the time of the novel" (*Seeds* 56). But while some of these concerns

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[36] I do not doubt that there are some classical dystopias still being written, but what purpose do they really serve in this time when the future, when the nature of the catastrophe is now? Perhaps this is a naïve question that will be rendered null by forthcoming innovative pieces that articulate environment in important new ways, but the current ecocritical dystopia seems set in its urgency.

[37] Moylan comments that "the dystopia (especially as near-future sf) in Jameson's gaze appears to be too close to the current situation to partake effectively in the powerful estranging mechanisms of Utopia" (141). Perhaps conversely, the ecocritical dystopia is both close to the present and works against ultimate estrangement from utopian desires. The ecocritial dystopia is thus linked to a motivational drive toward achieving utopian conditions in the future.

are clearly applicable to the present, Jameson's dystopian articulation is distanced all the same

from a current sense of time. That is, in his dystopian vision, the "near-future" aspect allows an

event that has not yet happened to become relevant in the speculative future narrative, projecting

the catastrophic and the undesirable into what might become a contemporary society. But as

Moylan explains, this Jamesonian "literary form … works with daily fears and apprehensions of

'imminent disaster'" ("New Maps" 141); instead, the ecocritical dystopia is, unlike its critical or

classical predecessors, more concerned with *immanence* than *imminence*, since it combines

worries about the future with a revelation about ones in the present. In this respect, the thinking

behind Gunn and Beard's shift from the imminent to the immanent in apocalyptic literature is

especially helpful in understanding the ecocritical dystopia's comparable sense of "collapsing

linear temporality onto a prolonged experience of the present" (Gunn and Beard 272). Gunn and

Beard explain a redefinition of "'ends,'" which "in turn disorients the audience … by collapsing

linear temporality onto a prolonged experience of the present, a punctuated intense moment .... In

the imminent apocalyptic—premillennial or postmillennial—one anticipates endings. In the

immanent apocalyptic, one realizes she is (already) dwelling in the 'end period'" (Gunn and

Beard 272; Kermode 25). Kermode earlier anticipates this by unpacking the biblical roots of our

anxiety about the future, saying that "[a]lready in St. Paul and St. John there is a tendency to

conceive of the End as happening at every moment; this is the moment when the modern concept

of *crisis* was born" (25). Brian Massumi also contends, at first, that "our culture [embodies] the

perpetual imminence of the accident" (10). He then corrects himself: "Better, the *immanence* of

the accident" (10; my emphasis). It is clear that a redefinition of both terminology and

considerations about the future is essential, whether one's focus is the apocalyptic, or the related

dystopia. Tapping into this scene of already ongoing catastrophe, the ecocritical dystopia is

uniquely suited to address both the concerns of the present and the developments of the future in a broad conceptual stroke, since, unlike previous understandings, it anchors its development within the future to the cornerstones of the current day.

Writers of dystopia are cognizant of the cultural barometer for how the practices of the present can negatively affect our future. As Atwood says, during the planning of *Oryx and Crake*, she had "not[ed] with alarm that trends derided ten years ago as paranoid fantasies had become possibilities, then actualities" ("Writing" 329). While Moylan phrases this perceptiveness slightly differently, surely this is the sort of thing he means when he discusses the concept of the critical dystopia somewhat in conversation with Sargent (and others such as Baccolini and Cavalcanti), who indicates a "distinctly new fictional development" (Moylan 188). Here Moylan is referring to how Sargent "conclude[s] that our basic utopia, eutopia, and dystopia lexicon must be complicated to express the range of materials that authors have created …. And even one of our most basic terms, *dystopia*, has been generally neglected by critics and recent works" that "are clearly both eutopias and dystopias" and "undermine all neat classification schemes. The terms good place and bad place simply do not work" (Sargent, "Three" 7). Moylan's usage of "critical dystopia" is expanded from Sargent's reaction to the term since Moylan argues that, in Sargent's "proper insistence on taxonomic and bibliographic precision, he sets aside the implication of a utopian-dystopian hybrid and identifies the new tendency as a specific form of dystopian narrative. He therefore suggests that these new works might usefully be understood as 'critical dystopias' that interrogate both society and their generic predecessors in ways that resemble the approach critical utopias took toward the utopian

tradition a decade or so earlier" (188).[38] While I would push against the erasure of "utopian-dystopian" hybridity, in current forms, many of Sargent's ideas are, interestingly, incorporated into the ecocritical dystopia.

The critical dystopian form reacts to social aspects of the times, and creates corresponding societies that are representations of a crisis or set of crises projected and explored into storyworlds where the current day lingers as perhaps a sense. Moylan claims introspectively that "several sf writers turned to dystopian strategies as a way to come to terms with the changing, and enclosing, social reality. Although they reached back into its classical and science fictional roots, they did not simply revive dystopia but rather reworked it in the context of the economic, political, and cultural conditions of the decade" (186). So, too, do the writers of the newer, place-focused, ecocritical dystopian narratives work their reconsiderations—except that they have reconfigured their genre through their indebtedness to environmental concerns as a precursor to social developments. To be fair, Moylan does also reference the role of environmental concerns when he mentions the "move toward creating a social reality that is shaped by an impulse to … ecological health" (189). He even later refers to the critical dystopias as "radically ecological" (190). After all, so many texts spanning the extended decade of the 1990s create a history of engagement with the environment, such as even the brief binary of comparable oceanic devastations from whale extinction (189) to potential Arctic char overfishing (336) in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) or of the old activist's unfortunate experience of fears-come-to-pass in T. Coraghessan Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth* (2000). However, Moylan's

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[38] Moylan's wording here avoids his own role concerning the term: Sargent comments earlier, however, about whether the term is "plausible" or "simply an oxymoron because all dystopias are 'critical' in Moylan's sense" and says "we need to think more seriously about the possibility of" the subgenre even though "we should keep the concept" (Sargent, "Three" 9) and rethink it. Moylan's *Scraps* clearly does that work.

terminology does not highlight the clear weight of environment in formulating the type of

dystopia that will next emerge or is even emerging within the period he indicates—that is, he

does not pinpoint a focus on spaces and places in his consideration of ecological elements.

This is a problem that stands out for some texts even within the time range he marks for

the "dystopian turn," as well as obviously for more recent fiction, but it is also of value to

somewhat trouble the periodization that extends directly from his determinations about 1980s

and 1990s. While Moylan might categorically mark the emergence of the critical dystopia within

this range, and while I suggest a nomenclature of partial inheritance from his terminology, it is

counterproductive to rule out the possibility that ecocritical dystopian elements were present

even earlier in sf writing. In fact, this is a valuable line of future inquiry that could involve

scholarship applying the tenets of ecocritical dystopianism toward older texts to uncover and

interrogate how environmental, place-based modes of change have evolved from, say, Mary

Shelley's inclusion, in *The Last Man*, of a Rome overcome by a re-emergence of the natural

world after decimation by plague. While Shelley would not necessarily have known of

pandemics as phenomena directly related to the environment (and, vitally, does not directly

indicate hers as such), as David Quammen explains, "environmental disruption by humans [is] a

releaser of epidemics" (*Spillover* 237). In 1826, Shelley's *The Last Man* treats the plague as an

outcome of warfare, but there is no realization that pandemics are overwhelmingly zoonoses.[39]

Despite the gaps from more modern knowledge to the understandings involved with some earlier

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[39] Quammen's *Spillover* (2012) explains that most if not all major pandemics are and have been enabled through contact with and disturbance of the natural world: each is a zoonosis, or an epidemic that has transferred from animals to humans after specific contact with a "reservoir" and/or "vector" that then enables the process of "spillover" between species. This includes events such as the classic Black Plague outbreaks that Shelley's *The Last Man* references with the 1348 date (169) through to Ebola and SARS in more recent times.

sf writing, and a probable lack of intent by the writers, one possible conclusion is that real-world

alterations in sf writing have a deeper history than that the comparable markers identified by

Geoff Ryman's term "mundane sf," which suggests that sf "grow up" by adopting a set of rules

conceived as "no FTL, no FTL communications, no time travel, no aliens in the flesh, no

immortality, no telepathy, no parallel universe, no magic wands."[40] What appears to have been at

stake in creating the term is the opinion that enough recent sf work was not "really facing up to

the death of oil and climate change" (Hill, "Geoff"). Ecocritical dystopianism is not mundane sf,

exactly, though there seems to be a resonance with the use of real-world places even if they are

not specific features of Ryman's term, because mundane sf "could be the meeting ground for

hard sf (since it privileges the likely technology) and humanist sf (since it privileges everyday

life)" (Hill, "Geoff"). But the suggestion of pre-existing mundane sf texts and authors[41] might

also carry over to the particular lens of my study examining contemporary ecocritical dystopias.

As I have determined earlier, while *The Last Man* does not read directly in ecocritical dystopian

terms, this is not to say that subsequent texts well before Moylan's dystopian turn of the 1990s

do not incorporate elements of ecocritical dystopianism even before the distinct emergence of the

critical dystopia.

Besides, Moylan is ultimately discussing a different type of development in dystopia and,

importantly, one that can still contribute to such texts. Writers of dystopian fiction, from classical

dystopias through to the more contemporary, place-focused dystopias, interrogate the

contemporary moment by speculating what the future might hold, and thus hold a mirror to the

processes of current culture by undermining its assumptions or exposing its flaws. This is a role

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[40] "FTL" means "Faster Than Light."

[41] Ryman argues that "SF authors such as Philip K. Dick, J.G. Ballard, Samuel Delaney or Walter Miller …. could be considered Mundane."

that the critical dystopia plays, and lends in some respect to ecocritical dystopianism. Through this resonance, the newer dystopias are, essentially, closely related to the critical dystopian type in spirit, though they also implement crucial developments (such as geographical alterations) that call for a different label.

Ecocritical Dystopianism as Terminological Solution

Our current lack of terminology to properly express the environmental issues presented in recent dystopias demonstrates a failure to fully reflect contemporary ecological crisis within our cultural lexicon. We talk of "climate change," for example, but as Jodi Dean and others indicate, we cannot accurately apprehend what that means. Generic markers can be rendered abstract by myriad co-indicators and agitators so that they are next to meaningless in their intended roles. The ecocritical dystopia, however, insists that both the present and the future are immersed in environmentally-fraught moments, and does not trivialize the variety of ecological concerns we face by eclipsing them with the abstraction of something like "climate." But the environmental conditions themselves also produce societal responses as we organize in various ways to adapt to, combat, or take advantage of the related transformations. Environmental shifts such as climate change lead to regional resource shortages and altered living conditions, and it is this increase in such stressors that opens the door to some governments embracing more rigid authority structures, as well as to an emboldened sense of support to groups that embrace social prejudices. The ecocritical dystopia works to reflect such complex elements, since it focuses on realism within future settings, after all. To their own degrees, it is true that many such texts also contain traditional elements of the genre, but while contemporary North American dystopian fiction of course draws in some respect from many elements of Western (and by that, I mean

Greek to Roman to European, and so on) literary traditions, in a speculative vein it is also

imbued with a distinct sense of the places and spaces of its settings (both physical and cultural),

which transcends such restrictive categorizations. This includes Indigenous dystopias—

important inclusions given the continental setting—which often (if not universally) incorporate

environmental impacts. Though the ecocritical dystopia does not always abandon the literary

traditions of its generic ancestors, it forges new ways of looking at, thinking about, and engaging

with the environmental disruptions that modern society perpetuates and, we fear, will continue to

perpetuate to our detriment.

What I find to be a less successful, somewhat popularized term that has been circulating

is Dan Bloom's "cli-fi." Fiction that directly incorporates climate change as a major factor is

sometimes referred to by the pun Bloom coined in 2007 (Bloom), and has also been dubbed

"climate fiction." An anthology of so-called "cli-fi" stories complete with an afterword by

Bloom, edited by Bruce Meyer and entitled *Cli-Fi: Canadian Tales of Climate Change*, even

came out in May 2017. But while the climate is involved in several contemporary speculative

texts, climate change is a process that is interconnected with many other environmental concerns

about and systems of alteration to ecological landscapes and specific places featured in the near-

future worlds of recent fiction. Frankly, by placing everything under a "climate" label, we are

ignoring equally relevant and poignant environmental alterations currently underway. We can

look to something like the Nine Planetary Boundaries to better understand the interconnectivity

at play in the real world; a focus on merely climate change in this body of fiction is short-

sighted, and smacks of what we would call "greenwashing" in other circumstances. As Mike

Hulme argues, "[r]ather than leading to a convergence in thinking, the idea of climate change

acts as a proxy for, and a revealer of, conflict in the human world. 'Climate Change' thus

becomes a malleable envoy enlisted in support of too many princes and principalities" (39). That

the issues are multifold is irrefutable, but perhaps the narration of an issue like "climate change

as an idea situated in cultural spaces rather than as one correlating solely with a physical reality,

makes it easier to understand the diverse and diverging calls for action we hear circulating

through the networks of advocates and echoing in the corridors of power" (Hulme 40). Of

course, the effects of climate change are also physical, but we need to understand how such an

issue is being appropriated and employed, especially as we attempt to comprehend how a

particular source of crisis might affect or is affecting our world. Hence "cli-fi" and "climate

fiction," rather than organizing and clarifying effectively, work to obscure equally important

flashpoints related to environmental dystopias, such as fossil energy and other resource

extractive processes as underpinning undesirable economics in future worlds that feature

ecological devastation.

Terminologies continuously emerge in an effort to capture a shift away from the critical

dystopias of the 1980s and 1990s that Moylan highlights. Instead of using the critical dystopia,

Hui-chuan Chang argues that "this umbrella term falls short of identifying crucial aspects of

dystopias around the millennium, which should be more properly labeled 'post-apocalyptic

dystopias'" (4). Though the dystopian and the post-apocalyptic do seem to cohabitate literature,

Chang's critical terminology does not quite capture the fundamental generic qualities emerging

from the time. I recognize that there is an apt instinct there that something *else* has emerged from

these critical dystopian (and earlier) roots, and thus Chang has a point in articulating that some

further permutation has developed, but it is also true that the elements of the critical dystopia still

appear around the millennium and do so even into the present day. The fact that Chang attempts

to make an example of Graham J. Murphy's 2009 entry on "dystopia" in *The Routledge*

Companion to Science Fiction is somewhat misguided. Murphy's application of "critical

dystopia" to Butler's *Sower* and *Talents*,[42] for instance, is not incorrect, as those works do

contain elements of the critical dystopia—and I say this despite my introduction of new

terminology to address emergent elements, and even my application of those elements to Butler's

Parable books (see Chapter 2). Besides, Chang's use of the Parable books,[43] in terms of a

suggested "post-apocalyptic" terminology, is off the mark; I can see an argument in the fact that

climate change is an immanent apocalyptic process, but no post-event period is reached in

Butler's narrative, and the only escape from the resultant dystopian conditions is a planetary

exodus. That is, the Parable books are in no way *post*-apocalyptic, but they are, of course,

dystopian in some fashion.

My examination pinpoints a very different generic development than the kind someone

like Chang suggests, or those who have variously placed some of these ecocritical dystopian

texts under "cli-fi" or other umbrellas such as the emerging "solarpunk" label (Mahrab). "Global

weirding," however, is one term that resonates with the work that the ecocritical dystopia is

trying to achieve, since, though Gerry Canavan and Andrew Hageman attribute this sense of

strangeness "in part [to] its popularization [through] the writing of *New York Times* columnist

Thomas Friedman" ("Global Weirding" 7), they explain that "[t]he point of *global weirding* as a

cognitive frame was to refocus our attention on the localities within the totality of the global"

(8). The "ecocritical dystopia" as terminology is not specifically touching on the "weirdness" of

global weather and other planetary systems, for instance, but it of course incorporates such

phenomena into its subgeneric domain through a redirection from global concerns to the

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[42] Here Murphy's assessment resonates with Moylan's treatment of the Parable narrative.

[43] Chang's argumentation employs both Butler and Atwood, whom I focus on in this study.

specificity of places within locales and even regions. Importantly, Canavan and Hageman also determine that, "[w]hile the term never truly took root as a competitor to either global warming or climate change, perhaps because it was located too narrowly within the logic of the pun, what global weirding as a frame was intended to show us is that we are now living in postnormal times" (8). The postnormality of the current day is something that many people can comprehend, what with rising tides, changing biomes, health impacts from climate-exacerbated urban pollutions, shifting governmental controls on natural resources, increasing diasporas from resource conflicts and losses of arable land, and whatnot—and even though many scholars have also stuck with calling the related contemporary texts "critical dystopias," the associated new fictions for new times deserve a category that is attuned to their particular qualities.

Claire L. Evans asserts that "[w]e need something new: a form of science fiction that tackles the radical changes of our pressing and strange reality. We need an Anthropocene fiction." The idea of a fiction to represent the Anthropocenic is a key factor to the obvious and important self-reflexivity of our current literary modes, even if we should also take *resistance* to heart in our terminological determinations, as T.J. Demos suggests in *Against the Anthropocene* (2017). The "'good Anthropocene'" (Demos, *Against* 44) of the "'Ecomodernist Manifesto'" (44-47) must be critiqued, for example, which we might do through alternative terms like the "'Capitalocene'" (54-56)[44] or the "Plantationocene" (Haraway). The ecocritical dystopia, too, is invested in providing resistance through its terminology and aesthetics; it is not positive that

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[44] Demos also engages in "a much-needed discussion of futures that could potentially be locked in for hundreds, even thousands of years, especially in light of the fact that technocratic climate science tends to ignore, or, at best, merely pays lip service to the differential impacts of environmental transformations on disenfranchised communities subject to ongoing racial and economic discrimination, and that social justice activism also tends to shunt ecological matters to the side due to an all-too-immediate confrontation with police brutality" (Demos, "To Save a World").

dystopias seem to be in vogue in the current day, and we must consider how and why to question their role in our social imaginations. That is, we could wonder how fiction also directs us toward the *end* of the Anthropocene rather than assuming its place as a continually growing range on the geological scale. Beyond the seeming contradiction proposed within binary ideas of utopia and dystopia, it is also true that the ultimate work of the ecocritical dystopia is to expose the inconsistencies between our societal and environmental needs, and thus to push us toward desiring what might actually, in comparison, be called more utopian conditions—and I say this even though I would strongly hesitate to advocate for a Utopia in any form, as such a determination, from one perspective, is fundamentally but another dystopia from another. Rather, the ecocritical dystopia suggests that our current and ongoing disconnection from ecological systems does not require a shift toward a utopian potential, but toward a balancing of what *should* be normal, or at least a comprehensive understanding of what the physical world might look like in the future if we continue to disregard all credible warnings currently being offered about environmental transformations. It is possible that a term more resonant with these dystopias has or will come along; that being said, the "ecocritical dystopia" has merit as a sound inheritor of the prior generic terminology, as well as a register for the qualities of this particular set of texts and others like them, even as more popularly-named bodies of work, such as climate change fiction, continue to propagate.

In his Foreword to the recent "climate fiction" focused anthology *Everything Change*,[45] Kim Stanley Robinson explains that science fiction stories of the future located in specific places, "[b]ecause they are fiction," are "imagined future histories" that "focus on individual

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[45] The book's title is drawn from Atwood's comment that "It's not climate change—it's everything change" ("Hope"). A second anthology was also published in 2018 (Dell).

characters in their relationships with each other, their society, and their planet" (Milkoreit et al.

ix).[46] Robinson's use of "planet," of course, is an ecological reference that seems macroscopic,

but the inclusion of the personal is a key element that interconnects his comment with the

ecocritical dystopia—though a sense of ecological entanglement between the personal and larger

systems might be more accurate here than a sense of "interconnection." In contrast, some

interlocutors discussing literature, like Adams, oversimplify dystopian fiction by placing the role

of government in a central position (*Brave New Worlds* 1). This is also apparent in the criticism

directed toward dystopia, like Eric S. Rabkin's reductionist claim that when "suppression is

dictated from above—by the authority figures—we usually see the narrative world as dystopic"

("Atavism" 5-6). A determination of this kind is not wrong, exactly, but it avoids all of the

generic complications that are inherently being ignored. Unfortunately, this categorization

emerges from Rabkin's decision to compare utopia and dystopia in a very binary fashion

(Rabkin, "Atavism" 1), even if the historical developments of both are much more along a

spectrum, if anything (Moylan). The ecocritical dystopia, however, even with its contemplations

of place, space, and environment, does not discount the very real possibility for increasingly

authoritarian regimes, for the rise of the demagogue.

Governmental systems indeed react to conditions not only affecting the populace, but

also to other factors like their revenue streams—and thus in the current day to their

entanglements with resource-extractive processes despite ample evidence of complications

affecting the natural world. This phenomenon is partly a reaction to social anxieties as resources

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[46] Another anthology in which ecocritical dystopian elements feature is Mark Martin's *I'm with the Bears* (2011), which includes Helen Simpson's "Diary of an Interesting Year," Toby Litt's "Newromancer," David Mitchell's "The Siphoners," Wu Ming's "Arzèstula," and Paolo Bacigalupi's "The Tamarisk Hunter."

or the viability of resource systems seems in jeopardy, and the austerity seen in recent years does not simply arise out of a vacuum but is permitted into power when elements like resource scarcity or environmental upheaval are already in play. The production of contemporary dystopias adds to the sense of this within ecological disruptions, and while M. Keith Booker does not see fit to include environmental conditions in his assessment, unlike Rabkin, Booker at least allows for the insertion of such factors when he says that

> dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premises upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (Introduction 3)

This approaches the more complex and careful readings of dystopia from which my understanding emerges, and an example of a more apt blanket statement about this literature is when Moylan highlights "the typical narrative structure of the dystopia … with its presentation of an alienated character's refusal of the dominant society" (147). His statement does not eclipse the environmental, which he even includes but does not focus on in categorizing the critical dystopia. But the contemporary dystopia, if not all dystopias on some fundamental level, naturally includes environmental concerns, and theory and criticism need to reconfigure the conversation to interpret dystopian literature just as Robinson does with climate fiction above.

The argument behind this dissertation is simple, and yet increasingly complicated as its attendant implications reveal themselves: if dystopia is literally bad place, then the places of the future world(s) featured within ecocritical dystopianism are modified from the present to something worse. They are extended along the lines of a horrifying element that is already occurring. By examining how authors configure these alterations and extensions with regards to environments as we know them, we can access potent contemplations about how our current society shapes the future. When we consider that, rather than proposing the utterly far-fetched, this fiction features speculations about highly potential alterations to real-world places, it is necessary to interrogate how much of that fiction is, well, *fiction*. Perhaps such writing even complicates what Dorrit Cohn means when she breaks down our understandings of the word "fiction" and proposes "nonreferential narrative" (Cohn 1-17), since the contemporary dystopia, at least, is a mode of narrative contemplation about a world that does not currently exist, yet also deliberately contains elements of the familiar or day-to-day and therefore features stories that connect with the real-world. Without a doubt, some of the speculations resonant with the ecocritical dystopia have not yet happened, and it might seem logical for writers such as Amitav Ghosh to dismiss "science fiction" as he worries about climate change's influence on contemporary literary fiction. But while I support Ghosh's argument that literary fiction needs to incorporate more of the physical and social impacts of climate change, I also protest the attempted creation of a hierarchy that occurs with his sense of "literary"[47] when he argues that "fiction that deals with climate change is almost by definition not of the kind that is taken seriously: the mere mention of the subject is often enough to relegate a novel or a short story to

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[47] Ursula K. Le Guin has the same critique of Atwood's position about literature and sf writing (Le Guin, "Year").

the genre of science fiction" ("Where"). Such a move attempts to ignore often important and well-known contributions that might fall into so-called "genre-fiction," which seems to have become an unwarranted negativism according to Ghosh's discussion. Hardly the least of these are Indigenous speculative fictions, which provide agency for the future (Streeby 5) and which often approach climate issues; to discount such "science fictions" is to unnecessarily marginalize writing that is increasingly "taken seriously," even if one is non-Indigenous or only now learning of how crucial speculative literature is for the current moment.

While my primary texts are indeed "literary," they are also contributions to speculative literature. Moreover, they are not the only offerings to ecocritical dystopianism. Ghosh's dismissal is short-sighted in part because some of the processes about which this "science fictional" body of work is concerned offer potentialities that have already begun. This is a connection to the trials of the times and their social stressors that is, in fact, literary, thus disproving Ghosh's assertion that, when "the subject of climate change occurs, it is almost always in relation to nonfiction; novels and short stories are very rarely to be glimpsed within this horizon" ("Where"). Many examples of fiction refute his claim, and as my study examines, the speculative, science fictional ecocritical dystopia is rooted in effects on the real-world. Even the textual interconnections such as in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* are fairly prominent, and despite her arguments about literature (*In Other Worlds* 8, 61), *Oryx* and the other MaddAddam books are undoubtedly sf writing. Atwood and other authors further extend a connection with the real world to social or pop-cultural lengths, like when Robinson's *New York 2140* engages in narrative language-play with words like "gehryglory" (17) to represent future architectural marvels. The ecocritical dystopian fiction I examine highlights how our current society might have to adapt as elements in the world around us (like climate change) exhibit our

anthropogenically-driven changes played out in realistic ways that further complicate how we continue to engage with the world in not only so-called traditional literary forms, but also myriad examples of media—the science fictional story included.

Here, at the End

These ecocritical dystopian fictions for the Anthropocene, these speculative, science fictional imaginings looking forward, wield our cultural realisms as explorations of the present as much as they extrapolate the current toward the futuristic. In *Cultural Mapping as Cultural Inquiry* (2015), Nancy Duxbury, W.F. Garrett-Petts, and David MacLennan delineate how the spaces and places of a community intersect with the registers of cultural mapping practices. These elements cover both the "*tangible*, or quantitative (e.g., physical spaces, cultural organizations, public forms of promotion and self-representation, public art, cultural industries, natural and cultural heritage, architecture, people, artifacts, and other material resources)" and the "*intangible*, or qualitative (e.g., values and norms, beliefs and philosophies, language, community narratives, histories and memories, relationships, rituals, traditions, identities, and shared sense of place)" (2). Tellingly, Duxbury, Garrett-Petts, and MacLennan outline how, "[t]ogether, these assets help define communities (and help communities define themselves) in terms of cultural identity, vitality, sense of place, and quality of life" (2). While the places indicated in ecocritical dystopian fiction are "tangible" ones, they are also inflected by those aspects that are "intangible"—by the factors that deepen and enrich our cultural understandings of the physicality of landscapes and ecologies. The ecocritical dystopia registers the disruption of sustained narratives of "place" as valued before the modernity of goods and services had set in or, for the

normalized subject of current capitalism, before upcoming transformations further that gargantuan momentum and drag current social systems into future crisis.

The sense of the dystopian now pervades our culture and world and undermines idealized expectations of both the physical and the cultural compositions of place—alongside accompanying and unrealistic notions of their permanence. The tangible aspects indicate a current state of engagement with the paradoxical horror and convenience, with the seemingly inescapable machine of consumption and excess that an environmental, cultural, and/or social critique might flag in terms of the transition away from more natural landscapes as urban and suburban sprawl increase. These permeate the stories we tell ourselves that can link to the everyday, to the conditions of reality that shape quotidian experience and thus inflect larger narratives about identity. These changes to places and spaces imbue who we believe we are, and what possibilities the future holds. But it is the intangible aspects that extend from such disruptions to decry cultural losses and/or shifts in communal identities; the losses resonate with vast processes such as the hyper-normalizing agents of late capitalism like strip malls, the shopping "meridians" between opposing trunk roads in urban areas, and other "planned" meccas of convergence and transit where "affordable" retail, houseware, and foodstuff outlets gather to fill the gaps in urban grids. Massey argues that there is an "increasing uncertainty about what we mean by 'places' and how we relate to them. How, in the face of all this movement and intermixing, can we retain any sense of a local place and its particularity? An (idealized) notion of an era when places were (supposedly) inhabited by coherent and homogeneous communities is set against the current fragmentation and disruption" ("Global" 167). In one sense Massey is not wrong, and the current day alterity of how our modern places have been sold to capitalistic projects is captured visually within the spaces of inactivity and waste accumulation seen through

lenses like Spohler's photography. But the tangible and intangible markers of cultural mapping remain in how we narrate the physicality of our living experiences and our related worldviews, and the ecocritical dystopia works as a reminder that our sense of place can be altered all too soon and quite dramatically into the future as current environmental shifts keep occurring.

For many individuals, of course, change can also be a Utopian consideration, but the etymological suggestion of "home" forming part of the concern within the ecocritical dystopia is an essential troubling of Utopian assumptions. The characters in several of these texts leave their familiar homes (only some to return) in attempts to discover better home places—evoking literary roots from utopian traditions to more classical dystopias. Even as readers of the contemporary dystopia, we are confronted by the possibility that what we know about potential sanctuary from crisis might be uncertain, and that our understanding of the spaces and places of home and its environmental conditions is askew. Accordingly, our knowledge of the world might need re-constituting; so it is with the characters in these ecocritical dystopias as they learn to interact with landscapes that are not only different from what they might have expected, but also different from what those living in today's North America might expect. Our recent experiences with increased wildfire and storm intensity are only a glimpse into a series of changes that will alter our sense of continent, region, and locale.

This incorporation of the journey narrative, this emergence of a "new hope," is as linked to utter devastation as utopia is to dystopia. As Moylan suggests, a particular text can register more than one utopian and/or dystopian quality. The comparable issue with "apocalypse," as it has developed from its etymological roots to a functional concept, is that the so-called revelation

of apocalypse,[48] in contemporary usage, can just as easily render reality, social processes, or

even the nature of events opaque. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the implied disaster is more

than regional, and can likely be extended to a global state of catastrophe through various factors.

Major cities are visibly devastated—even if the means of destruction are either unknown or

unspecified.[49] The structure of Western society is broken in McCarthy's narrative. Ecological

and environmental distress is near-total, and a resurgence ultimately doomed. For all the

certainty of these aspects, a pall of the unknown covers everything, obscuring rather than

illuminating the hidden nature of the world in contrast with the traditional vein of apocalypse.

While it is revealed that we have wrecked the world irreparably, and that, even in such a time of

devastation, good hearts can forge onwards within the chaos,[50] nowhere is there a definite answer

about the exact nature of the calamity that befalls us in this future. Instead, we are confronted by

the spectre of various social processes we have perpetuated upon both ourselves and the

drastically altered physical world. In McCarthy's vision, these haunt the future through the

irreparable damage we have wrought. But the utopian and dystopian conditions are paradoxically

intertwined since the "good place" of Utopia is never actually accessible due to the

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[48] Alistair McIntosh argues that "[e]tymologically the Greek *apokalyptein* has its roots in *apo-* 'from,' and *kalyptein*, 'to cover or conceal.' Apocalypse is therefore an uncovering, a *revelation*. The word has a technical usage that implies a transformation, perhaps in consciousness, by which an existing corrupt socio-ecological order is turned upside down by the astonishing irruption of new hope" (ix). Montanari further positions "apokaluptó" as the term connected to uncovering, and the related term "apokalupsis" to "revelation" ("ἀποκαλύπτω"; "ἀποκάλυψις").

[49] Ben De Bruyn insists that in the post-apocalyptic landscape of *The Road*, "the story and its ecological dimension seem straightforward" (776), but this is hardly so, given the obfuscation at play. As Michael O'Driscoll generously suggested to me, the novel presents what we might call a "slow reveal" of place.

[50] McCarthy's version of *apocalypsis* is a bittersweet legacy that hinges on "Christian" goodwill, even though the prospect is ultimately dire.

"contradiction" (Chamberlin 75) "between *eutopos* (a good place) and *outopos* (no place)"

(Brown, "Nowherelands" 6).[51] The etymology of "utopia" suggests that present conditions are

always more imperfect and dystopian than the sense of desire that drives hopeful, future ones:

the present is already populated with dystopian places and experiences, as Gibson might say

(Riesman).

The so-called "eutopias" in the style of More's *Utopia* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's*

Travels (1726) are also, essentially, "outopias," since the landscapes of their Utopian

communities are not real-world places. They are not the altered locales and regions of the

ecocritical dystopia, where change has affected the real world. That is, these earlier "outopias"

represent completely cartographic fictions, filling as-of-yet unexplored territories—by the

mapmakers, that is—on land and by ocean with possibility. Sargent argues that "[t]opos implies

that the Utopia must be located spatially and temporally; even though nowhere, it must have

some place. This is, of course, a device for *imparting* reality, making it *seem* possible rather than

impossible" ("Utopia" 138; my emphasis). This creation of places, of geography within which to

house a Utopia, is a natural extension of the utopian narrative, since the utopia's suggestion of a

place of escape from the hard facts of the real world is something that both Utopian thinkers and

writers of utopia wish to make seem possible. However, despite Sargent's claim, we cannot

divest the term of its prefix and the attendant implications, and it is important to note that

Moylan also applauds Sargent's move in order to push (through his lengthy and complex

discussion) for the sense that, by extension, critical dystopias are instead *reflections* upon the real

world, rather than tangible extensions of the present day (*Scraps* 72). In discussing utopia,

Moylan writes that, "[i]n a move that connects with the work of … others on spatiality, [Sargent]

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[51] See also Sargent's "Utopia—The Problem of Definition."

argues that the importance of the second syllable of the key word, *topos*, is not to be dismissed; for the invocation of social space is what establishes the connection of Utopia and history" ("Daring" 72). He goes on to say that, "as the critical utopias of the 1960s and 1970s revived and transformed utopian writing," "the critical dystopias of the 1980s and 1990s carry out similar intertextual intervention as they negate the negation of the critical utopian moment and thus make room for another manifestation of the utopian imagination within the dystopias [sic] form" (195). Following from this, Moylan refers to Sargent's definitions of the utopia, the eutopia, the dystopia, the utopian satire, the anti-utopia, and the critical utopia—all of which emphasize "'a non-existent society'" (Sargent as qtd. in Moylan 195; Sargent 9) of some type. But here Moylan links the "non-existent" label to the critical *dys*topia, which therefore becomes a construct in which places are created as comparisons to a given contemporary society. Both Moylan and Sargent accordingly put great emphasis on what is essentially place-*making*, or as Moylan calls the utopian society, "an exercise in imaginative intervention in historical reality" (72), which is to be differentiated from the place-*changing* of the ecocritical dystopia.

In a practical sense, it is true that living in the modern, real world involves learning to cope with and strive against imperfect conditions. Global inequality is one glaring example. While, etymologically and traditionally, the dystopia is not the opposite of the *ou*topos inherent in Utopia's roots, in the sense of contemporary literature that alters what the reader expects about real world place (in the sense of the ecocritical dystopia), it has become that opposing form. Through the lens of the ecocritical dystopia, the "no place" of utopia becomes highly resonant within the etymological associations—especially since there is no escape from current global processes of environmental degradation. If the utopian contains a sense of no place, then the ecocritical dystopia contains an absolute sense of place, and unfortunately for both the

contemporary moment and the future, that dystopian feeling inflects our idea of home, of the "here" with which we imbue our North American home places.

This sense of place is articulated within fictional worlds to demonstrate how alterations are underway or have occurred from today. The ecocritical dystopia questions how ideas of here or home might remain functional while ecological, geographical, and/or geological shifts continue or even magnify. Environmental change is literally change to both physical space and place, as well as to the understanding of those present-day, tangible and intangible cultural qualities that had already existed prior to the modifications. The writers of ecocritical dystopian texts speculate about how the current broader global systems of environmental distress could influence regional and local North American place, bringing the concerns of the planet into play in a manner that directly involves our future social interactions through imagining ecological and/or environmental alterations to the future continent. Not only has dystopian fiction adapted to envision the outcomes of immanent deterioration, but the narrative "sense of place" spun by the local or regional communal and cultural identities across real-world North America is jeopardized within the futures represented by this body of fiction.

Perhaps the ecocritical dystopia is therefore, in some ways, merely a recognition that our comprehension of place is constantly changing anyway, and that amidst these transformations are less-than-desirable effects that, collectively, incrementally, and aggregately, come to imbue how we understand our world despite our previously-held conceptions. Ursula K. Heise argues that, "[r]ather than focusing on the recuperation of a sense of place, environmentalism needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness" (21). In this sense that places will shift no matter which actions we

take to mitigate our impact—and this is especially true of the effects that something like anthropogenic climate change has and will be having on our understanding of our surroundings—the ecocritical dystopia is engaged in explicating to us, once again, that human activity is the driver of transformations[52] that humans, conversely, do not seem to expect or want for their conceptions of the places and spaces in which they hold a stake. Putting a positivist spin on how we might see such alterations, Heise proposes a concept of "eco-cosmopolitanism" to navigate the connections between local, regional, national, and global perspectives of environmental commitment and enable the complex negotiation between universalizing modernity and unique "identities shaped by hybridity, creolization, mestizaje, migration, borderlands, diaspora, nomadism, exile, and deterritorialization" (5). But the danger to both unique cultural expressions and ecological niches, for instance, is indeed the universalizing forces of the modern world that threaten how communal places feature in many cultural self-determinations. This is not to rule out the importance and validity of hybrid cultures created by the processes of colonialism, capitalism, or ecological devastation that transect and divide both environmental and traditional spaces, but to critique the processes themselves as they impose such different organizational effects on regions and locales.

D. H. Lawrence's assertion that "[e]very continent has its own great spirit of place" (5-6; Tally 81) is less true the closer one gets to recognizing the particularities of regional and local cultural understandings of their physical environments—or of historical shifts. As Albert Braz generously put it to me, "The question is: what is a continent?" Such a question asks us to interrogate the means by which a geographical area is named and understood. Do all, here,

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[52] Outside of such fictional assertions, the 600-page November 2017 Climate Science Special Report (Fourth National Climate Assessment) makes a case for human activity driving climate change—as does the October 2018 IPCC report.

understand the space as North America, or is that a worldview passed down by colonial

conquest? Perhaps a continental label is nothing more than one of the universalizing forces of

modernity, through such a lens. This resonates much more for me than Lawrence's assertion

about continental "spirit of place," though I would also add that regional and local communities

are more likely markers for registering such distinct self-identifying elements. On these

geographical levels, despite the fact that a particular place has multiple histories inflecting its

narrative and a variety of pasts and potential futures indicating that a sense of place is constantly

in flux, the more common assumptions seem to be that a potential for change is unprecedented in

actuality. Past histories or not, existing cultural worldviews tend to prioritize their continued

purview over the places and spaces to which they feel entitlement. The increasing appearance of

speculative alterations to particular places in ecocritical dystopian fiction questions such ideas of

permanence and indicates what Massey calls the "locus of denial" (*For Space* 5), where authors

challenge entrenched social notions of real-world surroundings in order to indicate to their

readers that the advance of environmental degradation is inevitable under the continued

principles of social organization to which we are currently subject.

In general, the ecocritical dystopia fundamentally reduces the sense of distance between

the future and the immediate moment, but it can also extend the related processes of change quite

far and might even involve an indeterminate gap of time between the present and the future. Yet

this last would still feature a distinct relationship between, say, the social and geographical

realities of the present and the ensuing future, which alters how contemporary dystopias must be

seen in comparison with older iterations of the genre. I think it would be valuable to read these

previous contributions through the lens of the ecocritical dystopia, since, with an example like

Forster's "The Machine Stops," the narrator's story indicates or implies the many following

places around the globe: Brisbane, Mongolia, China, Pekin (Beijing), Shrewsbury, Rye, Christchurch, Rheims, The Helsingfors (Helsinki), Brazil, the Alps, Palermo, Sumatra, Asia, Simla (Shimla), the Himalayas, India, Kinchinjunga, Greece, Mount Taygetus, Wessex, Paris, Versailles, and Courland. But while the narrative names several geographical locations throughout, the associated goal is not to show how specific places have shifted environmentally, and is also not really about the fact that they have changed—despite how an ongoing environmentally destructive planetary condition is indicated since the air is said to be deadly (165), "the forests" to have been "destroyed during the literature epoch" (162-63), and the "diminished rivers" to trickle by "the ruins of cities" (163). Connecting specific locales or regions to such environmental alterations would belong to the ecocritical dystopia, but perhaps the story is, retroactively, more of a critical dystopia. Even though Moylan does not apply that label, he indicates an "ideological distance between Forster's historical moment and the elsewhere of the text" (112), and calls the story "an abstract yet critical account of the new social spacetime of the twentieth century" (111). While this alone does not make "The Machine Stops" a critical dystopia, there is also a separation created between Forster's social time and that of the fictional Machine.

Forster establishes a distinct alienation between these future-living characters and the places of today, which is perhaps seen best when an "air-ship" attendant apologizes for her "common way of speaking" that includes "the habit of calling places over which" she "pass[es] by their *unmechanical* names" (161; my emphasis). Here, "unmechanical" clearly refers to nomenclature that is not Machine-forward, and that seeks to perpetuate the ideas of past, and thus defunct, civilizations. As the character Vashti (to whom the attendant apologizes) traverses the global hemispheres in the air-ship, she even continually acts to block geographical locations

from view "behind a metal blind" (163, 164; 162), and repeats her invocation, "'No ideas here'" (164; 162, 163), as if reciting a litany that observes the Machine as the sole source of knowledge. Her performance displays a blinding, ingrained loss of understanding about both history and her world in general, which contradicts her assumed role as a perpetuator of knowledge. The narrative language surrounding these moments is also of direct importance, since the wording indicates an obfuscation of name, fact, history, and identification-based information for distinct locations, and even a series of choices taken to forget: Greece, for example, which is the last geographical area indicated during Vashti's flight, is first described in abstract from the narrative perspective as "a golden sea, in which lay many small islands and one peninsula" (164). But the place name is not given until the air-ship's divisive metal blind has been lowered, and by this point the suggestion seems to be that Vashti is not even able to recognize the setting she sees as intrinsic to Greece. The language used in the narration is revealing, and an important corollary from some of this is that the narrator who gives the geographical place names is actually the Machine[53]—who,[54] while controlling, is quite logical (to a fault, and its inevitable demise). It should also be noted that the Machine's success in organizing society according to its ideas of efficiency[55] is to work on achieving as complete a separation between its citizens and the surface as possible. These places are therefore mostly being offered as excess information that matters little anymore to that conception of society and the characters' lives, and since the narrative is

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[53] This is made clear by both the self-identifying pronouns used near the end (Forster 195), and the fact that the story finishes when the Machine fails—though humanity technically does not go extinct, since there are at least surface-dwellers called the "Homeless."

[54] I use "who" rather than "which" because the narrative demonstrates the Machine's personhood.

[55] One could argue that such efficiencies are written into the manual that was likely to have originally been created by humans, but it appears from the effects of the Machine even across one human lifespan that changes occur in its modes of social control.

not being directed to the people of the society, the Machine does not logically need to withhold

such information. Geographical and cultural places have ceased to matter according to the global

society run by the Machine, and the place markers mentioned in the text have mostly become

irrelevant; the story is not an ecocritical dystopia in its own right.

This formulation seen in "The Machine Stops" presents a more distancing temporal effect

than that seen within the ecocritical dystopia and, overall, the story relates more to either the

classical or critical dystopias. The one exception that might be retroactively read as resonating

with ecocritical dystopian qualities is in the character Kuno's failed attempts to ground himself

in an existence that recognizes and participates culturally in the surface-geography of Wessex

(the globally-spanning society lives underground). He says to his mother, Vashti, "You know

that we have lost the sense of space" (167), and to this we might as well add a sense of place. But

Kuno's goal is to regain both of those senses, and he educates himself on the cultural history of

Wessex,[56] below which he lives earlier in the story (174). When Kuno reaches the surface during

his quest for geographical and cultural re-education, he is "in a grass-green hollow … edged with

fern" (174). Arguably, this could be any hollow in "the hills of Wessex" (176), but during

Vashti's earlier journey in the air-ship, the narration also comments on "the ruins of cities, …

and by the sides of these … the signs of vomitories, marking the cities" (163) of the time of the

Machine. Kuno therefore not only lives under Wessex in a geographical sense, but also under the

remains of one of its (unnamed) modern cities. Though the narrative earlier indicates the human-

induced alterations to air, tree coverage, and water qualities seen today, the environmental

change from the current day to that of Kuno and Vashti's present is thus also composed of at

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[56] Even his re-education demonstrates a loss of knowledge about geographical places, for he
wonders "how long [Wessex] remained an international power" (174).

least a reintroduction of natural flora into spaces once essentially cleared of such things, like the urban and industrial landscapes of modern Britain. The extent of this is not made clear in Forster's story, however, and it is likely that an ecocritical reading must end there. Kuno's interaction with the surface is also further distanced in a formal sense from the main narrative being told, since he only recounts it to his mother, and the reader/audience does not engage with the episode directly; this does not discount a potential ecocritical dystopian re-reading, but it does put the story's only connection to tangible environmental and place-based change at a remove from the present events related through narration. In my reading, this fact functions to formally separate the main narrative from the ecocritical dystopian linkage between the present day and the fictional time of the future, which corroborates the fact that there is no specific sense that current events drive the development of such a future, beyond the general ones related to technological advance.

In comparison, unlike the general drive of Forster's text, in an ecocritical dystopia such as Paolo Bacigalupi's short story "The People of Sand and Slag" (2004), places are deliberately altered to demonstrate particular environmentally-related afflictions. Montana is an unrecognizable mining operation from open acid pit to mountain of slag and the iconic beauty of Hawai'i[57] is irreparably tarnished by unabated oil extraction processes, scrap metal, barbed wire, plastic, and rubble. Both geographical locations are tied to the story's commentary on deep-seated environmental alterations imposed by the present time's social choices having run amok. In ecocritical dystopian narratives, the respective communities of future continents, nations,

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[57] Bacigalupi does not specify a Hawaiian island, so the suggestion is that the entire area, and perhaps beyond, has been affected by near-future processes extrapolated from today, and especially a disregard for the environmental impacts of rampant fossil fuel resource extraction and general pollution.

regions, or locales are expressed in particular ways that both make them recognizable to those living now and demonstrate just how modified communal spaces and places have become. The complex exchange between modes of engaging with place and with space fit into conceptualizing and understanding shifts from the present day into imagined ecocritical dystopian futures. It is thus fitting that the *topos* of dystopia refers to place, because it is often the particularity of places that is first fundamentally altered in the ecocritical dystopia, which then changes how a given space can be discussed, understood, or experienced. This last extends to the sense of future cultural elements and to the organization of society, which, as per many dystopias from the classical to the contemporary, often includes a ruling element with a large degree of power over the rest of society, to which individual and collective elements resist.

To a social class that holds some amount of affluence, like the middle to upper economic classes of the present day, the idea that a concrete sense of communal place could be severely transformed is unnerving, disorienting, and steeped in anguish. This dystopian sense read through the lens of North American place[58] ostensibly assigns value to the preservation of particular landscapes, as with William Cronon's discussion on the origins of the "movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas" (79)—even though, hypocritically, the artificial, urban areas this increasingly technological society has created transform on a fairly small time scale across generations, making permanence merely a catchphrase for the moralistic or a register for the nostalgic. The ecocritical dystopia articulates this attempted control as having at

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[58] I am also not ruling out the potential for non-Western ecocritical dystopias, or the existence of such narratives centred around how the processes of modernity have affected global cultures. I would call both Lindsay Redifer's "Standing Still" and Shauna O'Meara's "On Darwin Tides" ecocritical dystopias that deal with both environmental and social shifts in Madagascar and Malaysia, respectively, but the non-Western locales of both can also be legitimately troubled by the somewhat colonial narrative voice in the former and the non-Malaysian writer of the latter. Western, globalized modernity is ultimately inescapable in both narratives.

least two negative outcomes, which are presented through social and environmental registers. The first, a socially-based issue, underscores that fabricated notions of maintaining communal place are, in fact, elitist at their core, and exclude the disadvantaged and/or minority populations in society; moreover, the militaristic, authoritarian control that will come or is already forming in response to environmental concerns such as climate change (see Schneider-Mayerson on eco-authoritarianism in Singapore, or Demos's "To Save a World") is one that threatens to repress and erase cultural diversity. Middle to upper class Western society, as representatives of seemingly more economically-stable and more fundamentally mobile cultural nodes, seems to value "producing and reproducing the daily lives of the comfortably-off in First World societies" (Massey, "Global" 171). Such a system includes "the resources they draw on, from all over the world, to feed their lives," and "limit[s] the lives of others before their own. We need to ask, in other words, whether our relative mobility and power over mobility and communication entrenches the spatial imprisonment of other groups" (171). Western society's notion that it is maintaining or can preserve places and spaces is a fallacy since hyper-capitalism demands constant movement, in a sense, and reorganizes social infrastructures to facilitate the reduction of distances and obstacles to a flow of capital across country and state borders. Massey notes an "almost obligatory use in the literature of terms and phrases such as speed-up, global village, overcoming spatial barriers, the disruption of horizons, and so forth" (167), all which highlight convenience over all other aims. The resultant "time-space compression represent[s] very much a western, colonizer's, view" (168), which the ecocritical dystopia, notably, critiques through its suggestion of immanence—as well as Indigenous examples.

Though ecocritical dystopianism is not written in support of Western modes of living, it provides a strong register for anxiety about how the current world is being altered toward an

even more dystopian future. This projection forward is also, in a sense, a tallying of how present-day issues affect its various social communities and the environments in which they interact. For Massey, the sustained effects of global capitalism on local spaces and places are ones that require a deeply critical eye, for the phenomenon itself seems to breed language and constructs that perpetuate its processes. Our so-called "convenience" is actually often rather inconvenient in a variety of ways. As Rita Wong's poem "nervous organism" (2017) critiques, to achieve our desire to have fresh produce year-round, we "hafta nasty nafta through mexico, california, oregon, washington, canada" (20).[59] An emphasis on travel, transport, fuel requirements, time constraints, and the like is implied, of course. It is quite true that mobility in this manner is one element of a complex economic system that belies claims that the so-called First World offers the global south an opportunity to partake in its luxuries. It has, additionally, been demonstrated that, articulated purely in terms of "aid," "the flow of money from rich countries to poor countries pales in comparison to the flow that runs in the other direction" (Hickel). Locally to globally, and certainly environmentally, we live in a world that favours the elite, and the movements of capital that sustain them.

Massey even points out that such modes of convenience "may entail environmental consequences, or hit constraints" ("Global" 171), which is the other negative outcome of attempted control over spaces and places that the ecocritical dystopia highlights. Such results are inevitable, for this modernized, self-privileging worldview does not only, ultimately, inhibit cultural diversity and freedoms, but through a prioritization of a continued flow of capital, or business as usual, negatively affects biosphere integrity and hastens its ongoing disappearance

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[59] Her entire collection *forage* (2007) is conspicuously devoid of capital letters, which I read as a poetic resistance to the (non-grammatical) process of capitalism itself.

("Nine"). Our so-called continental culture, at least, is the epitome of that worldview, with its paradoxical neoliberal banner of conservativism and far-reaching actions (whether direct or indirect) that alter the landscapes of entire locales or regions. One only has to glance at Burtynsky's, Spohler's, Garth Lenz's (Harlan), or Warren Cariou's[60] visual work to see our impact on the world, to see the visual presentation of the Anthropocene—and a visual starting point for how writers of some ecocritical dystopias might imagine future landscapes. Bacigalupi's "The People of Sand and Slag," for instance, might easily take its initial cues on setting from the dismal vistas of the Alberta oilsands. Environmental disruptions cannot be averted by the very means by which they are being perpetuated, and westernized, global capitalistic processes, energy policies, and industrial practices of our so-called First World culture do not actually preserve the spaces and places of the world, as they are organized into modes of greater efficiency. Such constructs bifurcate, dissect, section, and separate landscapes so that null or void spaces appear and are perpetuated as "dead zones" by the very systems that created them in the first place. The modern infrastructures of convenience only sustain advantageous species in these gaps, if anything—those "weedy" species that adapt to our concrete, invasive, dislocated, and muddled aesthetic (Quammen, "Planet"). The meridian, roadside, and empty-lot "voids" that metaphorically and literally collect the detritus of our superhighway, fast-food, and convenience-seeking lifestyles reflect the tired and deeply-flawed notion that a sustainable future is possible as the endgame of this system for making profits over not only other human agents in competition, but also over the well-being of biotic systems with which we come into contact. Modern human impositions on the world alter landscapes, ocean reefs, and atmospheric processes in ways that often leave devastation behind, and an inability to

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[60] Cariou's petrography introspectively embodies current energy cultures within its medium.

support life. Industry-favourable "management" of environmental resources does not benefit

ecological systems, in the end; here the example modern forestry management stands out in a

time when, following decades of practices modelled to boost harvests, climate-exacerbated fires

now have more than ample fodder to rage often out of control and beyond the scale of human

intervention (Dimoff; Lindsay). Such a system is not tenable and will result in a future of

devastating change that also more acutely accentuates social disparity. It is this crux of faith with

modernized social systems that the ecocritical dystopia articulates so clearly.

Modern times are anthropogenically-driven, and thus Anthropocenic ones. These

fictional geographic alterations of ecocritical dystopian fiction, which Tally might, in the absence

of speculative element, classify under the "literary geography" label (5, 43, 52, 79-111, 149)

label, contain tangible stratigraphic, geologic traces that indicate how the processes of what is

already happening to the world will leave a legacy—not to mention what will occur moving

forward along this trajectory. Alastair McIntosh foresees two possible outcomes from the

immanent continuation of the environmentally apocalyptic mode that is connected to such

processes as global warming, continuations that are hardly separable from the concerns of the

ecocritical dystopia. He envisions death and destruction if the world remains culturally and

economically divided, and describes the attempt to avoid it as

> the challenge of our times, because the political, economic and technological
>
> responses to climate change will not be enough on their own. We also need a
>
> change of heart: a shift from seeking fulfilment primarily from the things of outer
>
> quantitative consumption, and a move to the more qualitative realms of empathy
>
> in relationships, elemental connections to nature, depth of community, sensitivity
>
> to beauty and a deepening of the inner life. (x)

That our current mode of living will result in a reduction of cultural and biotic diversities seems inevitable, and the implication imbuing the ecocritical dystopia is that we should attend to environmental concerns in order to foster at least some manner of a more viable and ecologically-responsible future. The challenge is to not distance ourselves from the natural world or from each other. Just as Cronon earlier recognizes that mythologizing the idea of "wilderness" as something pristine and in need of preservation actually separates the human from the natural, Hulme demonstrates that we regard climate in a similar manner, as if "lamenting Eden" (40).[61] Rather, it is more useful to both document how the present world is changing and to speculate about how the future world will be affected so that we can effectively adapt to processes already in play while mitigating our further anthropogenic impacts. This is the role of creative work in our system of handling current concerns projected into the future, and writing like the ecocritical dystopia is sorely needed as imaginative world-building to contemplate how dystopian conditions might become even more problematic. Dean's insistence on anamorphosis as an organizing principle for envisioning climate change (an idea that can be extended even further with the globe's many related and concurrent environmental issues) also means that we could benefit from perceptual aids to accomplish what a linear, straightforward point of view cannot hope to. Otherwise, the *aporia* of phenomena like climate change remains impassable and renders both clarity and active solutions improbable. Hulme makes an interesting point when he argues that as one climate shifts in a specific location, it will *also* adapt in another, since "[c]limate is not like biodiversity—an absolute decline in species numbers or a loss of ecosystem function—or even like ozone, a direct physiological health hazard. As climates transform, the

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[61] Hulme also acknowledges Cronon alongside "anthropologists and environmental historians ... such as Julie Cruikshank [and] Michael Thompson" (40).

various categories of weather are re-arranged to occur in different places and in different sequences" (42). This and other similar shifts are hard to conceptualize, and then to re-conceptualize in terms of social interactions.

The ecocritical dystopia, however, is the imagination machine of the "now" pushed forward. Of course, speculative fiction has always worked to provide this social role. Hence, Shelley's responses in fiction after Mount Tambora's 1815 eruption in Indonesia precipitated a further dip in northern hemispheric temperatures at the tail end of the "Little Ice Age," affecting at least 1816 Europe[62] and the Americas. But the role of the "event" in driving such fiction has become impossibly convoluted in the present day. We only need recall how our current world's altered prevalence and intensity of storms, combined with a reduction of Arctic ice, increases erosion of landscape in the northern Inupiaq village of Shishmaref (Atleo, *Principles* 9). Or we can recall the fact that, in the spring of 2016, the Slims River, former tributary to the Kluane and thus to the Yukon and the Bering Sea, disappeared (perhaps forever) over a period of four days in "'the first event … where river piracy occurred … due to contemporary climate change'" (Weikle; Devlin; Struzik; M. Brown). As Paul Tukker indicates in relation to this sudden shift, "[r]esearchers in Alaska say they're seeing significant changes in freshwater chemistry in the Yukon River basin, which they attribute to thawing permafrost" (see also Fountain). The associated regional problems are clearly myriad, though issues likely range further afield. Ecocritical dystopianism works to encapsulate such concerns with the imagined future guarantee of receding California coastlines in Butler's Parable books, the afternoon storms and even

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[62] See William J. Broad's "A Volcanic Eruption" or Gillen D'Arcy Wood's *Tambora: The Eruption the Changed the World*; see also Dehlia Hannah, Cynthia Selin, and Karen Holmberg's research and curatorial project *A Year Without a Winter* (2018), and Dehlia Hannah's edited book of the same name.

tornadoes on the eastern seaboard in Atwood's MaddAddam books (*Oryx* 285-86), and the continued loss of boreal, coastal, and prairie biological habitats in King's *The Back of the Turtle*. But its associated role of giving form to the future of society is invaluable. With the ecocritical dystopia, we can begin to overlap the work of both the sciences and the humanities in mapping out how the effects of contemporary society are changing, and will change, the physical world in which we live.

Essentially, the ecocritical dystopia alters an understanding of how the present day relates to the future. Through its use of real-world rather than completely fictional place, this dystopian development mitigates or, rather, adapts the sense of "cognitive estrangement" that Suvin suggests for other sf, sf-related, or sf-adjacent works (*Metamorphoses*, 2016, 15).[63] In his edited re-release of Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Canavan comments that "[i]t seems easy to understand what makes such visions of alternative worlds an example of 'estrangement'—but what makes them 'cognitive'?" ("Suvin" xviii). Suvin's conception of sf material posits a break between the real world and the fiction he is discussing. As Canavan explains, "[e]strangement … is the principle of difference that fuels the soaring imagination of science fictional difference, while cognition is the reality principle that adheres to our real conditions of existence and thereby keeps the imagination honest" (xviii). To this we now have the added subgeneric disruption or complication of the ecocritical dystopia. For Suvin, sf work presents a separation from our knowledge or conception of the real world. Given its focus on real-world places, however, specifically *eco*critical dystopian fiction pushes against the critical

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[63] Suvin's rejection of other related genres is notable, and has stoked years of subsequent criticism (Canavan, "Suvin" xi-xiv). Eric Carl Link and Gerry Canavan also explain the complex difficulties with terminologies related to science fiction, speculative fiction, and sf in their introduction to *The Cambridge History of Science Fiction* (2019).

legacy of "cognitive estrangement" as its characteristics more closely align settings and scenarios with our sense of cognition and lessen our sense of disconnection. With the ecocritical dystopia, we have a distinct understanding of a particular real-world place employed in the narrative, and thus a stronger relation to how we conceive it. It is here, then, that the question of cognitive estrangement in sf work becomes much more potent, since we have a personal stake in the imagined transformation(s) at play. The tension between cognition and estrangement is that of the tangible versus the speculative for the ecocritical dystopia since its spaces and places are indeed fictional future versions of our present. The cognitive estrangement of the ecocritical dystopia is thus deliberately dampened for the reader, rather than how it can be, at times, presented in other sf through the alterity of a completely alien world. The sense of familiarity here plays a greater role than it would with a science fictional story set on Mars or one of Jupiter's moons, for instance, such as with Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) or Arthur C. Clarke's "A Meeting with Medusa" (1971), respectively. Instead, the reader knows fairly accurately what a reference to Wisconsin or the Mackenzie Mountain Barrens *should* mean, even if, in a given narrative, those locales have been considerably and purposefully altered, like the Washington, D.C., of Bacigalupi's *The Drowned Cities* (2012) or the Vancouver of Luanne Armstrong's *The Bone House* (2002), as climate change exacerbates sea-level rise. It is in the resulting palimpsest of transformed landscapes littered with remnants that the reader connects the author's speculative future with the contemporary world. It is within this imagined framework that we see an extension of ourselves, and are affected by a sense of urgency about not only our world, but also changes into the future.

Chapter 2

The Ecocritical Dystopia and Cultural Exodus

in Butler's Parable Series

Lauren Oya Olamina's coming-of-age story[64] in Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*

(1993) and the ensuing entwined narratives of Lauren,[65] her husband Taylor Franklin Bankole,

and their stolen and estranged daughter Larkin Beryl Ife Olamina Bankole (or Asha Vere) in

Parable of the Talents (1998)[66] present a near-future, dystopian California ranging from the year

2024 through 2090.[67] Here a breakdown of neoliberal, Western democratic values and related

urban social infrastructures extends from environmental problems exacerbated by human

activity—and highlights the increasing inability of social systems to continue functioning

without sliding into chaos and a neo-feudal rule of law. Rampant issues with climate change and

associated elements such as sea-level rise, desertification, and resource depletion are unveiled

throughout the Parable books as driving the destabilization of not only humane, organized,

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[64] While Ingrid Thaler (69) and others (Andréolle 119; Hentges 13; Texter 460) also determine that *Sower* is a *bildungsroman*, given what is essentially Lauren's development of creative practice not only in conceiving the Earthseed eco-religion but in her progression of writing from the journal form to books, we might even apply the *künstlerroman* term, though Lauren would never call herself an artist. Her daughter Larkin/Asha Vere, however, suggests that her mother could have been "a writer … or an artist" (*Talents* 2) in less troubled times. This last follows Larkin/Asha Vere's personal admission that she has become a writer, so *Talents*, at least, deserves the *künstlerroman* term.

[65] Several critics refer to Lauren as Olamina, since this is how she becomes known to the Earthseed ecoreligious community she builds, and how her estranged daughter chooses to refer to her in *Talents*. However, from the beginning of *Sower*, which she essentially narrates through journal entries, she is Lauren. I choose to identify her by her first name rather than what seems to me to be the more impersonal choice of Olamina.

[66] Text from Lauren's brother Marc's *Warrior* (*Talents* 109, 308-309) is also incorporated into the formal dynamic of *Talents*.

[67] Larkin/Asha Vere, who wrote, assembled, and edited (*Talents* 2) the fictional text that comprises *Talents*, technically carries the narrative past her mother's last, 2090 journal entry.

altruistic responses to social crisis, but also of privileged and idealized social constructs in the United States like Utopian suburbia and its increasingly gated communities. Such disruptions enable a shift in the systems governing social order.

Sower opens with a fifteen-year-old Lauren questioning the logic of a society that has a growing overpopulation and urbanization as she works to help her family and community, who live in a walled neighbourhood of Robledo, an area that used to be "a rich, green, unwalled little city" "20 miles from Los Angeles" (*Sower* 10). Yet she also plans for a future where flight from the urban sprawl of "Fortress L.A." (see Davis) will undoubtedly be necessary. Unfortunately for established communities like Robledo, the first of Lauren's homes, she has quite accurately foreseen the disintegration of larger urban social systems in Greater Los Angeles and the southern United States in general, and ends up fleeing north toward a potentially viable living space that she hopes is free from the disparity and violence accompanying strained urban areas beset by socioeconomic pressures. But, as the greater narrative arc of the Parable books demonstrates, both the environmental and resultant social shifts become ubiquitous in this arguably post-American landscape. Lauren cannot escape changes in the environment, even as she journeys northward and tries to settle elsewhere, and neither can the rest of the "freeway crowd" "walkers, bicyclers, [and] people carrying, pulling, pushing loads of all kinds" (176), for there is nowhere to go to escape the increasing effects of climate change and the societal burden on resources. Even her newly-founded, eco-religious, Utopian community Acorn, established up the Californian coast in Cape Mendocino country, is eventually overrun, disbanded, and repurposed into what is then named Camp Christian by racist fundamentalists who force those interned to wear shock-inducing slave-collars as part of a social and religious reconditioning program for the nascent Christian America movement. It is worth noting that, with this

experience, Lauren, as a black woman growing up and then reaching the end of her life from *Sower* through *Talents*, embodies Butler's cultural commentary on the region (and American history more generally) as a black, feminist sf writer. Lauren finally escapes being subjected to forced labour, religious indoctrination, and rape and other physical abuse. She then works for the rest of her 81 years (*Talents* 404) to spread her eco-religion Earthseed, without a fixed communal base, through lectures, events, and the diversion of donated funds toward combined social aid and Earthseed-friendly education and technology development. But while she even lives to witness her Earthseed movement propelled into the stars through colonial space expeditions, the Parable novels are not the utopian narratives they pretend to set out to be in each of their concluding movements. In moving from *Sower* to *Talents* and anchoring dystopia to the tangible, Butler clarifies that Lauren's Utopian dreaming about an eco-religious revitalization of community is troubled by ideological and otherwise opportunistic factors capitalizing on the climate disaster already ravaging the places and people of this future United States.

Rather, *Sower* and *Talents* contain a blend of critical and ecocritical dystopian elements, though the two novels often reflect utopian imaginings and Lauren and her group attempt to establish related aspects in Acorn. Gerry Canavan says that the novels "remain bound in a kind of antinomic relationship: *Sower* (utopian dreaming) and *Talents* (anti-utopian reality) are locked in a death struggle that cannot be overcome because the sequel that would have synthesized and moved beyond both can now never be written" (*Octavia* 143). This is true in the sense that the series is incomplete, and that resonances of utopian possibility remain blocked by the dystopian aspects of the existing texts. But the utopian desire represented within Lauren's flight from Los Angeles toward the more "natural" spaces north of San Francisco is also complicated by the ecological changes witnessed both on the road and in the region of Lauren's attempted new

settlement. Dystopian elements appear both as the group journeys to and arrives in what will become Acorn, which means that *Sower* is not simply a novel of "utopian dreaming." These are some of the most prominent ecocritical dystopian registers in the Parable books, since the narrative sections presenting such alterations also feature real-world, geographical ties to specific places comparable with the current day. Not even the original and destination communities (Robledo and Acorn, respectively) framing Lauren's journey north in *Sower* can retain their utopian resonances, despite communal efforts to maintain and establish a sense of order protecting inhabitants from the increasingly chaotic dissolution of the contemporary American social landscape. In this, Robledo and Acorn mirror each other, which they also do through the critical dystopian aspects evidenced by their fictional, representative, place names. Both locales and the parity they embody are destroyed by the greater socio-environmental forces driving change on not only the West Coast, but the United States and the planet more generally.

Butler's critical dystopian elements are also overpowered by the ecocritical dystopian core of the Parable narrative, as *Sower* and *Talents* transcend what are, at the time, fairly recent generic developments in sf literature. Despite Lauren's initially limited narrative focus and sphere of influence, the consequences of the changes that erase both Robledo and Acorn extend to global ones and beyond. This is, in a sense, the conclusion established in *Talents* through planetary overpopulation and a related dwindling of resources that make it necessary for humanity to divide itself as some bold adventurers propagate human culture and presence into the stars. But a larger community is also implied by the polyvocality of this second novel. While the polyvocal is read by both Moylan (223) and Baccolini ("Gender" 13, 18, 24) as critical dystopianism because the formal aspects of the Parable books are partly rooted in "the use, re-vision, and appropriation of [varied] generic fiction" (Baccolini, "Gender" 13), and though this

may indeed have been a marker of the newly-emerged critical dystopias in the 1980s, such a phenomenon is hardly the sole purview of that subgenre. Instead, the polyvocal and the use of different generic modes simply reflect the collective voices of a community—albeit a broken one, in this case. The varied narrative points of view emerge as elements of ecocritical dystopianism questioning Lauren's Earthseed movement and its implied utopian registers: a focus on realism counteracts her push toward the unknown. Even some of the characters interacting with Lauren question the validity of Earthseed's expansion into the cosmos at a time when humanity has not yet solved its relationship with Earth's environment. The Utopian impulse of Lauren's vision with Earthseed is thus formally interrogated not only by some of the narrative voices in *Talents*, but by the dystopian subgeneric overtones of the combined novels.

If there is no physical home to return to, then the survivor of a disaster seeks a home place elsewhere. The process of leaving home and attempting to find respite structures character development in *Sower* and *Talents*, and extends into Butler's plan for the remaining volumes of the Parable series, with a new homeland located within the beckoning stars (Canavan, *Octavia* 8, 146-47).[68] Butler's *Sower* thus crystallizes a utopian set of desires as the main character Lauren flees a Los Angeles running short on resources and gripped by an economic depression, but the process of seeking sanctuary becomes fraught within the larger Parable narrative. In travelling toward the north in *Sower*, Lauren hopes to find a safe haven, despite the difficulty in achieving this. Perhaps Butler's argument with Lauren's plan is that this is just a normal reaction to her situation as she transitions into becoming one of the precariat; perhaps her only way of affecting social change is through Earthseed and its escapist modes of concretizing utopian desire. Amy S. Kaufman attributes this sense of "hope" to "Butler's narrative … draw[ing] on the Middle Ages"

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[68] Unfortunately, Butler passed away before finishing the Parable series (Canavan, *Octavia* 5).

(13), and even points out how Lauren recalls a "medieval plague" (13; *Sower* 56-57) as a

clearing out of over-populated space that then becomes favourable for those remaining. Lauren's

observation about how this historical development of the "bubonic plague" (*Sower* 56) provided

an irruption of possibility for the survivors contrasts with how Lauren's father is a climate

change denier who "'says he doesn't believe people changed the climate in spite of what

scientists say'" (*Sower* 57). As Sylvia Mayer argues, it is problematic that Lauren's father

"unwillingly … supports [the] functioning" (182) of a political system that has driven society

into this environmental and social conundrum. But while Lauren's views are contrary to her

father's, it is also problematic that Lauren founds Earthseed on the rather abstract notion of

embracing change (to which she ties the medieval plague example), yet, somewhat like the

generation before her, paradoxically retains elements of the past as she plants the roots for Acorn

and then the larger Earthseed movement. Butler's Parable books therefore show humanity,

through Lauren, locked in a repeating cycle of naïve and ineffectual attempts to thrive in the

midst of climate disaster and its systemic and environmental effects.

      This preservation of the past ironically represents a logical disconnect much like the one

Lauren observes in her father. In fact, she has inherited more tendencies from him than she

would likely be comfortable with—such as the somewhat authoritarian demeanour that

Larkin/Asha Vere[69] observes during their first meeting. Lauren's daughter says that her mother is

"a little frightening …. as though she could be hard with just the smallest change of expression"

(*Talents* 398), and that she has a "frightening intensity" and is an "overwhelming person" (403).

Lauren's father Laurence is also at times described as having the ability to turn "hard" and, like

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[69] Lauren's daughter insists on going by Asha Vere when they first meet and Lauren complies
with this as she leaves (*Talents* 403-404), but given the complex history of her naming, I will, in
general, use Larkin/Asha Vere.

Lauren, is very controlling in his role as the *de facto* community leader. For example, Lauren overhears a conversation about deterring thieves who come over their neighbourhood walls, which reveals her father's determination to shoot the perpetrators despite the biblical Commandment instructing, "'Thou shalt not kill'" (*Sower* 71). He demonstrates that he anticipates violent conflict since "[h]e carries a nine millimeter automatic pistol whenever he leaves the neighborhood," and also "has a silenced nine millimeter submachine gun" (38). He is prepared to do anything to preserve the structure and function of his communal area and thus impose his version of order upon the world, quoting "Nehemiah, chapter four, Verse 14," which includes an insistence to "'remember the Lord which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives and your houses'" (72). Lauren, for her part, finds this "Interesting" (72), which is quite telling given Larkin/Asha Vere's later observations and misgivings about her mother's "frightening intensity" when they first meet. Lauren also never hesitates to impose her will on events or her hopes for human society, even if she must resort to violence—like when she kills a wild dog to protect both herself[70] and her peers who are out target practicing with community guns. As the youths explain the logic of her gunshot to the adult chaperones, Curtis Talcott comments insightfully, "'Pow …. Just like she does stuff like that every day'" (45). A developing parallel is obvious between her father's carefully repeated insistence that he would shoot intruders and Lauren's decision to kill the animal, which she then takes on the road after the fall of Robledo.

Lauren is already hard even as she starts her journal (the text of *Sower*) when she turns fifteen and her father fifty-five (3), and it is essential to recall that she does so because the night

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[70] Lauren acutely feels the effects of her "hyperempathy" condition, which give her an overstimulated sensitivity to the pain or pleasure of others. She possesses this speculative ability because her mother was addicted to a drug called "Paracetco" (*Sower* 12) while pregnant.

before, as part of a "recurring" sequence, she had "dreamed a reminder that it's all a lie" (3).

That is, this is the dream that presents itself when she tries "to be [her] father's daughter" (3).

While this "revelation" is somewhat ironic given her clearly inherited qualities, it is also both the

process that starts her toward eventually writing "EARTHSEED: THE BOOKS OF THE

LIVING," the text that precedes all of the chapters and sections of *Sower* and *Talents*, and

appears in snippets through the journal proper in the novels. The dream that uncovers the "lie" is

also, significantly, both seemingly prescient about the "fire" (*Sower* 4) that will eventually

consume Robledo (153), and a beckoning toward the "stars" (4) that embody the expected

destination of her Earthseed religion. This dream sequence is the inception of her writing and

drive to expand human presence off-earth and out of the solar system; it hardens her resolve, and

all of her actions eventually become a part of her singular goal to "seed" the stars. She is harder

still by the age of 81 (*Talents* 404), when she has long been prepared to achieve success in her

Earthseed goal by any means—a process that is perhaps best encapsulated by the otherwise

cryptic "Parable of the Talents" biblical episode, that text of titular inspiration Butler adopted

from St. Matthew (25:14-30), in which God is also called a "*hard man*" and says, "*I reap where I

sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed*" (*Talents* 408). The point is seemingly that one

must invest time, gifts, and riches in order to reap rewards—and do so unfailingly and without

compromise. Lauren, even more than her father, takes such a lesson to heart.

Narrative seeds like this expose fundamental flaws in Lauren's reasoning about Earthseed

that manifest early on and undermine her genuine attempts at helping humanity. At the end of

Talents, as the "shuttles … loaded with cargoes of people …. and animal embryos, plant seeds,

tools, equipment, memories, dreams, and hopes" launch toward "the Earth's first starship" (406),

Lauren comments that she has "helped them to give our species its only chance at immortality"

and "helped them to the next stage of growth." But she also comments, "I know what I have done," which resonates more alarmingly with her admission that these human fledglings will find it "rough … out there" and that "[i]t will take a toll—perhaps a heavy one" (405). She concedes that she does not "like to think about that, but … know[s] it's true" (405). As Larkin/Asha Vere puts it, "All that she did, she did for Earthseed" (404), which, from the daughter's perspective, means that nothing else (even individual human life) ever held the same value, including her own kin. Lauren has almost single-handedly made this difficult thing happen, has orchestrated this planetary exodus not merely for altruistic reasons, but because she says she never "had a choice in the matter" (405). She claims, despite her knowledge of the difficulties that will be faced, "If you want a thing—truly want it, want it so badly that you need it as you need air to breathe, then unless you die, you will have it" (405). Fundamentally, the Earthseed exodus to the stars is not just about saving humanity from stifling itself to extinction on our planet, but about the perseverance of Lauren's will over the trials she has faced in the world. Canavan reminds us that this Earthseed "dream seems to have been achieved, although it has personally cost Olamina nearly everything else in her life, including her daughter, her husband, her brother, and her personal safety" ("Eden" 1). By the end of *Talents*, when she repeats, "I know what I've done" (*Talents* 405, 407), this bookending comment of her last diary entry (July 20, 2090) underscores her bid for agency in (and beyond) the world more than it promises the success of Earthseed once it leaves the planet and our solar system behind.[71] The admission is yet another suggestion that Lauren is caught in a circular pattern of reasoning, but whether she is right or wrong in seeing to fruition what Larkin/Asha Vere calls "her only 'child'" (404), what really matters to

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[71] Canavan also intervenes with the following: "the repetition of the phrase at the beginning and end of the three-page epilogue may suggest to some readers that she may actually be attempting to convince *herself* of its truth" ("Eden" 1).

her is that she "made it real, [gave] it substance" (405) and, in that process, never succumbed to the pressures of the society and environment that shaped her.

Lauren's redeeming qualities include her progress in learning to understand social developments on a larger scale than just her immediate situation. More reasonably than her father, Lauren is convinced that "the causes of ecological catastrophe" are "anthropogenic in nature" (Mayer 182). With this last in mind, Mayer connects the theme of "anthropogenic ecological damage" to Rachel Carson's publication of *Silent Spring* (1962), and places *Sower* under what she labels the resulting "tradition of apocalyptic ecologism" (175), which suggests a replacement of a social world with a new and different environmental one, as modelled through religious tropes of apocalypse, like Michah D. Kiel does in discussing the Book of Revelation.[72] Kiel asserts that "[a]n apocalyptic ecology will understand that our treatment of the environment has moral importance" (54), which resonates with how Lauren reconsiders religion and ecology through the Earthseed idea that "God Is Change" (*Sower* 3), and that humanity must live and survive through constantly altering environments. As Lauren contemplates leaving the urban centres that bolster humanity's exploitative nature and continual need for resources, her planned exodus entails trying to reimagine and transform the existing social pressures of economic competition for those resources.

Her flight thus, notably, also reconfigures what the contemporary reader understands about the real world. That is, though published in 1993, *Sower* anticipates the ongoing mega-drought affecting the American Southwest with the depletion of a resource like the San Luis Reservoir (*Sower* 258); likewise, *Talents*' 1998 narrative indicates the dying out of coastal

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[72] Kiel argues that "[a]n apocalyptic ecology will be an exploration of Revelation's potential role in and interaction with the planet and its inhabitants" (16).

redwoods (*Talents* 61). Neither was a problem at the time, even if the issue of freshwater in California and neighbouring areas has since become a problem, and regional ecosystems have been affected by the processes of anthropogenic climate change. The conditions leading to this are what Mayer calls "the nexus of social justice and environmental degradation" (175). Put another way, while the violence in *Sower* initially appears to be from those disadvantaged in the urban setting, as Rebecca Solnit explains for related contexts outside of criticism on the Parable books, the "message is that ordinary people will behave badly in an era of intensified climate change. All this makes sense, unless you go back to the premise and note that climate change is itself violence. Extreme, horrific, longterm, widespread violence." Within the context of the Parable series, despite Lauren's experiences with the violence of the drug-crazed pyros against the residents of Robledo, it is the anthropogenic violence of the social system that has affected the environmental world, which in turn has affected the social system, thus putting pressure on those disadvantaged. A strong example of this is the exorbitant price of water as the resource becomes scarce—especially for the urban and suburban citizens of Greater Los Angeles—with water peddlers "found with their throats cut and their money and handtrucks stolen" (*Sower* 18). Lauren's father even explains that "water now costs several times as much as gasoline," though Lauren does not know anyone who "uses a gas-powered car, truck, or cycle" (18). As she states concisely, "[i]t's a lot harder to give up water" (18). Climate change and related processes are the fundamental antagonists in the Parable books and are clearly caused by modern human activities.

The Shifting Environments of Ecocritical Dystopianism

Peter G. Stillman reminds us that, in *Sower*, "Butler has Olamina speak through her diaries," but that "*Talents* also contains material by Bankole and Marc and is edited with extensive

commentary by Olamina's daughter Vere; Butler's use of multiple (and critical) narrative voices allows her to bring out the ambiguities in Olamina's decisions and successes" (30). But despite Lauren's perhaps flawed vision, she is obviously being proactive about her fate in *Sower* when "she joins the stream of thousands of homeless people who move North, toward those regions where ecological devastation has not yet reached as desperate a level as in the south and where the climatic conditions of living allow for at least a slightly better way of living: Northern California, Oregon, Washington, and, ultimately, Canada" (Mayer 177). The potential viability of such places is a combination of less desertification at such latitudes and of a more dispersed population from the urban and its concentrated resource-extractive tendencies. Lauren has long been willing to physically remove herself from the pressures of modern society and articulates this as a positivism when, even at the age of 15, she tries to convince her best friend Joanne that their "'cul-de-sac with a wall around it'" will one day become too tempting for the "'hungry, desperate, crazy people outside'" (*Sower* 55). Instead, she argues, they must learn about living in the non-urban world and plan "'so that [they] can survive and rebuild—or at least survive and escape to be something other than beggars'" (55). With this in mind, she has been "'reading and studying'" with books in her house and her father's computer (57), and shows Joanne her stash of "[t]hree books on survival in the wilderness, three on guns and shooting, two each on handling medical emergencies, California native and naturalized plants and their uses, and basic living: logcabin-building, livestock raising, plant cultivation, soap making" (57-58). The core Earthseed tenet that "God Is Change" is a lesson that adaptability is important, even if the dispersal to remote Northern California regions or off-planet locations is not ultimately the most productive solution for rectifying human-caused problems on Earth. But despite Mayer's claims that the

northward environment is less damaged, it is as Lauren journeys away from urban areas that she encounters more extensive environmental changes.

Even in Robledo, the environment is an unstable one. Moylan's interpretation that the "critical dystopias emerge in the hard times of the 1980s and 1990s" from which they "give voice and space to such dispossessed and denied subjects" is quite apt when applied to this earlier urban space in *Sower*, with its many people "constricted by the narrow and destructive logic of a system intent only on enhancing competition in order to gain more profit for a select few." The elements endangering Robledo's survival and sense of place are fittingly represented by people who cannot be blamed for their own situations, because the roots of their problems are systemic. They are those without homes or economic stability; the people outside the communal walls are further disadvantaged by survival needs in violent, crime-ridden urban sprawl where they are "preyed upon by criminals of all sorts" (Peel 54), and many are ruled by the economic and social trap of hard drug addiction. The Robledo community, somewhat led by the moral force of Lauren's university professor, dean, and preacher father (*Sower* 12), Laurence Olamina, pretends it exists in a pocket of nostalgic stasis as the world changes significantly outside, but the physical and conceptual walls of Robledo are not capable of withstanding the social shifts occurring. While Ingrid Thaler argues that, in *Sower*, "the apocalyptic moment is not a natural catastrophe, caused by ecological collapse" (82)—focusing instead on the drug-crazed addicts called Paints (see *Sower* 110, 143-44) as if they exist separate from social systems affected by environmental conditions—the dissolution of Robledo is, at its root, caused through changes to the environment that occur despite conceptual or physical walls and that are relevant to all people in the society.

Homelessness, joblessness, crime, theft, violence, and increasing drug-related and other social problems at first seem to be the primary mechanism by which Lauren is dislodged from her walled community in suburban Los Angeles, where she subsists in a relatively middle-class living with her father, stepmother, siblings, and community. After all, it is the Paints who eventually either gain enough confidence or become desperate enough to breach the physical barrier and overrun the walled Robledo group (153). These Paints are the physical manifestation of social problems stoked to an inferno in Lauren's United States, just as the racism later uncovered in *Talents* is fostered and made seemingly permissible in the demagogic regime that arises. But these societal manifestations do not exist in a vacuum and are intimately enmeshed with anthropogenic effects on environmental systems. The increasing aridity of California is paired with rising ocean levels that threaten coastal communities, for instance. While, in *Talents*, Lauren indicates the issue of the nearby Halstead with its crumbling cliffs (113-14), in *Sower*, the ocean-side Olivar, sometimes "undercut or deeply saturated by salt water" and compromised as "[s]ea levels [keep] rising with the warming climate" (118), more fittingly stands in for an entanglement of the social and the environmental that shows the elitism of corporations taking advantage of those in need. With Olivar, Lauren discusses the emergence of a company town (*Sower* 118-22) run by Kagimoto, Stamm, Frampton, and Company (KSF) as the community becomes "privatized" (119), where the economic model is designed to "get people into debt, hang onto them, and work them harder," operating on "[d]ebt slavery" (121). This is all while KSF "intends to dominate farming and the selling of water and solar and wind energy over much of the southwest—where for pennies it's already bought vast tracts of fertile, waterless land" (119). Preying on the desperate nature of those living in the region, the company "mean[s] to own great water, power, and agricultural industries in an area that most people have given up on"

(119). Both natural and social elements therefore eat away at California living spaces and resources alike as scarcity creates tension between the affluent and other economic classes.

Yet at first Lauren and her community mostly seem to only worry about the unwashed masses, and only when venturing outside of the protection of their walls—like when "two or three of the neighborhood adults begin taking" children of an appropriate age who have had "gun handling instruction" out "to the hills for target practice" (39). In the episode where Lauren describes this activity, she also mentions the "groups of homeless people and packs of feral dogs living out beyond the last hillside shacks" (40), which become a reoccurring theme anytime Lauren leaves her community—even inflecting the disappearance of her father and the search afterwards, in which they find "squalor" and "human remains" (130), a severed human arm "hung up in the low branches of a scrub oak" (131), "the rotting corpses of five people," and "the cold remains of a fire with a human femur and two human skulls lying among the ashes" (133). That is, leaving the relative safety of their community is presented as fraught with danger. At the beginning of *Sower*, when they leave the Robledo walls for a baptism in "a real church building with a real baptistery" instead of "in the bathtub at home" (8), she describes "a naked little boy whose skin [is] a mass of big red sores; a man with a huge scab over the stump where his right hand used to be; a little girl, naked, maybe seven years old with blood running down her bare thighs [and a] woman with a swollen, bloody, beaten face" (13). Like the environmental concerns that drive them, the social tensions and inequalities of this future California are left to build until they become tangibly destructive. The former, however, go fairly unacknowledged in the narrative until later, when Lauren has left the safety of her walled community for good.

Though the initial communal threats in *Sower* appear to be socio-economic, the complicated resonances of increasingly randomized weather patterns and a shift in the regional

climatic conditions toward drought are already overcoming the erected communal barriers early

in the narrative. Lauren comments in a July 2024 journal entry that there is "a big, early-season

storm blowing itself out in the Gulf of Mexico" (*Sower* 15). She discusses effects on places

distant from her Robledo neighbourhood as the meteorological phenomenon "bounce[s] around

… killing people from Florida to Texas and down into Mexico," and, with incredulity, she

laments the "700 known dead" in "[o]ne hurricane" (15). But such distances have been made

even more prominent in the narrative with an increasing failure of globalized, petromodern[73]

systems, what with the shortages in fuel for everyone except for those willing or able to pay, like

"arsonists and the rich" (18; *Sower* 8, 73, 124; *Talents* 82).[74] While this physical distance might

appear to make the storms less concerning, the transnational or even transregional flow of goods

that had been nearly instantaneous before is hindered, and resources become scarce even in the

greater suburban sprawl of large centres like Los Angeles. This is devastating for those without

safe shelter or economic means,[75] and Hazel V. Carby reminds us of the "maggot" metaphor that,

in *Sower*, is expanded "to encompass the entire city and its destructive effect on processes of

community formation" (30). But not even Lauren's barricaded, comparatively well-off

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[73] Stephanie LeMenager comments that she "actually prefer[s] the term petro-modernity to the term petro-culture, and use[s] 'petro-modernity' to explicitly describe a certain US/North American mode of living which is largely aspirational, in the sense that its imagined rewards have been realized by very few people, globally" (Bellamy, LeMenager, and Szeman).

[74] These arsonists—the Paints—are described as mentally unstable, and driven further into a desire to burn by the rapid spread of an accidentally-created street drug nicknamed "Blaze, fuego, flash, sunfire …. pyro" (*Sower* 143).

[75] Though Lauren says Robledo is "poor" (*Sower* 120), this sense of poorness appears in an odd comment that also calls it "big" and includes the "street poor, body dumps, and a memory of once being well-off," with "shade trees, big houses, hills, and canyons" (120). Several of these elements are not specifically associated with Lauren's walled community, but with their surroundings outside the barriers, so it is likely here that she means the greater area, rather than her immediate, gated locale.

community is immune from environmental shifts. The commentary about the Gulf storm perhaps

most relevant to her communal, local, regional, and even further situation centres on questions

about "how many people [it has] hurt" and how "many are going to starve later because of

destroyed crops" (*Sower* 15). Even if this last could easily be read in terms of just the southern

coast of the United States and applied to the survivors of the storm Lauren mentions, the

resource-based and environmental effects are far more wide-ranging, and even relate to shortages

and shifts that Lauren, Robledo, and the Los Angeles region are experiencing in the narrative.

Butler demonstrates the randomness of regional climate shifts through the environmental

microcosm of social challenges affecting Los Angeles and Robledo. Lauren reports hot weather

and desertification, commenting at one point that the "cost of water has gone up again. And I

heard on the news today that more water peddlers are being killed" (17). Such environmental

conditions transcend the illusion that urban residents live separately from weather and the

provenance of their resources. But Butler's point is also that a climate-changed world is

unpredictable, and on Sunday, March 2, 2025, it starts raining in Robledo for the first time in six

years (47). It is a "winter storm" (48) off "the Pacific, but most people didn't believe it" (47)

until the "[s]teady drizzle, and occasional, heavy showers all day" (48), for two days. Such

unpredictability is destabilizing, and Lauren writes that she has "never felt so overwhelmed by

water" (48). Though the downpour makes her feel "incredible and wonderful" (48), she also

"wonder[s] how many years it will be before [they] see rain again," and as the unexpected

phenomenon ceases, she comments that it is "[s]urprising how fast" (60) the weather dissipates.

Despite how Lauren sees the rain as "different and beautiful" (48), the brevity and unexpected

nature of the storm demonstrate that, with the increasing disturbances to modern social structures

as anthropogenic climate change and related processes alter North American landscapes, the

madness that dissolves Robledo and the Greater Los Angeles area quite easily stands in as the unfortunate refrain for many a desperate bid for survival. After all, as Lauren observes, such weather would be more valuable "[i]f only it came more often" (48). The focus here is environmental and the resultant urban conflagration is tangible.

Part of the problem is that, with cities and "coastline inundated" (152) through climate-exacerbated sea-level rise, a very large population in the coastal United States will need to find new places to live. Perhaps fittingly, in *Sower* environmental issues come to the forefront predominantly through the ensuing exodus as Lauren encounters them firsthand; while she lives in Robledo, they just appear as further elements of an already problematic world. But in *Talents*, though a cultural dispersal also occurs and other narrative voices pick up the discussion of environmental catastrophe, climate and related issues are not uncovered through a journey narrative. Rather, in the second novel, human effects on the environment are already clear, as well as the environment's effects on society, even if these effects are part of what drives the final movement of Earthseed. The drive for escape from ecological catastrophe continually accessed, interpreted, and referenced through a long history of narratives certainly provides the dynamic infrastructure (both formal and plot-related) for Butler's Parable series. The related potential for hope is why Rebecca Wanzo, in particular, reads *Sower* as a critical dystopia by following Raffaella Baccolini, who categorizes that subgenre under "open-ended dystopias that maintain a utopian core at their center, a locus of hope that contributes to deconstructing and reconstructing alternatives" (Baccolini, "Gender" 13). It is true that Lauren's escape northward resonates with a desire for improved living conditions. As Butler says in an interview published at the end of *Talents*, some of the people in Lauren's world "know that they have to get away from the chaotic 'old country' that the U.S.A. has become. These people emigrate to Canada, to Alaska, even to

Siberia—places made more hospitable by global warming" ("Conversation," *Talents* 413).[76] But climatic shift and its associated alterations to real-world ecological landscapes are at the heart of Butler's crisis about the future, not the utopian hope of rebuilding. While the journey is often highlighted as a facet of utopian generic registers and a means of driving toward redemptive possibilities at the end of *Sower*, it is the environmental issues encountered during travel that reveal the major dystopian elements of the Parable books.

Despite Baccolini's claims that *Sower* is a critical dystopia because of its open-endedness and the attempted realization of a utopian core, she also recalls Bankole's remarks about the complexities of utopia and dystopia (*Sower* 261-62), which underline "the imperfectness of utopia, the false goal of achieving perfection, and the historical failure of attempts to create it" (Baccolini, "Gender" 26). Especially before arriving, Lauren sees so much potential in the land Bankole donates to Earthseed, since it is "far removed from any city" (*Sower* 313) and, she believes, "far from the desperate, the crazy, and the vicious" (314). She is immediately forced to reconsider this potential for safety through distance, however, when she "reache[s] the hillside where Bankole's sister's house and outbuildings [a]re supposed to be" (314), and encounters devastation. Lauren later records in her journal for "September 26, 2027" (313) that

> There was no house. There were no buildings. There was almost nothing. A broad
> black smear on the hillside; a few charred planks sticking up from the rubble,
> some leaning against others; and a tall chimney, standing black and solitary like a
> tombstone in a picture of an old-style graveyard. A tombstone amid the bones and
> ashes. (314)

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[76] It seems with these last destinations as if Butler did not consider the problems with melting permafrost (Fountain) and trapped methane we are already having in contemporary times.

But even this alarming discovery does not dissuade her from seeing potential in Bankole's land, and she insists that "'[n]othing [they] find farther north will be any better or any safer'" (319). She reasons that "Bankole owns this land, free and clear," and it has "a huge, [albeit] half ruined garden plus citrus trees full of unripe fruit" (318): they immediately begin "pulling carrots and digging potatoes," and she also notes "plenty of other fruit and nut trees plus wild pines, redwoods, and Douglas firs" (318). In formulating how this relative bounty can support her fellow travellers moving forward, should they stay, Lauren also recalls that she has "the seed [she's] been carrying and collecting since [they] left home" (318). Yet even with such very clear markers of potential for "'build[ing] a community [t]here'" (319), the resultant Acorn cannot escape the haunting fact "'that someone burned this place down last time'" (319).

While Lauren holds onto the idea that Earthseed is "'an Acorn'" and "'will grow'" (*Talents* 182), and manages to convince Bankole that there is time to do "'more work'" (182) to sustain their present community, even the best intentions and planning cannot stop the arrival of seven "big, armed and armored, all-terrain, all-wheel-drive vehicle[s]" called "maggots," which are "something less than a tank, and something more than a truck" (186). This is not some random raid by the desperate and destitute, as with Robledo's fall to drug addicts and other urban poor, but a coordinated attack in "military formation," "not firing bullets" and instead launching "canisters" (187) of a "terrible gas" that remove most of one's "ability to move," while still leaving one "wide awake, able to hear and see" (188). Yet the attack parallels the one on Robledo in that this is a situation of outside forces inserting themselves into where Lauren and her people reside, and therefore affecting how they live. The utopian potential for Acorn is undercut, as it was always going to be, by the extreme religious and racialized violence burgeoning in not only California, but across the United States, with the rise of one Andrew

Steele Jarret to a presidency that encourages a group that calls themselves "Jarret's Crusaders" (207), the forceful arm of the fundamentalist Church of Christian America movement. When the "maggots" arrive, Acorn is overrun and immediately transformed from a utopian community into a dystopian enclave for religious indoctrination; thus, as with the ongoing environmental problems in the second novel, it is necessary to read *Sower* and *Talents* as a combined narrative, for ignoring the destruction of Acorn provides for an incomplete reading of the Parable books.

Though *Sower* opens in Robledo, near Los Angeles, and the narrative at first seems rooted in that walled community and the effects of its nearby metropolitan neighbour, there are hints early on that some form of departure could very well take place at any moment. Lauren even starts planning to "get ready …. for what's going to happen, get ready to survive it, get ready to make a life afterward" (55), and by June 2025, has "assembled a small survivalpack" that she refers to as "a grab-and-run pack" (80). This is the result of her process started by studying the several old books around her house, as well as her "Dad's computer … to get new stuff" (57). Propelled initially by her dream sequence in which "[t]he neighborhood wall is a massive, looming presence …, more threatening than protective" (5), Lauren's efforts to become a capable survivor outside of Robledo in the non-urban world echo the development of her journal entries into travelogue. The effect of both is that the narrative takes on an air of escapism from the troubles rooted in Robledo and the Greater Los Angeles area, but there is really no way to avoid either the environmental factors or the social ones that follow. Even so, as the events of *Sower* play out, Lauren indeed ends up fleeing northward from the Los Angeles region, and up toward coastal, less-populated lands in Cape Mendocino, where, by the time of *Talents*, she has founded her eco-religious community called Acorn.

It is in this transitional narrative and geographical space between Robledo and Acorn, which are both fictional geographical names, that Butler uses the vehicle of the ecocritical dystopia specifically, and it is fitting that the Robledo-Acorn exodus, itself a process of change, is presented in such a subgeneric mode that also adheres to environmental shifts, rather than continuing with the critical dystopian resonances of Lauren's earlier home. The real-world Cape Mendocino is important not just because the place name is only given twice in *Sower* (272, 313) and nowhere in *Talents*, but because it is a key clue that locates Acorn more tangibly in the reader's world than the general markers associated with Humboldt County—an area even now sandwiched between more than one national forest and the wild Pacific itself.[77] Here Acorn is started literally on the "rubble" (*Sower* 314) and remains of Lauren's future husband Bankole's family. The use of both the real-world "Clear Lake" (312) and the related route "west on State Highway 20" (290) before returning to the 101 also hint at where the travellers are headed and where they pass. Later, as Lauren's group "reache[s] [its] new home … in the coastal hills of Humboldt County" (313), the land of the future Acorn is said to be situated directly between the "U.S. 101 … to the east and north" (313) and "Cape Mendocino and the sea … to the west" (313). These are very specific markers that place Bankole's land and the future Acorn somewhere in the vicinity of the geographic coordinates 40°26'25.5"N 124°13'36.5"W— though, since Bankole "'own[s] three hundred acres'" (273), exact coordinates do not demarcate the boundaries of his land. Even Lauren's explication of her travel confirms that Bankole's property is adjacent to the more northerly Cape Mendocino and not the town of Mendocino

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[77] Certainly, Cronon's critique of viewing the American West and related areas as void, pristine, and empty before their transition into national parks is relevant here. The so-called voiding of the land has hardly been utopian for the Yurok Nation and their tenure along the Klamath River (Mozingo).

further south. Later, in *Talents*, this place is again situated along a slightly different directional

axis when there is talk of "contract[ing] to grow crops for businesses in Eureka-Arcata, [and]

maybe down in Garberville" (67), which are also real-world places. The suggestion is that Acorn

lies between this roughly northwest by southeast line, which corroborates the earlier information

about Cape Mendocino.

Here Butler relates specific details of real-world place rather than only employing

fictional, representative places. As she says in response to an interview question about the "kind

of research" she undertook "for *Parable of the Sower*" ("Conversation," *Sower* 338), "I tacked

detailed maps of different parts of California all over my walls. I used to travel up and down

California on Greyhound buses, but I [had] never walked the length of the state. Since my

characters had to do that, I had to understand how they would manage. I also read books by

people who had walked the state, bicycled it, or ridden the length of it on horseback" (339). The

journey and its geographical referencing are significant not only to Butler's research, but to the

subgeneric elements presented through those places, since an understanding of this locale and

region is necessary in capturing Butler's message to her readership: even these real places, albeit

fictionalized within the future of the narrative, will be affected by environmental factors and thus

human society living there will in turn be affected. That the novels themselves work to embody

real-world places with such significance parallels how Lauren suggests to her friend Joanne that,

beyond "survival information from encyclopedias [and] biographies," it is essential to "use your

imagination," for "[e]ven some fiction might be useful" (*Sower* 59). The value of literature of

course transcends what Lauren and her friend might read, and includes what we or the

inhabitants of these locales might engage with. It is through the imagination that readers can gain

new perspectives on the present of the world they live in, as well as consider what the future may hold.

Lauren's attempts to achieve and establish her intentional community[78] also colour some of her initial conceptions of this coastal area. Her future Acorn and birth-community of Earthseed are initially articulated in Utopian, even Arcadian terms, though Jerry Phillips appropriately labels *Sower* a "reduction of utopianism to survivalism" (309), which is fitting since even a "few miles south are state parks filled with huge redwood trees and hoards of squatters. The land surrounding [them], however, is as empty and wild as any [Lauren has] seen. It's covered with dry brush, trees, and tree stumps, all far removed from any city, and a long, hilly walk from the little towns that line the highway. There's farming around [t]here, and logging, and just plain isolated living" (*Sower* 313). Despite elements like the "dry bush," Lauren conveys the sense that she sees promise in the landscape, especially with the garden and fruit trees; this locale differs from her previous encounters with the ecological non-urban world near Robledo. Here, if anywhere, Butler is accessing the utopian tradition with the pastoral potential that Lauren sees for this place (see also Moylan 236), though it is key that, by the end of *Sower*, she contrasts Lauren's expectation with the reality that what remains of Bankole's family land is a "tombstone" (*Sower* 314)—inserting a sense of foreboding that carries over into the further dystopian upheaval of *Talents*.

While toward the end of *Sower* Lauren's party discovers the horrifying remnants on Bankole's land, as any reader of *Talents* knows, they work at building a successful, thriving community all the same. Yet this labour does not save them from either the worsening effects of

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[78] Communities constructed with Utopian visions in mind are now sometimes called "intentional communities" (see Justine Brown on the history of such groups on the British Columbia West Coast, for instance).

anthropogenic climate change or the resultant impacts made and advantages taken by the extreme social elements seen with Jarret's Crusaders. The Parable narrative mostly articulates environmental stressors through real-world places fictionalized as altered geographical locales, as well as the social chaos first affecting the urban areas and increasingly spreading out to the rural. But part of Butler's ecocritical dystopian setting details complex ecological transformations such as species loss. The Parable books even highlight the environmental impacts of phenomena like climate change on specific plants and animals, and it would seem that the adaptability of species would resonate with the Earthseed approach to understanding change, which instructs believers to "Alter the speed / Or the direction of Change. Vary the scope of Change. Recombine the seeds of Change. Transmute the impact of Change. Seize Change. Use it. Adapt and grow" (*Talents* 22). Given the ongoing nature of ecological shifts in Lauren's lifetime, a sense of agency over events is gained with this mindset, rather than a reduction to mourning a world in the throes of an ongoing apocalypse—which is what Bankole outlines as having begun "well before 2015, perhaps even before the turn of the millennium" and past "2030" as a set of "problems" that the world "sat and watched as they grew into crises" (8). He says that he has "read that the Pox" (8), which is seemingly just a nickname for "the period of upheaval that journalists have begun to refer to as 'the Apocalypse'" (7), "was caused by accidentally coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological" factors, but adds that "[i]t would be more honest to say that the Pox was caused by [people's] refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas" (8). Bankole suggests that the phenomenon includes how America might "'break up into a lot of little states quarreling and fighting with each other over whatever crumbs are left. [This has] almost happened with states shutting themselves off from one another, treating state lines as national borders'" (*Sower* 327). But, importantly, this "Pox" (*Talents* 8) is

also an environmental factor of note in the world of the Parable books, for, as Bankole explains, "convenience, profit, and inertia excused greater and more dangerous environmental degradation" (8). While presented as a period of time that is said to stand in for the apocalypse, the Pox is a manifestation of human activities interfering with and altering the natural world, even if its exact provenance is unknown to the narrating characters. One apt revelation of environmental effects on species is when Bankole narrates that their "coast redwood trees are dying. Sequoia sempervirens is the botanical name for this tallest of all trees, but many are evergreen no longer. Little by little from the tops down, they are turning brown and dying" (61).[79] Though there are not many indications of how anthropogenic climate change in the future has affected either flora or fauna in the greater region, this contemplation about the fate of the redwoods is as striking as our current concerns over the fate of charismatic megafauna like the polar bear and its struggles to survive in an Arctic that is dramatically altering because of climate change, as the permanence of sea ice diminishes and permafrost melts. Butler's inclusion of adverse effects on these trees is a reminder that shifts in biomes involve deep-seated alterations that will affect a sense of place.

In the Parable narrative, Bankole doubts that the redwoods "are dying as a result of the heat" (61), but surely some related mechanism is responsible. Bankole does not offer an answer in his assessment of why "young redwood trees … only about a century old … are withering" (62), yet it is clear from this excerpt that some element(s) related to climate change processes are

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[79] Though sequoia, redwood, and western red cedar are often confused (Friedman), and are not all the same, Bankole's discussion of sequoia parallels that of the latter—especially since it "is widely distributed from the Alaskan panhandle, south along the Pacific coast to the Mendocino coast of California" (Lang) and inland. That is, the western red cedar is "'is the canary in the coal mine'" and "'the first well-known species that's likely to disappear from areas that it's traditionally established in because of a lack of moisture'" (Brend).

altering even the viable conditions for the long-lived sequoia or redwoods in the region. We are

not given a reason, but this could even include ecological issues like the shift in pine beetle

activity in the real-world Pacific Northwest over the last couple of decades. Bankole might be

sceptical, however, as Lauren argues much earlier in a conversation back in Robledo, "'[p]eople

have changed the climate of the world'" (*Sower* 57).[80] The problematic factor here up the coast

seems to not specifically be temperature but the associated conditions—perhaps a shift from the

"soft, green climate … friendly to most growing things" to that of "coastal southern California"

in Bankole's past "a few decades" back, when it was "hot, semiarid, more brown than green

most of the time" (*Talents* 62). Bankole does make it clear, however, that the region is "in the

middle of the change" (62). This shift is most immediately seen within the greenery of the area,

or its increasing lack thereof, but it also affects animal species.

Butler's characters tend to make comparisons between civilized levels of humanity and

humans becoming more like animals (*Sower* 182, 229, 240, 257; *Talents* 270, 329, 358),[81] yet

she notably associates nonhuman animals with how environmental conditions play out in the

region. The inclusion of small-to-medium animals, for instance, happens more than once, as

Lauren indicates early on that "[p]eople and dogs hunt rabbits, possums, [and] squirrels" to

survive (*Sower* 40). But besides a further instance when a brush fire in the arid conditions

threatens all and Lauren and her group flee side-by-side with "dogs …. [c]ats and deer … and a

skunk" (308), and a stark condemnation that "Terrestrial environmental laws … don't even really

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[80] His resistance to this seems strikingly comparable to Laurence Olamina's disavowal of anthropogenic climate change, which problematically suggests the cliché that Lauren "marries her father"; of course, Lauren, as the daughter of Laurence, also does not fall as far from the proverbial tree as she would like.

[81] Earlier, the Robledo "neighborhood wall" is also seen in a dream "as a crouching animal, perhaps about to spring, [and] more threatening than protective" (*Sower* 5).

protect plant and animal species" (*Talents* 85), there seems to be a clear absence of modern

North American megafauna or even rich biological diversity in Butler's near-future narrative.

This is not to suggest that she made a mistake in her portrayal of the region or that people in

general run into animals like bears and cougars, but here the absence is also as tangible and

meaningful as a physical presence, and is made deliberately so. Surely, even in Humboldt

County today, it is common knowledge that one still encounters "[b]lack-tailed [or mule] deer,

California ground squirrels, gray fox, and raccoons" alongside "rabbits, rodents, … birds," "the

black bear," and "the mountain lion"—though the "[m]ost likely the closest [one will] get to …

the mountain lion … is by seeing its tracks" ("Wildlife"). Not one bear is mentioned in the

Parable books, which represents the significant ecological "change" (*Talents* 62) that Bankole's

narration indicates for the region. The wildlife present in Butler's stark future is but a remnant of

the current population expectations. Perhaps the human exodus from urban centres and its

encroachment into undeveloped areas has resulted in either animal migration or depopulation.

But, like the sequoia, climate-related change is more connected to the narrative's planetary

setting. While the first mammal determined to have been driven extinct by climate change

processes (anthropogenically-induced sea-level rise) is the mosaic-tailed rat (more properly, the

Bramble Cay melomys) endemic to a small coral island in the Great Barrier Reef (Slezak), the

effects of anthropogenic climate change will not only be restricted to some remote islands. North

American absences will also become tangible, and Butler recognizes this with her ecocritical

dystopian mode as the region is described. Instead, more visible in the Parable books are canids,

with an assortment of dogs, what are possibly coyotes or the interspecific coywolves, and wolves

(*Sower* 44). This grouping is further associated with the near-future dystopian conditions since

the transition from family pet to untrustworthy beast is highlighted in the overarching narrative.

The first of these is seen in *Sower* when Lauren's hyperempathy overwhelms her as a "feral dog" (*Sower* 40)—or most certainly a member of *some* canine pack—investigates the Robledo community group that is out at target practice in "the hills" (36). Here the specific nature of dog or other canid is lost in the concern that such animals have drifted from their close relationship with human civilization. Besides the "one dog" that Lauren notices, who is "male, yellow-brown, sharp-eared, short-haired" (40), there is also "the dog that had been shot," which is "a bigger, grayer animal than the [first] one" (44). This latter description subtly suggests the growing coywolf population, if not the interbreeding of domestic dogs with other species normally considered "wild." But these are early examples of the canine influence on the Parable books, which seems like a substantial intervention in conjunction with the other transitional elements such as regional climate change. Ecological systems will shift with anthropogenic climate change, but what is not often considered in previous dystopian or sf literature is how this process interrelates with social destabilization in futures where socio-economics and depleted resources become too great of burdens. Of the references to dogs and related species, the civilized and beloved family companion "becoming animal" is perhaps the most disturbing to notions of normalcy imposed by suburbs like Robledo. For example, to the south of Sacramento, Lauren and her group witness "a big black and white dog … wandering down toward [their] camp with the fresh-looking, bloody hand and forearm of a child in its mouth" (271). As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari indicate in their analysis of Franz Kafka's work, "the deterritorialization of the becoming-animal is absolute .... But this is only one side of the poles ... [since] the animal oscillate[s] between its own becoming-inhuman and an all-too-human familiarization" (36). Read over this scenario with the "black and white dog" in *Sower*, the suggestion is that the animal struggles between the ostensible poles of its relationships with

humanity and with the wild, à la Jack London's *Call of the Wild* (1903)—though surely Deleuze

and Guattari mean to assess human behaviour and not nonhuman animal behaviour. Of course,

the family dog with the limb in its jaws is not human, but in today's society we tend to see such

pets as *almost*-human; Butler contrasts this idea with her suggestion that the dissolution of

society will lead to such agents as family pets reverting to their natural instincts. In fact, the

disintegration of society will likely reveal many truths, according to the narrative. The later

social implications as both Robledo and Acorn are attacked and subjugated to horrors resonate

with the socio-political aspects that Butler's ongoing dystopia uncovers in a very apocalyptic and

revelatory manner.

   The novels hint at the political manoeuvring within the United States as a whole as a

piece of the social conundrum. Lauren's father looks to politicians (and, as Mayer argues, to

God) to solve resource scarcity, poverty, and homelessness. But the politicians do not solve these

issues, much less the environmental ones, which are already too ingrained and widespread. For

Lauren, such fundamental flaws with the social processes of her day will lead to a reckoning. As

she explains to her group shortly after fleeing her walled neighbourhood, carefully listing a

progression of concerns starting with anthropogenic climate change, "'I thought something

would happen someday. I didn't know how bad it would be or when it would come. But

everything was getting worse: the climate, the economy, crime, drugs, you know. I didn't believe

we would be allowed to sit behind our walls, looking clean and fat and rich to the hungry, thirsty,

homeless, jobless, filthy people outside'" (*Sower* 187). At this stage, however, Lauren has yet to

travel up the coast and witness firsthand just how compromised the environment is, and to

experience its wider impacts on social systems. Nor has she suffered the fallout of the attack on

Acorn, which has a greater impact on her than the recent one on Robledo—especially since she

was mentally prepared for this last to fail, and also because she escapes relatively unscathed. In fact, these two communities stand in for phases of naïveté and innocence in Lauren's development, though she is more observant about the state of the world than her peers; the sense of this can further be read in generic terms, for which the critical dystopian registers unquestionably indicate bad developments, but the ecocritical dystopian ones concretize those as environmental issues affecting the future of the real world.

Utopian and Dystopian Registers

As demonstrated by the associated environmental shifts, Butler's Parable books, while sometimes aligning with the representative, critical dystopian elements of fiction, are in places fundamentally rooted in geographical and cultural traces from the time of Butler's writing. Moylan calls *Sower* a critical dystopia partly for its sense of social hardships just prior to its publication in 1993 and also says that, in "the early chapters of *Talents*, a critical dystopian sensibility lingers, especially when Butler makes the effort to brief her readers on the brutality of the world of the 2030s" (239), but he does not link this last back to the "hard times of the 1980s and 1990s" as he does with *Sower*. Instead he points to the self-reflexivity (Baccolini and Moylan 7) or "textual self-criticism" (Cavalcanti, "Writing" 48) inherent to the critical dystopian mode, which in part demonstrates a "textual self-awareness in generic terms with regard to a utopian tradition and concerning its own narrative constructions of utopian 'elsewheres'" (48)— arguably a perfect description of the function of the fictional Robledo and Acorn in the Parable books. But Moylan is not focusing on how the related examination of the 2030s in *Talents* is also centred within place-based and environmental issues carried forward directly from the speaker Bankole's time as a man who "was born in 1970" and "watched as convenience, profit, and

inertia excused greater and more dangerous environmental degradation" (*Talents* 8). These are

actual issues developed within American society, and not ones simply presented as facets of a

"terrible new world" (Baccolini and Moylan 5), even though Butler's conception of the future

carried forward from the 1990s is indeed "nightmarish" (Baccolini and Moylan 5).

When Baccolini and Moylan say for the critical dystopia that "cognitive estrangement is

at first forestalled by the immediacy and normality of the location" and that "[n]o dream or trip is

taken to get to this place of everyday life" (5), they are not highlighting a relationship with

realism but are directly indicating the fictional world of the narrative. For the relevant portions of

Talents, this becomes problematic because Butler is often working with a different subgeneric

mode that no longer merely represents her contemporary time, but that adheres more to the

realistic elements that accompany *Sower*'s journey narrative, and thus a future extrapolated

forward. Significantly, in *Scraps* at least, Moylan never gets into a discussion of these

geographic, real-world palimpsests: after all, they are not facets of his generic terminology or

specific understanding of previous criticism written about the novels. But as Jeff Menne reminds

us, the Parable books have a claim to realism, despite the fact "that in the western literary

tradition SF is presumed to have an attenuated, if not fully severed, link to its author's empirical

world" (716). Rather, as Menne indicates, "SF has posited itself as the mode of representation

that can execute the realist function in better faith than can other genres traditionally identified

with realism" (716). Though Thaler calls *Sower* "a politically motivated fictional text immersed

in the utopian tradition that uses (dystopian) hyperbole not for parody and irony but to reinforce

its didactic-realist tone" (72), my reading of the Parable books takes Butler's use of realism

further than just the "representation" that I see reflected in the critical dystopian mode, and hones

in on the realistic geographies, landscapes, and environmental factors that Butler extends into the

near future. The dire social scenarios in the narrative grow out of the environmental catastrophes of not only this near future, but also the present day. The effect on the reader, who may know some of these places, is that of recognition and concern, at the very least—if not outright dismay and hopefully an urge to circumvent such developments—which is why I examine Butler's Parable books as more than just the critical dystopian label that Moylan and others give them.[82] Rather, these novels also demonstrate clear aspects of the ecocritical dystopia, for all their initial obfuscation of the source of social problems in Butler's speculative American future.

Sower and Talents scaffold the transition of American society from a near-future iteration of the mid-1990s to one where social instability has produced the emergence of far-right rhetoric and racially-weighted, discriminatory policies, as well as radical, yet sanctioned, acts of violence and subjugation. Such overtones are eerily resonant with emerging, present day sociopolitical elements in the United States. As Wanzo asserts, "Butler describes Parable of the Sower as an 'if this goes on story,' because she argues that terrified gated communities, corporate enslavement of laborers, breakdown of socio-economic and legal systems, increasingly dangerous designer drugs, a fascist government run by the religious right, and environmental devastation can all happen and that versions of it are 'going on' now" (75). But the initial crisis presented in Sower seems to be one of having to evade the encroaching influence of urban sprawl and related issues of economic disparity in the Greater Los Angeles region. Menne argues that though "we could make the narrow observation that, since Butler lived in Pasadena at the time, Lauren's view of Los Angeles from Robledo roughly equates with the author's own view of the LA Civil Unrest, it is more to the point that Butler produces this structure—an urban decay that must be

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[82] Ellen Peel notes that Jim Miller (337), Baccolini ("Gender" 13), and Moylan (*Scraps* 223) all label *Sower* a "critical dystopia" (Peel 70). Later, so do Murphy (475) and Thaler (72).

represented by the suburban spectator as the end of civilization—because she wishes to indict these conditions as those general to neoliberal policies" (725). Indeed, the governmental and social systems that lead to the abandonment and destruction of Robledo invoke a distinct negation of the permanence of Utopian suburbia and an indictment of neoliberalism's policies of self-exclusion from environmental concerns.

Moving away from the suburban notion of fixity and tranquility, the remainder of *Sower* is structured by the threat of having to escape the increasingly perilous confines applicable to many a dystopian narrative, which turns into a flight toward a potentially utopian geographical and cultural goal. This is partly why Thaler says the book "presents a dystopian future with a decidedly national scope that is motivated by utopian hope for change in the future" (72). But Thaler only couches this dynamic in a by-play between the local and the national, and more is, in fact, involved than simply local, regional, or national registers; this sense of a missing geographical component is also true of Thaler's focus on the urban element, given the non-urban influences of Lauren's journey narrative. Thus, while Ellen Peel accurately observes that the Parable narrative "consists of a utopia within a dystopia" (53), utopia is fittingly unachievable. This is despite the inclusion of the biblical "Parable of the Sower" from "St. Luke 8: 5-8," which suggests that, after many hardships, "good ground" will be found to nurture the seed of the sower, from which it will "spr[i]ng up, and [bear] fruit an hundredfold" (*Sower* 329). This is the text that ends *Sower*, and has either been quoted in Lauren's last diary entry of "October 10, 2027" (325) or exists separately: whether one or the other, even with the group's founding of Acorn, the metaphorical times of seed falling "by the wayside" (328-29), getting "trodden down" (329) or "devoured" by "fowls of the air," settling "upon a rock," "wither[ing] away because it

lacked moisture," or landing "among thorns" that out-compete it are not finished. That is, the troubles of Earthseeders or even Lauren's associated travelling companions are far from over.

By the collection of narrative perspectives in *Talents*, it becomes clear that Lauren's initial conceptions of an idealized reconnection with the non-urban are problematized by the ideological and otherwise marginalizing sway of those come into power in this future United States through bodies like the Christian America movement. These are groups that, based on ideas about race and belief, would enslave and imprison, instate internment camps, and separate families. Though Menne argues that "what [Butler] wishes to do is root utopian vision in material conditions, to return the stress to the empirical situation, hence permitting such vision a transformative value rather than just a conservative function" (722), Butler instead anchors dystopia to the tangible. Utopian threads in the Parable books tend to eschew realism for an imagining that incorporates fictional place names rather than the real-world ones employed elsewhere; however, the dystopian aspects can often be centred within real-world geographical references, albeit set within Butler's speculative future. This is hardly surprising, since, as both Menne and Moylan remind us, Butler sees utopias as "'ridiculous'" (Menne 721; Moylan 323; McCaffery). Butler's point in shifting away from the utopian is that such a realistic, "disturbingly plausible" (Peel 52) dystopia as that in the Parable books is indeed not that distant from our present day.

This imagined future is rooted in how environmental shifts and resource scarcity open the path for manipulation of the desperate by extreme, self-serving leaders increasingly in control of society. A primary example is with KSF and Olivar, where the company purchases land that has no water sources, and plans to profit through irrigation and agriculture, for instance—the later of which can then be used to supply desperate urban sprawl areas like that of Great Los Angeles,

along with freshwater from its coastal desalination plants where labourers from previous urban

cores (even educated ones) have harnessed themselves through a form of debt economy (*Sower*

118-22). It is the promise of social order that is partly appealing to some, like Joanne's family,

who leaves the increasingly fraught Robledo for the relative security offered by KSF (138-9).

Such a logic of order, any order, being accepted as reasonable also follows with some who end

up supporting the Christian America movement, like Lauren's brother Marc, who is learning to

be a "minister … like [their] father," and who "'can't let himself admit what Christian America

did to [Lauren]'" (*Talents* 387). He even tries to persuade Lauren to join this religious body

purely on the suggestion that this might be the only way she will find her long-lost daughter

Larkin/Asha Vere (386). As it turns out, he has long known where she is, and has kept the

information from Lauren (400-401), thus proving how much of a hold the Christian America

movement has on him. The promise of organized religion, much like the economic stability

offered by companies like KSF, becomes too much of an opportunity for some to pass up, and

then subsequent generations are either indoctrinated or uneducated enough to allow such systems

to persist and rule their lives. Both act as forms of social control in the Parable books. As Lauren

points out in a journal entry in 2035, "during the early twenties … even the pretense of having an

educated populace was ending. Politicians shook their heads and said sadly that universal

education was a failed experiment. Some companies began to educate the children of their

workers at least well enough to enable them to become their next generation of workers" (367).

This is the advent and survival method of the modern company town in Butler's speculative

narrative, but given economic, environmental, and social insecurities today, as well as the

development of "campuses with huge footprints in towns and cities across the US" by

technology giants like "IBM, Google, Amazon, and GM" (Garfield), surely our contemporary

time is not far off from such concerns.

  While *Sower* relies on the journey narrative as its vehicle for these other,

environmentally-focused conversations, there is also a paradoxical negation of environmental

concern implicit here as an escapist mode even continues past the existing Parable narrative

through an abandonment of the planet to the human foibles that altered it in the first place. One

legacy of this kind is in the seemingly hope-giving Dreamasks that Asha Vere makes in *Talents*.

That Dreamask or v-room (virtual room) users escape into addictive fantasy worlds (*Talents* 345)

of "other, simpler, happier lives" (220; Kaufman 18) is comparable to the flight of Earthseed

from the planet since the former is but the departure of individuals into another (but instead

virtual) reality. Neither works to fix the anthropogenic environmental damage already wrought

or to stop its continued advance—and this is despite Larkin/Asha Vere's comment that "[s]o

much need[s] to be done … on earth" (380). Her sense of concern is ironic since both modes

(virtual reality and space colonization) avoid the reality that is an environmentally fraught planet

where humanity struggles to survive amidst "so many diseases, so much hunger, so much

poverty, such suffering" (380). Perhaps a further instalment in the Parable series would have

solved this fundamental problem of humans fleeing their problems, since, as Canavan points out,

the Huntington Library archives contain four unpublished Parable sequel book drafts and notes

demonstrating that Butler intended to continue her Parable novels (six in total were planned),[83] in

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[83] Canavan explains that Butler intended there to be "four Parables sequels: *Parable of the Trickster*, *Parable of the Teacher*, *Parable of Chaos*, and *Parable of Clay*. The titles suggest a shift from a Christian idiom (*Sower*, *Talents*, and *Trickster* all reference biblical parables) to an Earthseed one (*Teacher*, *Chaos*, and *Clay* seem likely to be parables drawn from Olamina's life, not Christ's)" ("'Nothing New'"; *Octavia* 147).

which contingents of Earthseed scions depart in spaceships and attempt to subsist in literally

alien lands; unfortunately, as Canavan highlights, she was having trouble with her writing of

further Parable work.[84] Perhaps this difficulty was partly in resolving the conundrum of what

would happen back on Earth. As we see in *Talents*, the environmental problems of the planet

become so severe that the dystopian age of the demagogue is sustained for what Bankole calls

more than the period "from 2015 through 2030" (8), and social injustice skyrockets along with,

as Canavan explains, a need to escape persecution. Sarah Hentges interprets this last when she

writes, "[w]e often assume that because of racial and ethnic 'mixing,' and general progress, there

will be much diversity in America's future; however, …. [i]n Butler's science-fictional future,

people still fear (and attack) differences of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality" (12-13).

Alarmingly, the 1990s-published Parable books parallel the current day's seeming advance into a

futurity full of exacerbated racial tensions, what with Donald Trump's shift into the Presidential

seat and his uncomfortable likeness to the character and caricature of Andrew Steele Jarret, first

a candidate and then a President who fuels segregation, elitism, and discord. A telling phrase in

Talents is that "Jarret's supporters are more than a little seduced by Jarret's talk of making

America great again" (25-26).[85] But it is also important to acknowledge that the racial biases

seen in the Parable books, though not caused by resource scarcity, become more visible in

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[84] Butler kept altering the plot and circumstances of the space voyage and destination, which was at times even more speculative than Lauren's hyperempathy. Canavan's archival research into Butler's private letters and diaries, other personal writings, and multiple novel drafts both published and unpublished demonstrates that the arc of the Earthseed narrative had been under development from quite early on in her life, and while the sequel text of this was "only partially finished or fragmentary" (*Octavia* 6), "[h]er larger outline for the Parables books, coupled with her 1970s journals, reveals the Earthseeders are just an updated version of the future-history interplanetary saga she had always planned to write" (8).

[85] One source making the connection between Trump and Jarret is Kashmir Hill's June 2016 article "The Fictional Presidential Candidate Who Promised to 'Make America Great Again' 16 Years Before Trump" (see also Canavan, "Making").

Butler's narrative as environmental instability and dwindling resources only embolden the more extreme elements of a society.

That the racialized conflicts in the Parable books are highlighted by the environmental distress and resultant social strains of the near-future times only makes a desire for escape and the lure of utopian promise much more potent for Lauren. Even living in Robledo while growing up, she is aware of stressors on the environment, though she still seems to be exploring just how such problems might relate to the social ones that plague her community's urban fortress. Ultimately, the desire of the Earthseed followers in leaving our planet to find a new and more viable home indicates a belief that the Earth can no longer sustain growing human populations (and, consequently, different cultures and social mores) within an era of strained resources. As Marlene D. Allen writes in terms of Butler's future America, the "economy of the United States is in shambles, gasoline and food prices have skyrocketed out of control, and potable water is a scarce commodity" (1355); Madhu Dubey articulates this issue as following from "[p]ast patterns of production and consumption [that] have so thoroughly stripped the earth of its natural resources that even water has become an expensive commodity" (107). The environmental changes become too much of a strain on the ecosystems as water reservoirs dry up, coastal geographies are inundated, and agricultural efforts are extremely hampered. The economic systems in place in urban settings like *Sower*'s Los Angeles become strained to the breaking point with over-population, lack of employment, vagrancy, desperation, and increasing idleness stoked into conflagration through oppressive social situations, prejudice, and even widespread drug use. It is hardly surprising that Lauren plans from early on to be ready for the possibility that sudden escape will someday be necessary.

Here Butler captures the sense of real-world concerns that people of colour already face in zones of environmental disorder as she explores the racialized outcomes of climate change and its social fallout. It has by now often been pointed out in the arena of social media (among other places) that the rise of the demagogue fosters the spectre of white supremacy since awoken (or revealed) in the United States—to which Philip H. Jos adds in the context of the Parable books, "the *Christian America* movement, which exploits [fear] and marries religious dogmatism to political authority" (409). Always a pioneering force, with Jarret's fictional rise to power in *Sower*, Butler precedes David Foster Wallace's iteration of the demagogue with his President Johnny Gentle in *Infinite Jest* (1996), or Robert Charles Wilson's President Deklin Comstock in *Julian Comstock* (2009). But perhaps even more notably, the social implications of Butler's use of climate shift are encapsulated within Bani Amor's comment that, though "environmental racism is usually defined as exposure to hazardous environmental conditions due to place-based structural discrimination, it's timely to focus on the domino effect of factors that leave Black- and brown-majority coastal regions vulnerable to hazards exacerbated by global warming." Unfortunately, such environmental and social issues were already timely in 1993 when *Sower* was published, and it is certainly more than time for attention to these matters now.

That Lauren runs from social upheaval in *Sower* straight into racial and religion-backed violence in *Talents* indicates that there was nowhere she could have gone (in the United States) as a non-Christian and visible "minority." The Church of Christian America movement encountered in *Talents* is portrayed as but another form of colonialist social control. The group seems to easily fill the voids left by the breakdown of social order, and not even the supposedly Utopian refuge of the distant and sparsely populated Cape Mendocino provides escape from their reach, which is articulated by one of their extremist factions in the form of the militant Jarret's

Crusaders—those who build the "'Camp Christian Reeducation Facility'" (*Talents* 226). All the same, Lauren escapes from this compound as well, again breaking from the problematic position a settled communal base has put her in, just as she did with Robledo. Since Lauren is hardly the first character in speculative literature to try to escape catastrophe, Butler is thus contributing to a long tradition even as she offers a unique installment where characters flee the fallout of environmental change only to encounter the full impact of ecological devastation on the road itself, bundled in with the journey motif; this is accompanied by social circumstances that are arguably more horrifying than those encountered earlier.

Though the demeaning streets of Greater Los Angeles are not comparable to the conditions on the road or while enslaved in Camp Christian, it is also true that the perpetrators in the latter locale believe that what they are doing is right (see 233-34, for instance), which is truly disturbing since, as Lauren recalls to her brother Marc, "'those holy Christians worked us like slaves every day and used us like whores at night'" (312). The Christian America movement is working to normalize the idea that straying from its set of beliefs and social mores makes one truly monstrous; this is a fundamental interpretation perpetrated by Jarret (see *Talents* 88-89). This unfortunately potent effect is perhaps most keenly seen with Marc, who thinks that a centre like Camp Christian is merely "'a reeducation camp—one of the places where the worst people [his group] handle[s] are sent. These are people who would go to prison if [they] didn't take them. Minor criminals, most of them—thieves, junkies, prostitutes, that kind of thing'" (313). He refuses to believe what his beloved Church of Christian America had done to Lauren there (311-15), or that Jarret's Crusaders had forcefully taken Acorn "'and turned it into a prison camp'" (313). He essentially becomes the religiously colonized subject in relation to Lauren's escaped character, even as she works to survive through a cultural revival of her decimated Earthseeders

and foster the shift in social, ecological, and religious perceptions suggested by her invented worldview.

Though Lauren's journey to escape disaster and find a new home, from Robledo to Acorn and beyond, resonates with both fiction and cultural narratives, as in many other dystopian versions of the future (like McCarthy's in *The Road*) the mass migratory response to environmental catastrophe *is* the new normal (O'Hagan, "Mass"). While it is hard to say with certainty how widespread the environmental toll is in the Parable books, the clear regional transformations of the West Coast in Butler's Parable world demonstrate but one iteration of a more global climatic shift. Consequently, Lauren's initial compulsion to flee dystopian Los Angeles is understandable, but also flawed due to her ignorance of the more far-reaching conditions of the world and her inability to predict just how ingrained social discord and prejudices will become in her own future. She is able to run but cannot, ultimately, hide, and this informs her entire perception of the world—especially as articulated through Earthseed and thus her impact on society.

Ecological Diaspora

Butler's Parable books suggest that the age of coastal populations will soon become the age of exodus and diaspora as the coastlines increasingly shrink, and new coastlines seem established and in turn shrink—a potentially long, drawn-out process given the fact that a melting of all of the ice reserves on the planet would result in about 80 metres of sea-level rise. *Sower* and *Talents*, besides their other qualities, are early variations of sf texts relating social phenomena to anthropogenic environmental change, and important not only because of their contribution to a discussion of human-caused environmental ills on a feedback loop with human environments but

also because of their revelation that even relatively minute changes to ecological landscapes will stress current social systems to a breaking point. Butler posits a process of climate change and other effects like sea-level rise that have just begun to affect society, and it is telling that the impact is still so dramatic. More recent ecocritical dystopias concerned with coastal issues often submerge the large coastal cities until many are inundated and destroyed, but Butler's earlier treatment of Greater Los Angeles brings up the ongoing real-world situations for places like Miami, New York, Vancouver, and the like, as coastal and cultural artifacts in the future outside of her narrative. In a 2017 *Rolling Stone* article outlining the precarity of the Antarctic glacial and ice sheet systems in terms of their potential to contribute to global sea-level rise, Jeff Goodell reminds us that "[h]alf the world's population lives within 50 miles of a coastline. Trillions of dollars of real estate is perched on beaches and clustered in low-lying cities like Miami and New York."[86] Or, as Justin Gillis writes in the May 2017 "Antarctic Dispatches" series in *The New York Times*, a "rapid disintegration of Antarctica might, in the worst case, cause the sea to rise so fast that tens of millions of coastal refugees would have to flee inland, potentially straining societies to the breaking point. Climate scientists used to regard that scenario as fit only for Hollywood disaster scripts. But these days, they cannot rule it out with any great confidence" ("Antarctic Dispatches: Part 1"; "Part 2" and "Part 3"). Furthermore, in a discussion of the modern nation-state, tenuous borders, and the potential re-emergence of the city-state, Jamie Bartlett points out that "[e]xact numbers are hard to come by, and notoriously broad, but according to some estimates as many as 200 million people could be climate-change refugees by the middle of the century." Canada's coastline is simply too extensive and comprises

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[86] Ashley Dawson's *Extreme Cities: The Peril and Promise of Urban Life in the Age of Climate Change* (2017) also tackles the role of cities in the future—as do Greg Hanscom and Benjamin Strauss.

areas in which many residents have not been inclined to live, but the majority of the population

in the continental United States is situated coastally, and Butler's Parable books capture this

problem as climate issues progress, not at their pinnacle. The *United States Census 2010*

indicates that, out of the top ten most-populated American cities, six are coastal or coastal-

adjacent. These include Los Angeles, with 3,792,621 (estimated as 3,990,456 in 2018), as the

second most populated American city ("Annual Estimates")—and it is no wonder that so many

representations consider the future of this city and its social dimensions, from Mike Davis's

critical *City of Quartz* (1990), through Neal Stephenson's cyberpunk *Snow Crash* (1992), to

Butler's *Sower*. In his examination of Los Angeles, Davis lauds the city with "[t]he ultimate

world-historical significance" in "that it has come to play the double role of utopia *and* dystopia

for advanced capitalism" (18). The city takes on a representative role as well as a realistic one,

and its inclusion in Butler's *Sower* helps solidify at least the critical dystopian elements of the

narrative that someone like Moylan highlights—especially since Butler anticipates, in some part,

the dire forecasts and outcomes of environmental and social conflicts affecting not only the

present, but a potential future in the area.

In their walled Robledo community in *Sower*, Lauren and her family succeed for a brief

time in keeping out undesirable external forces that threaten their safety and survival. As Peel

says, "[a]lthough not privileged, the Robledo citizens live better than the homeless and poor who

suffer outside" (54). This position of strength is a testament to the sense of their rooted name,

since the Spanish *roble* means "oak" (see "oak"), *de roble* means "oaken" or "made of oak,"[87]

and *enroblecido* means "grown hard as an oak" (Giral del Pino 202). Lauren's initial community

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[87] Many thanks to Mathieu Martin-LeBlanc for corroborating that "Oaken or made of oak is
basically the direct translation of de roble = of/made of/from oak" (Martin-LeBlanc).

prides itself on being solid and upstanding, and on upholding its Utopian principles amidst the darkness and despair that surround their walls. But even if Butler's fictional place name plays on the adage that oak trunks are understood to be amongst the strongest, she also ironically incorporates the idea that they can be uprooted or broken in great winds or other environmental disturbances, as their rigid trunks do not bend to a large degree (Virot et al.). Robledo is clearly subjected to such a process when it is overrun and destroyed by the Pyro-addicted Paints. Even so, the central metaphor at play in the fluctuations between utopia and dystopia (Miller, "Post-Apocalyptic"; Green) seems to be that the seed of a community can travel far and ground itself in unknown land. Lauren's shift from rooted, solidified communal values in Robledo to the Earthseed eco-religion she founds fundamentally promotes her belief that "God is change" (*Sower* 3), which is also a concept applicable to the survival methods she will need in the dystopian and utopian transitions of living past her community's existence.

But the fact that Lauren names her subsequent and equally-doomed community Acorn is also significant since this reflects a process of passing along an inherited genealogy of still assuming an oaken strength, while incorporating change into the idea of planting new seeds. As Kimberly J. Ruffin says, after dealing with the discovery of death and ashes Lauren and her group find upon arrival in Bankole's Northern Californian coastal lands, they "plant oak trees" (90-91) in addition to naming their settlement Acorn. This act clearly represents their journey toward utopian possibility. Bryan Aubrey even reminds us that the "acorn image occurs earlier in the novel …. Lauren learns from a book how to make acorn bread, and this helps to sustain their group as they travel north. The acorn image conveys the idea that the seeds of new life are always available, not only in nature but in humans, too" (240-41). But the larger point is that Lauren's idea of re-seeding the "oak" is a fundamental problem with conceptualising Earthseed.

Butler deliberately complicates the transition, and, as Canavan points out, her unpublished

Parable sequels suggest that a further, off-planet dispersal of Earthseed is less than successful—

thus continuing the process of seeding and destruction started with the dissolution of Robledo. If

Lauren's idea of communal strength and revival is embedded in a process of change, then one of

her failures in imagining such a transformation is that she does not shift her metaphor and

interpretive frame away from the rigidity of the oak that was so central to her Robledo

community and resonant with her father's ideas.

Though Mathias Nilges argues that "[c]entral in Lauren's effort is the attempt to form a

new community, based upon a new understanding of individual and collective existence, which

is designed to accept the fact that the post-apocalyptic world surrounding them lacks any form of

permanence or stability" (1332), if strength is indeed intertwined with change, then the oak itself

is a flawed example. This is true even if the life cycle of the oak is actually successful through

the metaphor that seeds can and will spread, and central to the crucial resilience that Lauren

promotes with her ideas. Lauren's conception of Earthseed refuses to die out, from its inception

in Robledo to its dispersal to the stars, but disaster still continuously befalls the metaphorical

oaks of the Robledo-Acorn-Earthseed heritage. Nilges makes an apt observation about "the

circular structure of *Parable of the Sower*, which begins in Robledo and ends in the founding of

the Acorn, the new settlement of the people of Earthseed, which in both architecture and

ideology is entirely congruent with Robledo" (1339). In this sense at least, no change has

occurred, and as the events of *Talents* demonstrate, this new intentional community is also

doomed. This trend of inheritance and failed ideals, with the irony of a cliché, does not fall far

from the tree because Lauren is named for her father Laurence and Lauren also passes this

genealogical naming on to her daughter (*Talents* 171-72): Larkin significantly refuses to embrace

Earthseed, and even insists on using her adopted name. In this vein, it is interesting that

Larkin/Asha Vere also rejects the etymological resonance of her father's name, which stands for

"*help me build a house*" (182). Bankole agrees to help build Earthseed, but Larkin/Asha Vere

refuses to be involved. Maybe this fallacy, however, is part of Butler's meditation on the nature

of shifts between utopian and dystopian registers: the ultimate refusal of the overall Parable

narrative to solidify a utopian outcome is quite telling in terms of the subgeneric modes at play.

The critical dystopian elements of the Parable books begin with Robledo itself, which is

incredibly difficult to place geographically—especially since it is not a real-world place. But it is

in such conceptual work to locate Robledo that the importance of the shift from critical dystopian

to ecocritical dystopian registers in the Parable books begins. While the scientific community can

repeat its warnings about the effects of anthropogenic climate change on sea-level rise ad

nauseam, and can even work to predict stratigraphic and geographic modifications, it is the

ecocritical dystopia that humanizes these outcomes, that relates far- and near-future alterations to

places and spaces with the human populations that will or intend to occupy them. Even the

critical dystopia arguably only accomplishes the same sense of impact as another generalized

scientific report or study of current numbers and predictive models. That is, while both the

critical dystopia and a scientific report contain elements relevant to the present, they also remain

somewhat abstract to a given reader who is, say, more unfamiliar with reading sf literature or not

interested or versed in connecting with scientific modes and modelling; moreover, even more

engaged readers can only apply the warnings in nonconcrete ways. Without a livable or

applicable experience, though the speculative or predictive aspects may be alarming or even

compelling in argumentation, the information offered remains relatively intangible. This is one

reason why the maps in Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway's *The Collapse of Western*

Civilization (2014) are useful, as the speculative narrative imagines, in part, altered geographies in which anthropogenic climate change driven sea-level rise changes coastlines for the Netherlands (xii), Bangladesh (10), New York (34), Florida (50). The authors also meld different approaches in their text, arguing that "[s]cience fiction writers construct an imaginary future [and] historians attempt to reconstruct the past. Ultimately, both are seeking to understand the present" (ix). The advantage of Oreskes and Conway's ecocritical dystopian mode is that abstraction, though sometimes useful in providing a sense of a topic, is eclipsed by concrete details that apply to places inhabited by humans. People have experiences in those cities (and will continue to do so), which matters because the imagined future events could directly affect their lives. In contrast, though a critical dystopia might align with a given reader's general sense of current events as perhaps a mirror or a parody even as the action occurs in a potential future, the connection is less direct, and more amorphous. Thus, Robledo is representative of any suburban, middle-class Los Angeles neighbourhood with its privilege and concerns about dissolution, but not a specific location. Perhaps such resonance as part of a whole, as an idea, is why Peel reads the Parable novels as critical dystopias when she says that "they offer a thread of hope not just to readers but also to characters" (53). Both fear and hope are abstractions in comparison with the tangible nature of the books' ecocritical dystopian elements.

We are increasingly certain that climate change processes affect our sense of the world, and *Sower* and *Talents* move between the realism and representation of the ecocritical and critical dystopias in order to solidify the understanding that this is not just a speculative worry anymore, but a tangible concern. Robledo is representative of the long-standing (and increasing) Hispanic cultural influences on both Los Angeles and much of California, though the many landmarks that Lauren encounters on her journey up the coast can be located in the real world,

and some of these include such historical registers. Robledo does not feature in these geographical examples, but in the real world, outside of Butler's fiction, the name connects to both individuals and locations. This includes a short street in Mission Viejo, roughly 50 miles south of downtown Los Angeles; the Robledo Mountains, a range northwest of Las Cruces in Doña Ana County, New Mexico; and the Robledo Family Winery north of San Francisco, which is maybe one reason why Lauren J. Lacey expects that Robledo is "north of Los Angeles" (380),[88] even if the winery was founded in 1996 (Robledo Family Winery), after *Sower* was published. But despite these connections, there seems to be no small city or even village named Robledo within the radius indicated. Instead, Robledo and other fictional place-based elements like it largely stand in for the critical dystopian elements of the Parable books, giving readers a sense of their own worlds presented as some horrible iteration, but not necessarily traceable to physical locations and/or regions in the current day, except in a generalized understanding that is separate from the specificity of a particular street, cul-de-sac, or address, for instance, that also exists in the real world. This lack of direct identifiability for Robledo follows Sargent's logic with his "dystopia[n] or negative utopia[n]" definition of "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" ("Three" 9; Baccolini and Moylan 7), and Moylan's related conceptions of the critical dystopia.

Robledo, clearly, is a fictional microcosm of the social ills that have descended upon both the urban centre of Los Angeles and its greater urban sprawl, and the urban spaces of the

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[88] Lacey may also derive this conclusion from the placement of major roadways, which will be discussed shortly.

American West Coast in general. This is despite Lauren's explanation that Robledo was, "according to [her] Dad, once a rich, green, unwalled little city" (*Sower* 10); while Dubey seems to fixate on the "'little city'" (Dubey 106) aspect, of course the usage of "once" (*Sower* 10) is quite important in differentiating what sounds like an idyllic locale from the unfortunate pressures of urban expansion and its attendant social shifts, which have transformed Robledo and area for the worse. But Butler also troubles this idealized vision of the past just as much as she troubles utopian desires for the future when Acorn later fails between *Sower* and *Talents*: it is the excesses of past generations and their refusal to change (as evidenced by Lauren's father's opinions about subjects like the climate disaster) that produce the current environmentally-detrimental and other problematic conditions of Lauren's world. Bankole expands upon this at the start of *Talents* with the theme of pre-millennial apocalypticism, and thus generational inequality, since people in secure positions "sat and watched" the crisis grow but did not act. For the present time of Lauren's coming-of-age, however, Dubey explains that "[t]he Robledo neighborhood cannot be sustained because its relative financial and social stability is structurally interconnected to the extreme instability of the poor and the pyromaniacs who throng outside the walls of Robledo and who eventually raid and burn down the neighborhood" (112), which Peel labels "middle-class" (54). The composition and location of Robledo is somewhat solidified in Butler's sequel *Talents*, though, in which Robledo is referred to as "a suburb of Los Angeles" (9). Kaufman indicates "a twenty-first-century Los Angeles suburb" (13) and Mayer recalls the distance of "twenty miles" (175), but, as Robert Butler comments, "Robledo becomes a frightening metaphor of America in gridlock" (135). This latter reading implies a social gridlock rather than a physical one.

Several examples of a strangling expansion unifying the urban and the suburban, alongside the attendant social repercussions, are apparent in *Sower*. One is with Laurence Olamina's reliance on his job teaching at a college in Los Angeles. When his daughter asks him if he would "'ever think about leaving [the area], heading north to where water isn't such a problem and food is cheaper,'" he reasons that his employment "'is as secure as a job could be,'" since, with those elsewhere, "'[n]ewcomers work for food if they work at all. Experience doesn't matter. Education doesn't matter. There are just too many desperate people. They work their lives away for a sack of beans and they live on the street'" (*Sower* 82).[89] But the suggestion that these conditions are distant is also a false one that willfully ignores the impermanence of Robledo as a sanctuary from the desperate streets just a wall away—for which even the uncertain nature of college teaching and its inherently problematic transit obligations add difficulties that always involve where one works, and where one can afford to live. This problem escalates when Lauren's father disappears one morning on the way home from teaching: travelling on his bicycle, "[h]e had ridden off toward home with three co-workers who lived in other neighborhoods in [the] area" (12-30), yet is never found again. Since it is clear that Laurence is rooted and invested in his Robledo community, his disappearance and probable death is likely the function of an encounter he has with unstable urban forces in the mere "five blocks" (130) that remained in his trip home from work after he and his co-workers parted. Then, once the neighbourhood walls fail to keep out the street "horde," so to speak, Lauren has a sudden realization that she is just another of the homeless "street poor" (156) without options except to

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[89] Another option that presents itself is, of course, with KSF in Olivar, which is "looking for registered nurses, credentialed teachers, and a few other skilled professionals" like Lauren's father and step-mother, Cory, who "are both teachers, both Ph.D.'s" (*Sower* 120). Cory is interested, but Laurence believes it will amount to "'slavery'" (121).

either scrape out an existence or attempt to leave (171-73, 176); this sudden shift to Robledo becoming but another part of the non-privileged regularity of abject urban survival is hardly surprising, though, since in "'L.A. [proper] some walled communities bigger and stronger … just aren't there anymore. Nothing left but ruins, rats, and squatters'" (55). Moreover, the indication that Robledo has subsumed into the sprawl of urban Los Angeles since its incarnation as a "rich, green, unwalled little city" is quite apt, even if Robledo is a fictional locale: perhaps one suggestion is that the absorption nullifies a sense of smaller communities rather than promoting their unique natures. As Mayer points out, Robledo and its relationship with Los Angeles is "a product of twentieth-century urban sprawl"—and the suburb is "still an integral part of [the] widespread area" (175). Regardless of Robledo's distance, the spread of urban characteristics to engulf it simply gives it the feeling of being at least right next door to Los Angeles, if not of being a part of the same entity.

Douglas W. Texter calls Robledo a "walled-off cul-de-sac" (472), but Butler's *Sower* further obfuscates the specific location of the suburb (see Menne 716, 725) or neighbourhood with the street names referenced as Lauren flees the riotous mob of pyromaniac Paints. She says that she runs "up Meredith Street away from Durant Road" and "[n]orth toward the hills" (*Sower* 154). In the real world, there is no Durant Road near downtown Los Angeles, and there are only two permutations of Meredith Street. One of these is in Claremont, but this is around 30 miles from the urban core; the other is in Riverside, which is 44 miles away. Neither is near the real-world freeways indicated through Lauren's journey in *Sower*. From a different angle, Meredith *Place* and Durant *Drive* could corroborate her actions at least in spirit, but they are located in Beverly Hills. Given Lauren's later explanation that she and her group "[walk] down to the freeway—the 118—and [turn] west ... [to] take the 118 to the 23 and the 23 to U.S. 101 ... up the

coast toward Oregon" (176), the Beverly Hills location for her neighbourhood does not quite

make sense, unless Butler is suggesting that Lauren and her group flee north *past* the 101, then

turn west onto the 118, either come back south on the 23 or continue along the 118, and continue

west on the 101. This seems counterintuitive, and it is much more likely that Lauren's fictional

Robledo neighbourhood sits somewhere in the area north of the 101 and south of the 118, like

Northridge, North Hills, or even Reseda.[90] As it happens, the edges of all of these adjacent

suburbs are about 17 miles to the northwest, or roughly 20 miles from the edge of downtown Los

Angeles (depending on where one considers the official boundaries), whereas 20 miles directly

to the north would indicate the unlikely region of the San Gabriel Mountains. Also unlikely is the

suburb of Sylmar, which is the one the most directly around 20 miles to the north of Los

Angeles, but we can discount this community because it is between the 118 and the "hills and

mountains" (*Sower* 154) that Lauren heads toward.

Perhaps, then, we can attribute Lacey's assessment of Robledo being "north of Los

Angeles" to one of Northridge, North Hills, or Reseda, instead, though of course none of these *is*

Robledo. Of these, at first glance, North Hills most seems to fit Lauren's comment that she is

"[t]hree miles [from] the hills" (*Sower* 156), but since she had already run north then stopped at

this point, the roughly 5 miles between Reseda and the hills suggest that this latter suburb is the

best real-world stand-in for the fictional Robledo suburb name. This locale would also fit the

revelation in *Sower* that one Mrs. Sims's house "had been in an unwalled area north and east of

[Robledo], closer to the foothills" (23). If this is the case, then it is quite reasonable that when

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[90] The general northerly direction of travel, however, supports Mayer's argument that, "[l]ike the
slave narratives which tell their stories of escape from slavery in the South to freedom in the
North, *Parable of the Sower* displays a plot structure based on a spatial movement from South to
North" (189)—even if not all such narratives present this directionality, as is demonstrated with
Lorena Gale's 1998 play *Angélique*, which in part portrays the flight of Marie Joseph Angélique.

Lauren's father takes the target practice group "to the top of River Street past the last

neighborhood walls … then higher into the hills along a dirt road …. into one of the canyons that

[they] and others use" (37), the real-world suggestion is the Browns Canyon system, with its

Browns Canyon Road that leads well up into the hills and their related natural Parks areas. This

connection to our geography seems especially likely since the connected Los Angeles River runs

through Reseda and descends from the hills and this same canyon system. But neither canyons

nor hills are ever named, and in later fleeing the fall of Robledo, Lauren does not "go all the way

to the hills" (156) before hiding out. Moreover, before fleeing northward, her and her

companions go to "Hanning Joss, the biggest secure store complex in Robledo" (173), then leave

to turn onto the freeway system, so Robledo must also be quite proximate to the 118, which

again suggests that the fictional suburb is located somewhere that resonates with the real-world

Reseda and its companion suburbs. But it is within the narration of the community venture to go

target practicing in a canyon that I am tempted to assert that Robledo is, in fact, an amalgamation

of a few different suburban areas in Greater Los Angeles abutting the northern hillscape above

the 101. The significance of this is partly in the above suggestion that L.A. subsuming the area

into its greater urban body works to cancel out the particular characteristics of each component

area, which parallels my assertion that *Sower* moves from a critical dystopian resonance to an

ecocritical dystopian inclusion of specific place. That is, while there does not seem to be more

specific evidence for the potential that Robledo is actually a grouping of other current real-world

suburban elements into a larger entity, such a body would be plausible in a speculative future as

different neighbourhoods band together for strength against expanding urban pressures. In this

sense, there is a potential for analysis of geographical elements to work backwards to unpack the

localities directly indicated, which would thus shift the critical dystopian nature of Robledo

toward an ecocritical dystopian one.[91] What is interesting is also not so much the precision or imprecision of the imagined mapping, but the illusion it creates of a known, orderly, and mapped world. That is, the cartographic resonances build a sense of Lauren's world for the reader, who then imagines the street grids and geographical features in relation to their own. Whether the continued growth of megacities will be part of a trend that obscures the old to create new versions of place is hard to say, but the suggestion of *Sower* is that these sprawling cityscapes will steadily fill landscapes wherever available, and conquer all possible horizons, as one might argue contemporary Los Angeles has steadily done.

Butler's Ecocritical Dystopia

One consideration for future Californian cities like Los Angeles will unsurprisingly be the resource-related concern of access to water—though of course this is already an issue in the present day and will only be exacerbated moving forward. Mayer asserts that Butler speculates about "global warming [that has] led to desertification, to long periods without rain on the one hand and rare instances of almost torrential downpouring on the other, to an increase of tornadoes and blizzards. These weather phenomena have deeply affected the economic, the social, and the political structure of U.S. society. Resources have been depleted and privatized, water has become scarce, and so have gasoline and electricity" (175). The transformations speculated about for the future, whether through anthropogenic climate change or other means, are slated to prompt massive conflicts over resources. This remains a well-established reality of

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[91] Another factor maybe at play here is that increasing Hispanic cultural contributions to California may also invariably shift the place-names in Greater Los Angeles in recognition—which would be a reversal of sorts, given aspects like the "El Camino Real" (*Sower* 223), which is a throughfare hearkening back to older (colonial) influences of culture in California.

our past and present worlds that will hardly diminish as we transition into the next decades and beyond. Butler captures such crises and their urgency clearly and effectively through her ecocritical dystopian mode. There are certainly critical dystopian elements in the Parable novels that might connect with a sense of current society resonating with such a future, but these and other specific elements of the Parable texts (and their contemporaries) produce only "a shock of familiarity rather than estrangement" (Dubey 106; Potts 334). Butler pinpoints modern concerns about climate change, but the overtly didactic elements (Mayer; Thaler) of the Parable narratives—which, for me, emerge when Lauren occasionally explains in her diaries how the world has changed for the worse, or when Bankole writes in the same manner in his text, "*Memories of Other Worlds*" (*Talents* 7-8, 45-47, 61-62)[92]—are kept to a relatively minor role, and thus Butler subtly incorporates quite significant environmental considerations that are convincingly extrapolated forward from the contemporary day amongst the social issues of her examination of the future. Butler's Parable books are therefore timely examples of the careful yet determined footsteps of a nascent subgenre of dystopian fiction that attempts to apprehend the vastness of human social impacts on the natural world and thus respectively on itself, but within concrete extensions forward from the current day.

Here Butler is again, as she is in many ways, a pioneer—especially when compared to the more abstract sense of place involved in sf texts ranging from Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), to E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1909), to J.G. Ballard's *The Wind from Nowhere* (1961), *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Burning World* (1964), and *The Drought* (1974). With the *The Drowned World*, for instance, an environmental change affects human societies, and

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[92] One of the successes of *Talents* is its polyvocality; Bankole's *Memories of Other Worlds* alone would have fallen flat as it hardly drives a narrative forward, and is really just included to teach the contemporary reader how human activity affected the future.

places are altered with "the momentous return of the age of the great reptiles" (6): the character

Kerans wonders, before his "northward odyssey" (7) toward "Camp Byrd in Northern

Greenland" (6), which never actually happens in the story, if a "drowned cit[y] in the south"

might have "once been Berlin, Paris or London" (7). But the narrative is more about the *conceit*

of a reversal of sorts in geological ages brought about by "gigantic geophysical upheavals" then

"higher levels" of "solar radiation" (18) than about a suggestion that our anthropocenic times

might produce climatic and ecological phenomena comparable to "the terrifying jungles of the

Paleocene" (15). Though an alteration of biomes that instills more tropical conditions at higher

latitudes may actually be a concern in our real-world future, this will not likely be accompanied

specifically by "radioactivity increas[ing] the rate at which mutations [occur]" (18) and the

"arrival of … distant forebears" (19) "recalling the giant tree-ferns of the Carboniferous period"

(18-19), for example. My sense is that, while Ballard's *The Drowned World* contains alterations

to human societies partly because of geographical and ecological shifts, including the reshaping

of all of the planet's continents (19), the associated aim is not to extrapolate forward in the

manner that Butler does, but to reconceive geographies and environments merely in order to

create a different setting in which to move the narrative. In fact, besides an initial descriptor of a

few changed places, and a brief mention partway through the text of "'Leicester Square'" (112)

and "'Coventry Street, Haymarket'" (115)—all indicating a London gone to swamp and jungle—

"place" is not really a factor in events except as a resonance of colonial fallout, and therefore the

idea of a future society does not feed backwards to inform the present. This choice *increases* a

sense of cognitive estrangement between the present and the future instead of decreasing it in the

manner that an ecocritical dystopian mode would. Even *The Drought*, which is the most recent of

those Ballard texts, is more about the premise that industrial waste causes an oceanic reaction

that stops precipitation. I find this comparable to the role of the chemical substance "*ice-nine*" in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963), where all of the world's water is eventually compromised in a plot expounding upon human military conflicts and religion—both Ballard and Vonnegut offer warnings about the future, but their speculative "hook" means they are not writing ecocritical dystopias. The Parable books stand in as an important stage in a long history of sf literature that employs geography, for instance, in various ways, but also does so as an integral part of the narrative.

Butler begins *Talents* with commentary by the older doctor Bankole (who married a younger Lauren), who explains how the world arrived at the terrible state it has reached in that speculative future. As with the formal text of *Sower*, which is presented in journal entries, *Talents* is formally arranged in fragments of text that are journal, excerpts from other work written by characters, and editorial glosses; by this stage, Bankole has written his thoughts in a book entitled "*Memories of Other Worlds*" (*Talents* 7), and their distanced daughter Larkin/Asha Vere later reads Bankole's considerations, her mother's journal, and her uncle Marc's writings as she collects and comments on their observations. That is, Larkin/Asha Vere is the novel's overall narrative voice tying together disparate contributions to a conversation about the future, which adds another dimension to the dynamic of the Parable narrative that *Sower* cannot display. This polyvocality is important not only because any contemplation of the future involves many stakeholders, but because community is essential to any healing Lauren and other characters achieve, even if the communities established are continually subjected to either renewed or fresh dangers, or cause harm themselves. Notably, Butler's Parable books suggest that the local community is ultimately entangled with the global and ecological ones, no matter what the singular voice desires. In Bankole's section, he contemplates how the consequences of their

current, ongoing crisis (the "new normal") are much more far-reaching than many critics have

argued. He writes, "I have read that the period of upheaval that journalists have begun to refer to

as 'the Apocalypse' or more commonly, more bitterly, 'the Pox' lasted from 2015 through

2030—a decade and a half of chaos. This is untrue. The Pox has been a much longer torment. It

began well before 2015, perhaps even before the turn of the millennium. It has not ended"

(*Talents* 8). Bankole links the inception of the "torment" of his time to ours, and even suggests

that it was around the time of "the turn of the millennium" that the chaos he has lived through

began. While 2015 was the future as Butler was writing *Talents*, this paralleled progression of

the world from around the year 2000 to ours is highly applicable (and moreover, to the

apocalypticism of end-millennial thinking), even if not all of the events Butler speculates about

occur, or at least occur in the way she writes. We cannot deny that we have encountered similar

hurdles of individualistic profiteering creating further chaos for the whole in this roughly fifteen

to twenty-year time frame.

Bankole analyzes these facets of his (and ironically, our) world rhizomatically when he

comments, "I have also read that the Pox was caused by accidentally coinciding climatic,

economic, and sociological crises." But he also cautions that "[w]e caused the problems[,] then

we sat and watched as they grew into crises" (8). Bankole's written voice here is clearly Butler's

didactic voice,[93] yet both resonate as an older, wiser voice shaking its head at the world gone

mad, essentially, as *Talents* was also written and published in 1998, or right around the

millennium. Allen asserts that "Butler uses her tales to teach her readers important lessons about

life, about human history, and about the many pitfalls that continually seem to ensnare the

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[93] Mayer also highlights the "title and text of the biblical 'Parable of the Sower,' St. Luke 8, 5-8, with which Butler ends her novel," and which Mayer argues "function[s] as a framing narrative device to highlight the text's moral, didactic thrust" (178).

human species" (1353-54). In *Talents*, it is notable that Bankole links the quite visible sociological outcomes in his world with the underlying environmental problems. He does not come right out and say that one is the cause of the other, but the two "topics" are listed back-to-back in his exposition. He recalls that he has "watched poverty, hunger, and disease become inevitable for more and more people" (*Talents* 8), but relates these to changes in the environment. Allen parses this by arguing that "the devastation of both the Earth itself and human social and economic structures occurs because of humanity's inactivity, its refusal to deal with many social, economic, and environmental issues that plague our contemporary world" (1355). The argument that "climatic" changes are part of the root causes to sociological ones is more upfront here, in *Talents*, than it was in *Sower*, where Lauren comments early on about some aspects like the weather, but only really discovers the direct, measurable elements of the non-urban world after fleeing the local and regional areas of her Robledo suburb and Greater Los Angeles. Perhaps, though, by focusing on rampant social issues while Lauren is in Los Angeles—and by somewhat obscuring the underlying environmental connections—Butler is creating an appropriate metaphor for how societies often do not see the roots of the issues driving them to disaster until it is too late. After all, Bankole argues that "the Pox was caused by our own refusal to deal with obvious problems" (*Talents* 8), which indicates a willful blindness compounded by a lack of foresight.

This flaw of societal blindness so common to many great, and failed, civilizations in the history of human occupation of this planet is crystalized in *Talents* when several houses built on the edge of the Pacific collapse into the ocean in the fictional community of Halstead, located near Lauren's communal Acorn, in the real-world Humboldt County, California. The entire scenario is arguably a metaphor begging the question of why anyone would take such a risk

when the consequences are so visible, so tangible. That is, the example of the falling Halstead houses is a microcosm of how Butler is asking why we continue to proceed in a business-as-usual fashion: called to help survivors after the community doctor dies "in one of the lost houses," Bankole asks why they "'still have people living on the cliffs,'" and demands to know "'[h]ow many times … this kind of thing [has] to happen before [they] get the idea'" (114). The response is fairly simple: some "'refuse to have their houses moved. They think they'll be okay'" (114). Yet, unlike the problem in Halstead, the brief mention of erosion in *Sower* is but a problem for the distant (also fictional) company town community of Olivar. Lauren explains that "Olivar, incorporated in the 1980s, is just one more beach/bedroom suburb of Los Angeles" on the "crumbling coastline" (*Sower* 118). Butler's environmental threat from sea-level rise erosion thus begins on the coast of arid Southern California and appears first in the form of Olivar, which is said to be "located between the sea and Los Angeles" (*Sower* 119); of course, in today's Los Angeles, the greater city itself abuts the oceanfront, even if its downtown is roughly 18 to 19 kilometers from the shore. Like Robledo, Olivar is fictional but representative of many smaller areas outlying Los Angeles that have been subsumed by a combination of social and environmental forces. Olivar, again like Robledo, stands in for the Hispanic cultural influences on the region, and perhaps implies the locales of Santa Monica and El Segundo, which, though part of the urban sprawl surrounding Los Angeles, are between the downtown core and the waves. We do not know the exact location of either Robledo or Olivar in the physical world, but it is clear that any effect of rising sea levels will immediately involve Los Angeles, and not just smaller cities or towns on the coast. Yet, perhaps like the blinkered, stubborn cliff-dwellers in Halstead, Lauren's Robledo seems to consider itself a step removed from that environmental

impact, just as the root cause of economic depression and increasing transiency is not made apparent until Lauren leaves the urban centre and reaches the "natural" world.

Most of the focus on Olivar seems to be about how the place became a company town, and whether it would make sense to move there as her friend Joanne does with her family (126-29, 138-39), but Lauren also comments that "it has extra problems. Parts of it sometimes crumble into the ocean, undercut or deeply saturated by salt water. Sea level keeps rising with the warming climate" and "Olivar's flat, sandy beach is already just a memory …. Like coastal cities all over the world, Olivar needs special help" (118). Again, much as with Bankole's later discussion, as read by their daughter in *Talents*, the focus here is on the conflation of environmental problems with social ones: as Lauren points out, "Olivar … is getting an influx of salt water from one direction and desperate poor people from the other" (*Sower* 119). But Lauren's perspective here is that of someone who has never seen the suburb, and who never will—unlike with her experience in Humboldt County. Instead, while she mentions environmental concerns at this point in *Sower*, she is much more wrapped up in the visible societal issues that seem to also plague Los Angeles and her walled community Robledo. Her experience in the Cape Mendocino region is much more tangible.

Halstead's problem is thus presented in *Talents* (113-14) as a stronger feature of environmental concern than Olivar's in *Sower* because of Lauren's proximity to the crisis. Through her lens of having grown up away from the coast, Lauren argues that she does not understand the motives of the cliff-dwellers, and enumerates environmental catastrophes that could occur: "whenever we have heavy rains, when there's an earthquake, or when the level of the sea rises enough to saturate more land, great blocks of the palisades drop into the sea, and the houses sitting on them break apart and fall. Sometimes half a house falls into the sea. Sometimes

it's several houses. Last night it was three of them. The people of Halstead were still fishing

victims out of the sea" (*Talents* 114). But even if Butler is critiquing this continuing human

activity of building where terrain and conditions do not make sense in the face of obvious perils,

her character Lauren, though not exactly a seer, is adept at apprehending societal trends and

flaws even from a young age.[94] Lauren is not prescient but plans for the future better than most

other humans in both the real world and literature in general, which perhaps is something Butler

would, admirably, like to foster in her own readership as we continue to contemplate how our

actions today affect the world of tomorrow.

As Canavan indicates, we should recognize many of the elements of Butler's speculative

society, since "the Parables series represents prophecy rather than fantasy, prediction rather than

escapism—the world of the Parables, the world of Lauren's childhood, is the world Butler

believed we were actually creating," in which "global warming, economic depression, and

neoliberalism's accelerative hollowing-out of the public sphere have conspired to leave America

in a state of near-total collapse" (*Octavia* 132). Canavan cites Butler's admiration in a 1998 talk

at MIT for a science fiction category she calls "'the if-this-goes-on category'" (qtd. in Canavan,

Octavia 132; Butler, "'Devil'"),[95] under which she groups the Parables series. Canavan notes that

this writing relationship with real-world events gleaned "just from watching the 'daily news'"

(132; Cobb, "Interview"; Cobb, *Conversations* 63) has been called "her attempt to write in the

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[94] By this I mean that she is perceptive beyond the hyperempathy through which she generally encounters the world adjacent to normal human interactions; Butler's further speculative elements, past that of the futuristic outcomes of environmental tolls that contribute to the ecocritical dystopia, include Lauren's unique impressions about human feelings.

[95] Canavan also deftly navigates what he believes to be Butler's misattribution of this "'category of science-fiction stories'" to Robert A. Heinlein (*Octavia* 132) instead of Isaac Asimov (*Octavia* 204).

mode critics and fans would later call 'mundane SF'" (132). This last is too broad for a

subgeneric ranging of classifications about utopias and dystopias, but the directionality resonates

with both the ecocritical dystopia and with Butler's concerns about real-world problems

extended into the future.[96] The inability of (most of) the rest of Lauren's society to accurately

observe how they are actually affecting the world and in return being affected by the changes

they inflict is clear in the narrative; moreover, the "pyro addicts" (153) who eventually destroy

Robledo are such an apt analogy for the blind obsession of those afflicted by the excesses of

modern society. As Lauren says when her father is still alive, in response to both communal

exodus and the pseudo-Utopian prospect of Olivar, the situation is comparable to "'ignoring a

fire in the living room because we're all in the kitchen, and, besides, house fires are too scary to

talk about'" (63). Surely this very careful language is not only Lauren's attempt to discuss

analogous ongoing, difficult matters with the authority figure she idolizes, but also Butler's

method of drawing in the conscience of the reader and likely the Western community at large.

Here I have framed Butler's second Parable novel as partly an ecocritical dystopia, but in

the context of the discussions by Moylan and others—in particular, Suvin—about a variety of

utopias, dystopias, and anti-utopias, some might be tempted to attribute anti-utopian qualities to

Talents. The novel contains dystopian qualities but also negates the desired Utopia of Lauren's

created community of Acorn (see Canavan, *Octavia* 143). That being said, as Clara Escoda

Agustí points out, within Acorn, Lauren "counteracts the oppression that the system wields over

her as a black woman and … she is able to re-write her own utopian community's approach to

gender and racial difference, thus creating a community of equals" (352); this carries over into

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[96] Though Thaler says that *Sower* employs "hyperbole" (72, 74), this seems to stray from both the "dead-serious" elements Thaler indicates (74), and Butler's admitted extrapolation of realism into the future.

the values of Earthseed that Lauren later propagates as she tours and builds the religion. While Acorn has been overrun by the time of the narrative edited by Larkin/Asha Vere, this negation is not enough to make *Talents* fully an anti-utopia (though it certainly has such registers). This is especially true of *Sower*, since Lauren is not deliberately setting up a utopian settlement in order to dupe her people and followers, contrary to many such real-world communities (again, see Brown's analysis of intentional communities on the Canadian West Coast in "Nowherelands" and *All Possible Worlds*)—but it is also true of her further efforts in *Talents* on behalf of Earthseed, after the fall of Camp Christian. Lauren does not use subterfuge to blind her followers to her true aims. She actually believes in the goals of this created community and subsequent movement. Neither Lauren's Acorn members nor the resultant Earthseed followers, therefore, belong to an anti-utopian project, despite the generic resonances in the novel, like how Jarret's Crusaders void Earthseed's efforts to build and sustain Acorn. However, Asha Vere's Dreamask project resonates strongly with anti-utopian qualities for, as Suvin puts it, "'Anti-utopia' … designates a pretended utopia" ("Utopianism" 170). After all, the company or product's name functions aurally both as "dream-mask" and "dream-ask." Users are both hiding behind the technology but also requesting desired fantasies within which to hide. But, alongside Moylan, I would also hesitate to refer to Suvin's "'simple' dystopia" ("Utopianism" 171): this seems too reductionist for the complex social issues at play in *Talents*.

Overall, the Parable texts are more ecocritical dystopian than anti-utopian, at least, especially since Lauren so vividly believes in the values behind Earthseed, as demonstrated from early on in *Sower* with her passionate and secretive formulation of the tenets that will later become a movement, a belief system. Even the formal aspects of Butler's two novels, with the inclusion of quasi-paratextual quotations from Lauren's eco-religious text "Earthseed: The

Books of the Living" or other related texts as chapter epigraphs and textual fragments,

authenticate Earthseed as well-intentioned, at least, instead of manipulative. But it is important to

remember that Earthseed as an element influencing genre in the Parable books is ultimately not

even utopian, even if it has Utopian desires. Melanie A. Marotta argues that Lauren's "first and

second (communities) … are unsuccessful because nature and technology are used separately[,

and] Lauren's third community … survives and has permanence as a result of the simultaneous

employment of nature and technology" (39),[97] but this utopian pairing of technology and nature

omits the events of *Talents*, as well as how Earthseed abandons the planet not only *through*

technology but *to* technology. This latter is seen with the Dreamasks and v-rooms that essentially

compromise the ability of individuals to not only function in society but to care for themselves

and thus survive without outside assistance. For instance, the "cheap," "lightweight, clothlike,

and comfortable" masks "[offer] wearers a whole series of adventures" in which they can

"submerge themselves in other, simpler, happier lives" and "[t]he poor [can] enjoy the illusion of

wealth, the ugly [can] be beautiful, the sick [can] be healthy, [and] the timid [can] be bold"

(*Talents* 220). Users become captured by the lure of their virtual, fantasy worlds, but the

technology is also "related to old-fashioned lie detectors, to slave collars, and to a frighteningly

efficient form of audiovisual subliminal suggestion" (220) that enslaves them in an existence of

disconnection from the tangible world. Instead, they gain a sense of connection with place that is

entirely virtual: they can "go anywhere, be anyone, be with anyone" (345). With this, in an

abstract way, the ecocritical dystopia resonates through the Dreamask and v-room (or v-bubble)

users' altered connections with the places they inhabit, and ostensibly nullifies their concerns

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[97] In Marotta's view, the first community is Robledo, the second one is the group travelling
northward, and the third is Acorn.

about ecological matters, though obviously they still rely on resources like air and water, or foodstuffs, even if they no longer seem to realize or even care that this mode of living matters.

Even for those who depend on these virtual escape modes from reality, it is troubling that environmental issues have not been solved by the end of *Talents*. Allen indicates perceptively that "Butler does not intend for us to see Earthseed as an ideal utopia. She does not believe imperfect humans can create a perfect society, which is why the Parable series ends on a discordant note" (1364). Here Allen is partly referring to Butler's comments about utopia (McCaffery), but with this mention of the (reluctant) series finale, Allen also alludes to the troubling fact that a starship Earthseed uses to depart our planet is called the *Christopher Columbus* (*Talents* 406). Allen is correct in establishing that, "[i]n the end, then, Butler inserts a dystopic note to the tale, showing that though the members of Earthseed may physically leave Earth, they will not leave their history behind" (1364). The vast and destructive history of colonialism referenced by the ship's name, a history that also includes environmental devastations,[98] is being celebrated. Lauren stubbornly argues that "[t]he name is nothing," and "object[s]" that the "ship is not about a shortcut to riches and empire. It's not about snatching up slaves and gold" (406). But the inescapable conclusion is that human history includes dark chapters, and despite Lauren's insistence, Butler's use of the name demonstrates an ongoing legacy (one that of course also involves not only conquest, but slavery). Allen's reading contradicts that of Thaler, for instance, who insists that *Sower* "reveals a stronger utopian urge because it presents utopia as a consequence of the dystopian future" (96). But even if this last

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[98] This is suggested, at the very least, through Quammen's discussion of invasive species ("Planet"), but also by the astounding revelation that the vast number of Indigenous lives lost during the European invasion of the Americas, as well as the resultant shift in land-system use, affected global climate and related aspects (Koch et al.).

conclusion did not ignore the events of *Talents*, the mode in which the departing starships are framed remains problematic. Colonialism is still (and always will be) as damaging as it has been in human history; how could it be any different even propagated into the alien worlds scattered amongst the stars?

Butler could not, ultimately, formulate definitive, published sequel texts that solved the problems of Lauren's Earthseed inductees, followers, and inheritors—or of those remaining behind on the earth. As Canavan indicates, Butler's many attempts to plan out new volumes for this group of books met with a variety of hurdles that included writer's block.[99] But for my purposes, the off-world parts of these narratives would also not have been ecocritical dystopias, and what is true is that Butler was not able to move beyond the critical and ecocritical dystopian modes with the Parable books. None of Butler's proposed outcomes seem to feature an Earthseed community that could sustain itself in the United States, other locations in North America (such as the often-proposed destination of Canada), or on the planet itself. Even the Earthseed fugue into space seems to be articulated in fraught and constantly compromised terms once a potential destination is reached. Canavan also reminds us, however, with what I think is one his most valuable observations about the Parable texts, that this exodus is counterintuitive. He articulates the point in at least two ways. First, he shows how "our evolution in Earth's ecology and our grounding in its biome is instead now the reason we shouldn't go to space at all" (*Octavia* 136). He also aptly points out that, "[f]or better or for worse, we live on the Earth; if there's going to be any change, it's got to happen down here, not out there" (139). This contradicts Lauren's drive to manifest Earthseed within the cosmos throughout *Sower* and *Talents* and beyond, and

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[99] Canavan was able to link Earthseed to the larger, updated Missionaries narrative (*Octavia* 8), but this connection is unfortunately not in print as part of Butler's finalized texts.

astutely takes into account Lauren's acknowledgement of culpability toward humanity as a whole when she says, "I know what I've done" (*Talents* 407) as the Earthseed "ships lift their cargoes from the Earth" (407). Technically, her admission stands in as the last narrative words of the collective, published Parable books, since the reference to "ST. MATTHEW 25:14-30" (*Talents* 407-408) is not narrative text, and Larkin/Asha Vere inserts no further editorial commentary.

The final question about *Talents* might actually be whether it is Lauren or Larkin/Asha Vere who includes the biblical material that ends the book, but either way it is safe to say that these are not Lauren's direct words, though they seem to echo her drive to foster economic growth in America as part of her long-fought attempts to send her eco-religion into the cosmos: "[s]he found sources of money and directed them into areas of study that brought the fulfillment of the Earthseed Destiny closer" (404). Notably, it is Larkin/Asha Vere, the collector and editor of all of the narrative fragments in the book, who has offered up Lauren's last journal entry just before the quote from the King James version of the Bible (408). Given the tone at the end of the inserted Parable of the Talents biblical excerpt, alongside Larkin/Asha Vere's role as the overarching narrator of *Talents* amidst the dialogic fragments, it is probable that this last quote does not concretely represent Lauren's voice or arguments, but belongs specifically to her daughter's fragmented sense of narrative, and thus finalizes the existing Parable texts *after* Lauren's admission that she has affected humanity in a radical manner. In a way, the biblical entry could be Larkin/Asha Vere's reading of her "hard" mother, whom she does call "overwhelming." Attributing this to Larkin/Asha Vere would also resonate with the admiration she often says she has for her uncle Marc, and his assumed role in the Christian America movement, which continues despite Lauren's accusations about how it was responsible for her

imprisonment at Camp Christian with its repurposing of Acorn into a Christian reconditioning slave compound. A further implication is evident here with the final text of biblical origin, even if Lauren's narration is done, and most certainly will be done by the time her ashes leave the planet (*Talents* 406-407)—though the end of Larkin/Asha Vere's editorial passages has already narrated the situation past Lauren's death. Humanity's story is not done on Earth; the skyward desires of Earthseed catch humanity's story *in medias res*, and surely the dark and strained future of humans left on Earth creates a prominent vocal register within the overall story of future human history, post-Earthseed exodus. That is, taken together, the Parable texts do not ultimately suggest utopian probabilities, complicating Lauren's formulations on how to live in the world and her eco-religious desires.

Instead, the existing published material of Butler's series, overall, represents an emergence of ecocritical dystopian qualities from critical dystopian roots. Beyond the indications by Baccolini and Moylan about the critical dystopia (see *Dark Horizons*), Butler's books reveal that Utopian refuge is impossible in the environmental catastrophe of our present and future; tellingly, it is also not sustainable in the remoteness of space. Butler's insertion of actual geographical elements, however, is not only fittingly environmental, but also a critique of how modern society's processes will lead to (and are already contributing to) such things as climate change, sea-level rise, and desertification, as well as the resultant social indicators like homelessness, joblessness, poor nutrition (or outright, widespread hunger), social strife, the rise of demagogues, and segregation. The journey between Los Angeles and the Acorn-to-be frames and accentuates this real-world dilemma even within and *despite* the fictional place-based names throughout *Sower* and *Talents*. But this travelogue also works to bring out the ecocritical dystopian elements of the Parable texts. The climatically-activated social dispersal is quite

evident "on Highway 101—on that portion of 101 that was once El Camino Real, the royal

highway of California's Spanish past" become "a river of the poor …. flooding north" (*Sower*

223). After setting out on the freeways that also crisscross Greater Los Angeles and beyond, it is

on that road, following an earthquake, that Lauren and her companions first encounter a

community corresponding with our geography and not the fictional additions of the narrative. It

is in passing through Hollister, a real-world California city, that Lauren first notes echoes of

community coming together in the face of not only social ills, but also environmental

catastrophe. She says that the "earthquake had done a lot of damage in Hollister, but the people

hadn't gone animal. They seemed to be helping one another with repairs and looking after their

own destitute" (257). It is in social instances such as these that Lauren witnesses resistance to the

environmental and societal pressures of the time, and thus forms the more tangible beginnings of

Earthseed while passing through real-world locales and regions.[100]

       Focusing on Lauren's development of the eventual Acorn community, Dubey argues that

"the journey section that constitutes the bulk of the novel presents community as process rather

than settlement. This section traces the contingent formation of a community on the move—

'born right here on Highway 101,' as Lauren puts it …—unified not by its attachment to past or

place but by a common set of practical objectives that must be continually adjusted to meet

changing circumstances" (112-13; *Sower* 200). But Dubey's reading ignores how Lauren reacts

to situations encountered in specific places on the road, from which she directly forms her

continuing Earthseed tenets. Though the two are perhaps only loosely related, Earthseed reflects

the sense of ecocritical dystopianism, since Lauren's formation of the eco-religion's ideas is

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[100] Here the ecocritical dystopia works to imply that the real world can learn something from
what Rob Nixon would also call the "environmentalism of the poor."

largely executed as she observes the environmental shifts in these extrapolated real-world geographical locales. That is, as the reader sees alterations to what they know from the real-world, so does Lauren develop the understanding that change is going to be vital for persevering in such a constantly shifting existence. A reaction to the practical necessities of survival in a grim world makes sense for Lauren and her companions, but it is, in contrast to Dubey's argument, the inclusion of real-world place and the changes made to it that hold resonance. Though Dubey is partly correct in pointing out that the nascent Earthseed contingent is not focused on an "attachment to past or place," the narrative elements have also shifted to involve distinct infrastructure not solely imagined for fictional purposes. Highway 101 holds meaning for the reader—especially one living in the Greater Los Angeles area in the present day, or further up the coast—and since Lauren includes it as a detail, it also holds meaning for her.

But *Talents* also incorporates future, real-world places in its narrative. One example is when Lauren explains that Alaska (proclaiming its independence from the United States in the time of the narrative), Russia, and Canada have benefited economically from environmental shifts:

> Thanks to climate change, they … have most of [the money]. The climate is still changing, warming. It's supposed to settle at a new stable state someday. Until then, we'll go on getting a lot of violent erratic weather around the world. Sea level is still rising and chewing away at low-lying coastal areas like the sand dunes that used to protect Humboldt Bay and Arcata Bay just north of us. Half the crops in the Midwest and South are still withering from the heat, drowning in floods, or being torn to pieces by winds, so food prices are still high. The warming has made tropical diseases like malaria and dengue normal parts of life

in the warm, wet Gulf Coast and southern Atlantic coast states. But people are

beginning to adapt. (*Talents* 82)

The world of the Parable books is a changed one from that of the years in which Butler was

writing, and demonstrates that any survival must come through adaptation to newer conditions.

While such ecocritical dystopian inclusions comment on the social dilemmas continuing after

Lauren's journey up the coast to real-world Humboldt County and the later timeline of her

daughter, somewhat of a shift has occurred from *Sower* to *Talents*. A passage like this more

readily acknowledges the root cause of social upheaval: that is, the environmental and climatic

shift. Though many parts of *Talents* seem to generally situate themselves within a question of

socioeconomics and racial prejudices, it is still clear that environmental impacts are prevalent

and also fundamental to the revealing of social flaws, if not the source of their emergence. As we

have seen even in the present day, the extremism of those already prejudiced will be sure to

come out in times of social stress. The second novel therefore has its moments of staring directly

at the problem of resources and environmental degradation,[101] and of articulating this through the

alteration to both fictional locales and speculation about real-world places. It is within the

physical move away from Los Angeles—which, with its fictionalized future places, emerges in

the narrative as more of an idea of dystopian outcomes in comparable societies than a direct

example of real-world place transformed—that Butler presents the ecocritical palimpsest of real-

world place altered by global warming. In terms of the generic shift from a critical dystopia to an

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[101] By bringing up issues with resources and the environment, I am not trying to detract from the very prevalent and troubling issue of persistent racism and prejudice that plagues the world over, including on the American West Coast and within the United States itself in both the real world and under the fictional auspices of Jarret; my point is that the prejudice involved will be but exacerbated within the system of social pressures imposed by a limitation of resources in both the imagined and definite futures of the world.

ecocritical one, at least, this mode in *Sower* and beyond is focal and essential. Without the changes to real-world elements, the novels and even the arch-Parable narrative as a whole might indeed fit solely within the critical dystopian categorizations that have already been applied to at least *Sower*.

The names of the freeways in Lauren's escape from Los Angeles in *Sower* are Butler's first indication of urban infrastructure and geographical markers that are solidly located in the real world (with the exception of the city or area of Los Angeles itself, other larger-scale place names such as the United States or Canada, or Hollister as the first city that is not Los Angeles). It is fitting that these conduits to Lauren's journey can be corroborated cartographically or even physically since, during her journey north up the coast, one of the main sources of resource scarcity is revealed through the changing environment. All of the locations she passes through or roads she walks on can be found in the world outside of fiction, and many of these, like the San Luis Reservoir (*Sower* 258), represent the alterations that the environmental impact of elements like climate (or the earthquake near Hollister) inflict on both the landscape, and the social structures of the people inhabiting particular locales and regions. As Lauren explains, "[t]here is still a little water in the San Luis Reservoir. It's more fresh water than [she has] ever seen in one place, but by the vast size of the reservoir, [she] can see that it's only a little compared to what should be there—what used to be there" (258). Later, as her group nears the land that will become Acorn, she again evaluates a body of water when she comments that Clear Lake is "much smaller than [she] had expected" (312), and here it is obvious that she is not talking about the real-world town, but the associated water source. Earlier, Lauren narrated that "[t]here was a lake ahead, according to [her] map of the area—Clear Lake, it was called. The map showed it to be large" (*Sower* 305). Though, in the real world, Clear Lake may now have suffered from

extended drought, for comparison, on a map (for example, Google maps) it appears bigger than

the San Luis Reservoir, and would certainly appear "large" to someone on foot and using a paper

map: "when Clear Lake is full it has a surface area of 43,790 acres and contains 1,155,000 acre-

feet of water" ("Historical").[102] In *Sower*, the expected amount of water, as with the San Luis

Reservoir, has been considerably reduced through the regional effects of climate change, which

have manifested as increasing desertification and lower-than-expected bodies of water. This is

significant since larger urban areas like Los Angeles and the other cities that Lauren encounters

or skirts rely on such resources for survival, and the results of their depletion are evident within

the ensuing social disorder.

In the Parable books, Butler most strongly extends the real world forward with places that

have been negatively affected environmentally, and represents the subsequent social influences

with fictional or near-fictional locales to demonstrate impacts on many other communities or

regions at the same time. But the real-world places function in the narrative to illuminate the

entire social system directly, creating a conceptual pathway that comments upon ours, and thus

involving our environmental future in the story Lauren tells. It is perhaps with the example of the

depleted San Luis Reservoir that Lauren first actively measures the *needs* of the urban world she

and her party have recently escaped, though Hollister is the first city she encounters and real-

world roads have already been traversed. Lauren's realization when encountering the reservoir is

important as a function of her shifting conception of the world in leaving Robledo for the

relatively non-urban, but also as a moment when the changing environment and the necessities of

the social are conflated. Initially, Lauren highlights the likely uncleanliness of the reservoir water

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[102] Most likely through a trick of bathymetry, though, the San Luis Reservoir can actually hold
more water than Clear Lake, since the former "has a total capacity of more than 2 million acre-
feet" ("B.F. Sisk Dam").

as a drinking source, wondering where "so many people [are] going to the bathroom," then deciding "to break out the water purification tablets" (258). It is also telling that Lauren then creates a sense of distancing between "the local squatters" and her small "crowd," as well as, more importantly, between those two groups and "the crowd [she] believe[s] will soon come in from the Bay Area" (259). For one thing, these categories of separation denote Lauren's active conceptual movement away from the urban and toward the non-urban as she continues to imagine what Earthseed might become; for another, her consideration of water cleanliness and usage portrays the needs of more populated urban areas versus those of the "squatters" around the reservoir, or even the needs she and her smaller group might have alone. The environmental effects upon a real-world region and resource base like the San Luis Reservoir not only relate to "cities that use it" (258), but also specific real-world regions like the San Francisco Bay Area, which becomes relevant in the detour it causes Lauren's group as they travel north toward a hope for respite. This seemingly more natural, less urban area is a likely destination for sanctuary from the stark, city-related pressures of a desperate urban existence.

The places that Lauren and her travelling group encounter create a transitionary process for both how they engage with locales and how these places seem to have fared in the face of environmental and social changes. Not every urban centre in the narrative is a direct reflection of Los Angeles or what happened to Lauren's walled community in Robledo. She comments that her group "reache[s] and passe[s] through the city of Sacramento without real trouble" (270), but she also highlights that cities are "dangerous. More gangs, more cops, more suspicious, nervous people with guns. You tiptoe through cities" (272). Lauren contrasts the relative ease of passing through Sacramento with an earlier eye-opening near-encounter on "the I-5" (270, 271)—again, an example of a real-world freeway employed in the text of *Sower*—with "four ragged, filthy

kids huddled around a campfire" (271) as they roast a "cannibal feast" (272) of "a severed

human leg" (271). This is comparable to McCarthy's later inclusion of horrifying dystopian

conditions in *The Road* when the father and son discover the remains of a fire-cooked,

cannibalized infant (198). Lauren and her party avoid direct contact with this group just as they

avoid authority figures and people with guns in Sacramento, and she comments that there is "no

guarantee that anything [will] be better on the other side of Sacramento, but" they want "to get

away from this grim land" (*Sower* 271). Lauren's narration sets up Sacramento as somewhat of a

way-station in fortune as they travel. She is contrasting the dissolution of social mores when

"people [are] eating one another" in "[n]ice country, and compared to Southern California, rich

country" (272), with the Utopian potential implicit in Bankole's "safe haven … in the hills near

Cape Mendocino maybe two weeks [walk] from" (272) Sacramento. This last location, as a city

along Lauren's journey, is thus also representative of the time she is first introduced to the idea

of the place that will become Acorn, and is a geographical marker for how Butler's Parable

books present a collocation of flight from social disaster and ecological crisis, though not even

Lauren specifically articulates the incendiary event of Robledo's destruction as having to do with

environmental conditions. The fictional element of such speculations forces us to imagine the

very real suffering of the victims of such real-world brutalities, which has been extreme

throughout history; this suffering doubles for those affected by environmental factors in the

novels, and the pairing makes each more complex, as well as adds an element of realism to both.

Places and spaces are deeply ingrained into the cultural systems of the given related

community—into its identity-of-place, even—and this importance resonates through culture,

community, and individuals. The alterations to our landscapes are potent and ongoing, and the

novels, taken together, suggest that Lauren's escapism must certainly be critiqued, as it does little to change the actual ways of modernity's destructive greed.

Butler's Parable narratives are especially vital in demonstrating an imagined future in which the social problems arising from environmental stressors are so entangled that escape is more desirable than continued attempts at subsistence in fraught locales, even if escape is ultimately impossible since ecological and social problems have not only become so entwined, but also nearly ubiquitous. While each of Butler's narrators provides a limited perspective (even Larkin/Asha Vere, despite her role as collector/editor/commentator), and thus does not always seem to understand in detail the complex ecological issues at play, Lauren's physical bid for freedom from racialized and resource-driven oppression in *Sower* and the aftermath of that move in *Talents* resonates within the distinct literary movement that is the ecocritical dystopia. The struggles of her progeny and those of the inheritors of Earthseed indicated in both the published material and the Huntington Library archives with the four unpublished Parable sequel book drafts and notes (see Canavan) also register this idea of searching for a better existence, a better life, and a better place in which to exist. The Earthseed contingent leaving on the *Christopher Columbus* and other starships does escape the planet's social and environmental woes, but it very likely cannot leave them behind; Lauren, notwithstanding her role in creating Earthseed, also cannot narrate her departure except as a future plan to send herself out of the atmosphere after she is dead, though she has "arranged" for future "extrasolar" (Canavan, "Eden" 1) bound Earthseeders to "someday use [her] ashes to fertilize their crops …[,] their orchards and their groves" (*Talents* 406). Lauren thus never does personally escape the issues of Earth and future America, even if she achieves the revenge of "burn[ing] Camp Christian" (261) and the monumental feat of finally seeing her Earthseed dream and creation launched: she comments,

"This is my life flying away on these ugly big trucks. This is my immortality. I have a right to see it, hear the thunder of it, smell it" (406). But for her, even if not for the fledgling followers of her eco-religion seeding the stars, perhaps the ecocritical dystopian registers will continue to hold true until her body is uplifted by the thrust of a star-borne ship—the environmental plight of the Earth, after all, remains unresolved by the end of the published Parable narrative.

A landscape increasingly altered by climate change forms the backdrop to *Sower* and *Talents*, and even if these elements hardly seem apparent at the beginning of the narrative, they are inextricably entangled within the social fabric. They perform dislocating work on the sense of specific places in *Sower*, and the collective social heartbeat of the denizens of those locales becomes frenzied with the widening disparity evident in urban settings and beyond, building to the crescendo of Utopianist failure demonstrated in *Talents*. Environment skews economics here, and both alter the quality of life across social classes as desertification and sea-level rise continue on the ostensible periphery and middle-to-upper class America continues to seek shelter within their walled enclaves. Moving into a future where rising coastal waters inundate and erode present landmasses means that an over-reliance on the cartographic over the experiential and the continually-developing will be counterproductive, because maps are static, whereas knowledge of historical trends paired with adaptability to conditions in the moment provide more practical means of engaging with a sense of place. It will not always be feasible to map either terrain or the cultural histories of given spaces and places. Perhaps as we move into an increasing future of oceanic rise encroaching on coastal, more populated areas, the desire to map (re-map?) the newly submerged will increase; unavoidably, the related effects on places and spaces will require a rethinking of how we understand areas adjacent to newly-risen coastal waters. These understandings will be a mixture of both old and new, as such an instinct is partially nostalgic yet

also in the hopes of cataloguing our own, troubled history for future generations, should

humanity even last to witness the more extreme aspects of future climate shift. But the ecocritical

dystopia attempts to capture this very phenomenon, and Butler's Parable books are an early

example that works to map a coastal understanding of the palimpsest composed of the Los

Angeles and American West Coast from her day and that region extended into the future. As

Mayer argues, by "aiming at verisimilitude in its imaginative mapping of a plausible future,

speculative fiction calls for critical reflection of the reader's present and past. Butler tries to

achieve this effect by choosing a temporal setting that is very close to her contemporary reader's

world. She uses realist conventions of representation to delineate the features of her social and

ecological dystopian future and by means of that facilitates reader identification" (177). Though

Mayer does not, of course, employ the ecocritical dystopian terminology, her arguments

unavoidably align with such resonances: through place-based entanglements of environment and

society, Butler shows the reader how the futuristic concerns of her narrative are really the

concerns of the present. Moreover, the truth the Parable books presents is that socio-

environmental problems are not merely an issue for a place like Los Angeles—as cartographic

depictions of climate change effects tend to demonstrate (such as the Climate Central "Surging

Seas" coastal city projection maps). These are useful contemplations about the future, yet do not

detail the complex range of interconnected issues that accompany not only what will happen to

urban locales, but also to the more rural reaches. In Butler's Parable books, however, the

environmental issues affecting social systems involve both the urban and the rural, and

ultimately it is this emphasis that pushes the ecocritical dystopianism of the narrative, and places

Sower and *Talents* as early examples of the subgenre. From the lessons that Butler provides

about the generic registers that can best convey the environmental changes that not only her

characters, but also her readers, are facing, we might find a starting point for reading the

ecocritical nuances of fiction in which setting is clearly much more than just a backdrop.

Chapter 3

The Ecocritical Dystopia's Revealing of Place

in Atwood's MaddAddam Series

The Catastrophe of Place

The books that comprise Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy—*Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013)—all involve alterations to current day places and spaces in a manner that obfuscates geographical markers. But these linked books also demonstrate that their society of the further future results from a previous one that, in turn, has distinct ties back to our time—or at least the relatively contemporaneous time of when the novels were written. The unknown localities and regions of these future moments once resonated with cartographic and cultural understandings that we might have in the present, but by the time of the narratives, they have been so altered that even the geographical names are no longer uttered. This involves a physical change to places as well as an erasure of knowledge about them. For instance, New York transitions to "New New York" as the former drowns (*Oryx* 179-80), but both ultimately lose meaning in terms of their geographies. Yet, in formal opposition to this temporal, catastrophic process of cartographic undoing, the first two MaddAddam novels (*Oryx* and *Flood*) open in unknown locales then later reveal unsettled connections to the places of today. The first novel begins with an ambiguous character named Snowman, who sleeps in a tree for safety and looks out from a beach and arboretum area toward abandoned, bird-filled, city-tower infrastructure rising out of the ocean at dawn. The second novel follows suit by starting with a character named Toby, who also looks toward the sunrise from an area adjacent to a "derelict city" and "the distant ocean" (*Flood* 3) after some ambiguous detrimental scenario that nonetheless highlights the perseverance of nature. The two narrative threads are eventually

revealed to be offering different perspectives on the same event; the challenge, but advantage, in

reading the two texts is that the roughly parallel timelines are set in the same future world, even

if *Flood* takes the conclusion of *Oryx* slightly further, and the later *MaddAddam* presents plot-

points (for the most part) subsequent to both. Characters even cross over between the first two

and, though this is also not immediately apparent, the intersection spills over into the final

installment. In *Oryx*, Snowman recalls how he used to be named Jimmy before the mysterious

incidents that stranded him near the beach, which are later uncovered as the release of a globally-

dispersed pandemic nicknamed JUVE or, by a group called the God's Gardeners, the Waterless

Flood. The JUVE acronym means "Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary," which is a name that

Jimmy's dying society had applied in vain "to make it seem more manageable" (*Oryx* 406).[103]

But while Toby and her co-protagonist Ren have quite different experiences from Jimmy leading

up to the planetary near-extinction of humanity—transitioning from the eco-religious God's

Gardeners cult to working in the AnooYoo beauty spa[104] and the Scales and Tails exotic dance

club, respectively—the interconnections between the texts also reveal more about the continental

and regional places, and related contexts of both the society that follows ours and the world

following that one.

The formal shifting between the critical dystopia and the ecocritical dystopia in the first

two MaddAddam books has a particular location as its origin, for it is after the events that are

unleashed there that a sense of place changes in the narratives and there are no more direct

indications of geography, only resonances. This place is the research "bubble-dome" (358) from

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[103] It is so named for its heightened virulence and its hardened resistance to treatment or preventative measures—without the antidote, that is, as we see in Jimmy-Snowman's case.

[104] Gerry Canavan says that in "a send-up of trends in twenty-first century corporate branding, most of the companies and products we encounter in Atwood's novel have names with similarly modified or outright silly spellings—HelthWyzer, RejoovenEsence [sic], … etc." ("Hope" 156).

which JUVE / the Waterless Flood emerges. Here, deep in the RejoovenEsense compound, the

"Paradice Project" (*Oryx* 366) is ostensibly working on "'immortality'" (353) for the

corporation's technological, cosmetic, and pharmaceutical profit advantages over the general

populace. But this is also where the project head Crake instead builds the virus he embeds in the

BlyssPluss pill, which is supposed to be a "prophylactic" (353) that "eliminate[s] the external

causes of death" such as "'[w]ar, which is to say misplaced sexual energy'" as it leads to

"'[c]ontagious diseases, especially sexually transmitted ones,'" and "'[o]verpopulation, leading

… to environmental degradation and poor nutrition'" (354). Crake is actually Jimmy's life-long

friend Glenn and, in a strange vein, is meant to be continuing the work begun by pioneers like

Jimmy's father, who had "helped engineer the Methuselah Mouse as a part of Operation

Immortality" (27). But Crake is more interested in discontinuing what he sees as humanity's

adverse effects upon the world and, while preparing the pandemic in secret, also designs the

posthuman hominids nicknamed the Children of Crake (Crakers) seemingly as "'floor models'"

(367) for what humanity could become. All the while, he plans on releasing these Crakers upon a

world suddenly devoid of human presence: he means for them to replace humanity. This is partly

where the role of the character Oryx becomes crucial to his plan, to the split between Jimmy's

and Snowman's timelines, and to the sudden alteration of the world that ensues.

Oryx plays a complicated part in the narrative of *Oryx*—as well as those of *Flood* and

MaddAddam—since she is the unwitting distributor of JUVE as she travels the globe to market

the BlyssPluss pill. She even later says to Jimmy that the virus "'was in those pills I was giving

away, the ones I was selling. It's all the same cities, I went there'" (389), and it is after her

dispersal of the product and the resulting world-wide pandemic that both the locations she visited

and ones more regional to Paradice shift to become unnamed within the logic of the narratives

that Snowman/Jimmy,[105] Toby, and Ren embody. Oryx's further influence on the first narrative

is that, like Ren (i.e., Brenda, Jimmy's brief high school girlfriend from *Oryx*), she is

romantically entangled with Jimmy—but she is also involved with Crake, which complicates

how she affects the story. Oryx is quite possibly a tool for Crake's manipulation of Jimmy as he

transitions to become the new caretaker of the Crakers. That is, before Snowman, Oryx is also

the only human that these lab-created creatures have ever encountered, and her tutelage of them

begins a trend within which knowledge about the world is nature-centred and devoid of the

markers of both Jimmy's world and our preceding time. That this factor carries over into *Flood*

with the perspectives of Toby and Ren is telling, since neither ever meets Oryx and they only

encounter the Crakers within the narrative of *MaddAddam*. In retrospect, Oryx's actions as an

agent reacting to Crake and affecting Jimmy (and Snowman), the Crakers, the global human

population, and the survivors are profound. Crake certainly could not have executed his plan

without Oryx's involvement and her impression on Jimmy, who only really cares to foster the

Crakers because of his affection for her. But it is in this vastly traumatic transitional moment

between the influence of Oryx's physical presence and the world post-JUVE that a new

understanding of places occurs; it is here that the specific geographies of the reader's current day

and even Jimmy's time become only accessible through the storytelling by Snowman, Toby, and

Ren (and, in *MaddAddam*, Zeb, Toby's lover and Ren's father-figure). These characters are

significant as a group of storytellers who reveal the place they are in because they are all

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[105] With this terminology, I diverge from Lee Rozelle, who uses "Jimmy/Snowman." The Crakers in *MaddAddam* use "Snowman-the-Jimmy" instead, which demonstrates an essential directionality of a name-to-name conceptualization that forefronts one identity before the other. Rozelle over-emphazises the Jimmy portion, since it is not until later in *MaddAddam* that Jimmy resurfaces from his alter-ego; only at that late point does he separate from being Snowman (except in how he is referred to by others).

survivors of JUVE who also lived in and experienced the world of our near future, unlike the

final narrator of the MaddAddam books, who is, notably, the Craker child Blackbeard.

Importantly, despite Snowman/Jimmy's unreliability as an initial narrative focus[106] in the

MaddAddam novels, the entangled books demonstrate that this set of stories indeed occurs (for

the most part) on the climate-altered eastern coast of what used to be the United States. As Susan

L. Hall points out, Atwood's *Oryx* features "the new geography of the country in which various

eastern cities have been washed away" (Hall 179-80). This and other climate change related

indicators directly contradict how Earl G. Ingersoll sets the action "somewhere along the coast of

the American South" (163).[107] But Ingersoll later acknowledges that, in Snowman's world,

"[g]lobal warming melted the polar icecaps" (164), so his placement of the beach in the coastal

"American South" holds no logical value, given the amount that sea levels would have risen with

such a volume of melted ice (Poore, Williams, and Tracey) and the thermal expansion of oceans

(Hulme et al.; Hess, Malilay, and Parkinson; Zalasiewicz et al., "Stratigraphy"). More likely is

the possibility that Snowman is living somewhere on a future coastline where abandoned

metropolises like Boston and New York punctuate the offshore seascape. After all, in her 2014

comments as a part of the Imagination and Climate Futures Initiative at Arizona State University,

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[106] I say "narrative focus" rather than "narrator" because of the point of view somewhat detached from Snowman's direct thoughts (not first person), though reflective of them; this trend continues throughout the MaddAddam books, but I think the more important point is that individuals in these future circumstances feel distanced from themselves. There is no overarching narrator speaking for them, and the potentiality of "omniscience" is complicated at the very least with Snowman/Jimmy because of his dissociative experiences.

[107] Ingersoll also asks where Atwood would "find a spot that's warm year-round in Canada" (163), but in her 2003 interview with Mel Gussow, Atwood explicitly claims that the setting could not be in Canada because of a lack of time to accommodate ecological shifts (Gussow, "Atwood's"). This ignores the increasing relevance of both speculative and real-world elements, or even the potentiality for alternative historical elements. Outside of the text, it is my guess, however, that such changes will increasingly occur more quickly than previously expected.

Atwood does indicate the general area of the "Upper East Coast" of the United States, since,

when "the sea rises, a bunch of it will flood" ("Hope"). Ursula K. Le Guin even suggests in her

review of *Flood* that, perhaps because of a lack of "functioning" "national governments," the

"setting may be the upper Midwest of the US or Canada, but there is no geography, no history."

The remaining critical conversation about geographically placing the overarching MaddAddam

narrative ranges from indicating Massachusetts more generally (Wagner-Lawlor) and Boston

specifically (Sutherland and Swan), though some of this hinges on very loosely-associated

responses Atwood has made in interviews (Halliwell 261; Gussow, "Atwood, Margaret";

Gussow, "Series II"), or on assumptions critics have made about these interviews (Wagner-

Lawlor). As Gerry Canavan wrote to me in a note, the idea that Massachusetts is the setting is "a

well-known belief" that "might be in part because [*Handmaid*] is set at Harvard and people like

the parallelism" (Canavan, Message). While we should question whether Atwood's deliberations

in such scenarios are exacting and finite, since it is the evidence of the texts themselves that

suggests ultimate signposts and place-markers, for the purposes of the ecocritical dystopia it is

useful to note that she is indeed commenting on a treatment of North America's future, whether

that means Boston, New York, or some other related locale or region. Sharon Sutherland and

Sarah Swan at least seem to consider New York in their examination of a potential setting (224),

and while Atwood comments in 2014 that she enjoys "setting things in and around Boston"

("Hope"), in her interview with Mel Gussow for his 2003 review of *Oryx* ("Atwood's"), she also

says that it is more necessary for the setting to provide access to the New York(s) (Gussow,

"Atwood, Margaret"). The resulting sense of opacity may even be a function of changing place,

in that Atwood leaves the setting open enough for readers to make a variety of real-world locales

"fit," and thus relate the region to its environmental dysfunction. Either way, though place names

and current cultural referents later become completely obscured, the textual progressions of the narratives and their relationships cement that Atwood is, in fact, speculating about the potential future of the East Coast of the United States as well as other locations on the North American continent and about the future of the modern world more generally. She is thus, at least in part, writing ecocritical dystopias.

Despite the prevalence of current real-world place extrapolated in recent or emerging ecocritical dystopian fictions, in many texts set in our near future, it is notoriously difficult to locate a specific setting, or to "place" the narrative in comparison with the present, real world. This cognitive estrangement is first presented in Atwood's MaddAddam books through the character Snowman's situation at the beginning of *Oryx*. Sometimes, in such texts, this initial disengagement from geography subsequently involves what we might call a slow revealing of the locales and/or regions of the story, and sometimes the actual place indicated is impossible to pinpoint. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* is an example of the former, complicated presentation of places and spaces, which requires active close-reading to determine a setting connected to the world today. As Laura Gruber Godfrey explains, the narrative seems disassociated from absolutely certain terrain, but real-world registers are still employed.[108] Godfrey calls this "a haunting topographical palimpsest" (170) and, as with the MaddAddam novels, even in the obscured locales and regions of the potential future, traces of the current, non-fictional world can be found. The rigorous critical work necessary to read the geographical traces of a past in texts

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[108] Godfrey examines and places geographical traces through the ecological echoes in *The Road*; she reads the landscape based on the father's memory of mayapple, pipsissewa, and ginseng, and the deadened, blackened remains of rhododendron (Godfrey 169-70; McCarthy 39-40). These palimpsestic botanical qualities allow her to locate geographical registers in light of the father's memory of the landscape, which intersects with readings done through ethnobotany (Ryan, "Cultural"), plant ethics (Pouteau), and human-plant studies (Ryan, "Passive").

like this demonstrates the devastating impact that the given apocalyptic forces have had on not only the landscape, but also the cultural registers of place in that narrative.

This conundrum looms immediately in Atwood's *Oryx*, where the main character Snowman is struggling to survive in a world in which the social places and spaces he knows from his present timeline are practically devoid of readily identifiable monikers. This text demonstrates how, as with Godfrey's reading of *The Road*, "the world's geographical and emotional meaning has been broken" (164) enough that relating the fictional world to our real world is initially difficult. Snowman's geographically-related scenario presents a distinct sense of what Godfrey calls "postapocalyptic nothingness" (165), which is a direct break from the recent past in which Snowman identifies (through his experience as Jimmy) several place names that the reader of the late 20th and early 21st centuries can recognize, either on the eastern seaboard of the United States, or other North American cities, locales, and regions, and even metropolises of the contemporary world at large. Of course, these place names from Jimmy's time are themselves distanced from the present day by a process of re-naming and re-configuring that accompanies a world altered by both the ecological shifts imposed by climate change and the hierarchical division of social groups driven by the interests of capitalistic corporations. The distance between our present day and the somewhat recognizable place names of Jimmy's speculative, not-too-distant future is negligible, though, compared to the lack of landmarks or proper place names that Snowman indicates in his own, post-catastrophic time. These are nonexistent and, if he states any identifying names, then they occur during his narrative flashbacks to his past as Jimmy. While Snowman's recollections obfuscate his geographical positioning as he huddles in a tree proximate to the beach where the genetically-engineered, humanoid Crakers (the Children of Crake) now live, the progression of the texts comprising the

MaddAddam books reveals more about how real-world places are altered from the current day, to Jimmy's and then Snowman's time.

Snowman/Jimmy's physical and mental conception of his surroundings demonstrates his difficulty in remembering that which came before, and it is not until the main characters of the roughly parallel sequel narrative and beyond (Toby and Ren in *Flood*, and then Toby, Zeb, and Blackbeard in *MaddAddam*, respectively) describe the landscapes they associate with or know about that readers can confirm Atwood's slightly-futuristic world relates to ours in some way. In *Oryx*, Snowman's estrangement from the society he grew up in is the result of trauma and injury, and the reader receives Jimmy's earlier story through him. What seems clear, however, is that these characters are living in a future in which a viral plague not only destroys most of humanity, but climate change has already taken hold and altered the coastlines, regional weather patterns, ecosystems, and interior landscapes of North America. Between the time of Jimmy's youth and Snowman's solitude, even seasonal shifts have been affected alongside elements like sea-level rise. As "Jimmy's earliest complete memory" explains, the "month could have been October, or else November; the leaves still turned colour then" (19). By the time that Snowman waits near the beach post-JUVE, autumn does not occur anymore, and climatic changes have long preceded the ravages of disease, imposing alterations to environmental conditions well before the seeming disappearance of humans.

These shifts not only alter the seasons, but regional weather events that might be expected in Snowman's day. In his journey back to Paradice from the beach, he is forced to take shelter from a "twister" (285). While side-stepping around some over-curious pigoons (lab-created pigs that carry human organs and tissue meant for medical harvest) in this landscape of essentially post-natural infrastructures and post-human, genetically-engineered biota, he notices

that "dark clouds have come boiling up from the south, blotting out the sun" (285). He realizes

that "[t]his isn't the usual afternoon storm: it's too early, and the sky has an ominous greenish-

yellow tinge. It's a twister, a big one" (285). The tornado, though, either has a low designation

on the Enhanced Fujita Scale—since it does not appear to rip buildings off their foundations or

bend skyscrapers—or reflects the fact that, by Jimmy's time, human urban infrastructure has

been adapted to withstand an increased frequency of storms and fringe weather events. The

horizon of sudden skyscrapers we would currently associate with a downtown core seems to be

non-existent in this world, with the obvious exception of the offshore city towers abandoned

after our day and left to succumb to the natural world's inexorable processes of reclamation. The

twister Snowman shelters from also occurs on land, and within walking distance of the ocean.

This offsets reader expectations for Snowman's potential locale, as the action is not set in the

shifting boundaries of Tornado Alley between the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains. In his

geographical area, wherever that is, Snowman habitually expects to have to face overwhelming

heat, continual afternoon weather, and even random weather events such as the appearance of

this twister; this is a product of the anthropogenic climate change that has also isolated the

cityscape offshore from his beachside vantage-point.

This weather is therefore not an accurate gauge for locating Snowman's beach in terms of

current trends, as it is part of a complex systemic fallout from the industrial and societal

processes of today, where an influx of extreme weather events will become normalized in an

echo of how "the peak in global oil production may already have occurred" (LeMenager 59). As

John Balbus and his co-authors discuss in the context of chemical pollutant motility for a world

increasingly affected by climatic events and processes, "[g]lobal climate change … is associated

with significant changes in long-term weather characteristics and short-term weather extremes in

different regions" (62). Patrick L. Kinney concurs, citing an effect on "air quality" (462), and

Katherine M. Shea, Robert T. Truckner, Richard W. Weber, and David B. Peden highlight the

"quality of aeroallergens and [a difference in] the distribution and severity of allergic disease"

(450). These health concerns are in a different vein from the "twister" threatening Snowman, but

their considerations put into perspective the fact that anthropogenic climate change affects a

complex system of concerns that include storm frequency, atmospheric conditions, air quality,

temperature gradients, and precipitation, and so on. Simply put, the frequency and irregularity of

extreme weather will increase regionally (and randomly) as the global climate shifts further from

its current state, and the expected pattern of weather in a particular locale will become an

inaccurate sense of the normal—as has already become apparent with the excessive flooding in

Texas and Louisiana in 2016, for example, and the storms in 2017, 2018, and 2019. In both

Snowman/Jimmy's world and the real world's future (and present), a sense of having to adjust to

a "new normal" is reflected.

But while rising sea levels, unpredictable regional weather, and altered ecosystems

inform Atwood's MaddAddam books and heavily invest them in an environmental message, the

main site of human apocalypse in the dystopian narrative is located in the global pandemic.

Ironically, though, such factors are actually linked in consequences for our future world, since a

"repercussion of climatic changes that have resulted in an increase in temperature is that

microbial pathogens are expanding their ranges into environments that were previously

inhospitable. As a result, resident species, including humans, are being exposed to pathogens

against which defences previously not needed, have not evolved or have not been fully

developed" (Raffa et al. 502; Gage et al. 436). Atwood's *Oryx* skews this somewhat since

corporations create viruses for profit, testing them on an unsuspecting populace before reaping

monetary rewards, but it is this culture of building what are essentially biological weapons that comes back to haunt them in the end; the point here is that they are unable to gain control over JUVE, and surely the climatic conditions cannot have helped. The two obvious environmental crises in Snowman's world, an altered climate and an apocalyptic plague, are interconnected in a manner not explored in great detail in the novels. Rather, they seem to be separate plot points. The effects of climate change on sea-level rise are simply taken as fact and are part of the dystopian world from before Jimmy's formative years onward.

The viral Waterless Flood, however, becomes the scourge of humanity that erases what was already a dystopia and, from Snowman's perspective, replaces it with another. While in the current day we tend to generally assume the rising tide is slow-acting (e.g. many people suspect coastal cities are largely safe from sea-level rise for generations to come), Jimmy refers to an established history of ocean-side elements "that got washed away with the rest of the beaches and quite a few of the eastern coastal cities when the sea-level rose so quickly" (*Oryx* 75).[109] The pandemic is also so rapid that no containment measures are possible, and this draws a tenuous parallel between the two catastrophic processes. Therefore, even if the anthropogenic environmental tolls stemming from today are seen mostly through hindsight, or as inevitable, and Atwood does not link them with the propagation of the JUVE pandemic, it is conversely through this viral propagation that human environmental tolls are brought into perspective. Crake creates

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[109] This is partly a separate process from the "huge tidal wave … from the Canary Islands volcano" (75) that Jimmy's narrative portion also refers to; *Oryx* suggests that, first, anthropogenic climate change driven sea-level rise decimated coastal American infrastructures. As an aside, Atwood's inclusion here of a cracked supervolcano in the Canary Islands sending a tidal wave is an unfortunate gaffe that her later MaddAddam books mostly avoid—the only remaining references are in *MaddAddam*, when PetroChurch embezzlement (183) and offshore banking (121, 183) are indicated after the Grand Caymans are "'mostly underwater'" (121), and before volcanic explosion presumably blows the shady funds to Kingdom Come.

the pandemic in secret and distributes it in the BlyssPluss pill as his ostensible solution to a variety of human problems—such as, ironically, overpopulation. In clearing the world of most humans, the JUVE pandemic creates a world in which remaining human survivors are brought that much closer to the natural world that their defunct society had helped form. But that world was already transitioned environmentally from the one of today. These elements are well hidden in *Oryx*, but Snowman's story does not tend to dwell directly on how the environmental shifts have affected the world of today. Because of this, it is hard for Snowman's audience to locate the narrative either spatially or temporally, or to fully relate to the imagined ecological or place-based changes. Thus, even if Snowman/Jimmy's state of mind involves the voiding and reintroduction of recognizable yet environmentally altered places—features of the ecocritical dystopia, but not necessarily of the critical dystopia—the group of novels increasingly reveals that the world itself has been changing all along, as we see with the fact that Wisconsin has become a desert, Texas has been flooded and walled-off, and the East Coast of the United States has urban infrastructure claimed by the ocean.

The future world presented in the MaddAddam books is, at least for Snowman/Jimmy, a dissociating experience. It is not so odd or unexpected, though, that some perspectives on the current world (rather than that of the future) present responses to dissociative affect. As Edward Burtynsky's photography demonstrates, our industrial processes can be brought into focus through a lens that highlights how disengaged we are from the sources, intrusions, and alterations that modern industry has imposed on the "natural" world. Writers of dystopian fiction often speculate about the future and how we might live in it, but it is increasingly inescapable that the present processes of modern society, and our technological and social advancements, have already had an alienating effect. The fallout of today is embodied within the fictional characters

of these future narratives. Both Jimmy and Crake are prime examples of youth experiencing a

future that is the direct result of our present. Perhaps their particularities are, indeed, how the

future generations will learn to deal with the drowned coastlines, the drastically-altered interior

landscapes, and the altered regional weather patterns of the world. Maybe these will, like Jimmy

and Glenn, indulge in questionable online games, visual pursuits, and activities—and the

argument that Atwood is making here is that this might be the "new normal." The children of the

future might have such a dissociated sense of the world that the 6th Mass Extinction (seen

through the Extinctathon online gaming portal), child pornography, and online public execution

would not really be that disturbing to their developing minds. Atwood points out in "Writing

Oryx and Crake" that, with the novel, she focuses on the human role in such a declining

environment, since "[t]he rules of biology are as inexorable as those of physics: run out of food

and water and you die. No animal can exhaust its resources base and hope to survive. Human

civilizations are subject to the same law" (329). But the overall narrative also presents human

and animal fates as intertwined; the title *Oryx and Crake*, after all, refers to not only the titular

characters, but also to the animals they are named after, which have vanished from the Earth.

That humanity might also be affected is quite likely, since "[h]uman civilizations are

subject to the same law," but such concerns are not the focus of Glenn and Jimmy's society,

which enables hypercapitalistic social infrastructures. Hence the co-opting of science toward

enhancing product value and the relegating of the voice of the humanities to promoting an

increased flow of capital in a move that also co-opts writers. As Amanda Payne, Jimmy's one-

time partner, puts it, the pharmaceutical, beauty-spa, self "improvement" (297) company

AnooYoo that Jimmy goes to work for as a "wordserf" (306) is "a collection of cesspool

denizens who existed for no other reason than to prey on the phobias and void the bank accounts

of the anxious and the gullible" (298). Crake, from his insider's perspective, also casts doubt on

Compound logic when he reveals that HelthWyzer is actually "'*creating*'" "'new diseases'"

(255) through a "'secret unit working on nothing else'" (256) as a form of "'[m]oney osmosis'"

(254) providing them with "'guaranteed high profits'" (256).[110] Since it is not related to

increasing immediate dividends, a factor like extinction becomes much of the usual fodder for

entertainment, then eventually boring as it loses its newness and no longer provides a sense of

both the taboo and ostensibly fulfilling *jouissance*. As Jimmy ages and steps into the grown-up

world of jobs and relationships, nothing can ever be uplifting anymore. His life is devoid of both

purpose and anything that gives him delight. This is not merely a facet of his desensitization

(alongside Glenn's) as a youth exploring the shady reaches of the internet (or, in Glenn's case, as

we see further in *Flood*, engaging with social fringe groups such as the God's Gardeners and

MaddAddam), but also of his society's dissolution of places and culture alongside rampant

environmental devastation.

It is notable that though Jimmy, or even his alter ego Snowman, is demonstrably a

temporal step or two away from now, their corporation-run, PetroChurch-ing,[111] climate-changed

world is actually a reasonable extension of our world into the near-future. After all, we are today,

in many regions, still not only reliant on fossil fuels, but defiantly and almost religiously so

despite ample evidence of anthropogenic climate change as well as the continued for-profit

climate denial activities of major players like Shell (Carrington and Mommers; Jacobson) and

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[110] This is also where Crake divulges his evidence that his father "'found out'" (256) about the scheme and was "'[e]xecuted'" (257) by being "'pushed off a bridge'" (256)—either by Crake's mom and/or his Uncle Pete in a Hamletian-style killing, or by the CorpSeCorps (257).

[111] Zeb and (his brother and the future God's Gardeners guru) Adam's father had a lucrative business running "[t]he Church of PetrOleum, affiliated with the somewhat more mainstream Petrobaptists" (*MaddAddam* 111).

ExxonMobil (Hiltzik; Supran and Oreskes). In the overall MaddAddam books, by Jimmy's time,

investment in the ideals of self, region, and even nation, for instance, is no longer encouraged or

fostered in this society and, as Eleonora Rao argues, Atwood's novels (and, invariably,

characters) "question narratives of national attachment by refusing to adhere to the limitations of

the nation-state and its related discourses of territory and identity" (112). For example, even if

"American" (*Oryx* 100) websites are mentioned, the characters do not readily identify as people

living in the United States and are not proud to be American; geographical place names are still

mentioned, but Jimmy, for instance, never explicitly says that he is in Boston. This is a shift from

the earlier times Zeb recalls in *MaddAddam* as he indicates more specific place names for the

landscapes he was in, like San Francisco and Santa Monica. Environmental alterations are even

evident from the time of Zeb's memories to Jimmy's. Michael Spiegel convincingly argues that

the neomedieval MaddAddamite society of Jimmy's time is "a world of simultaneous

globalization and fragmentation" (Spiegel 120) where,

> With decentralized power and competing jurisdictions, the neomedieval "state"
>
> shares authority with regional and global entities above, and with sub-state and
>
> sub-national entities below, just as feudal lords shared authority with provincial
>
> officials above and vassals below. Without a strong, centralized state, nationality
>
> would no longer represent one's primary means of identification. Instead, loyalty
>
> would disperse among various local groups or transnational organizations, just as
>
> loyalty was spread between bonds of blood (kinship) and those of oath
>
> (vassalage). (120-21; Bloch 124).

The sense of detachment that Jimmy and Crake embody, and that Snowman later feels more

fully, is socially supported by the institutional structures of control as they (further) disassociate

elements of economic class already present in the current day, and thus dislocate individuals one from the other. The Compounds of the Corps set in contrast with the pleeblands (a derogatory and spatially-based terminological resurrection of the Commons that derives from a prejudicial Roman-social root) is the physical representation of this issue in Jimmy's time, though of course the separations extend in other ways. Through Jimmy's experience and Snowman's sense of the world at the "End," Atwood presents what is a clearly psychological reaction to the state of the future—and from the dislocation seen through both Snowman and Jimmy in *Oryx* to a more located sense with the characters of the later MaddAddam novels, Atwood demonstrates that her speculative effects are meant to also distance our world from that of the future, while paradoxically connecting the two.

The movement from *Oryx* to *Flood* achieves a relationship between protagonists and environment that is more successful than Snowman's fraught experience journeying from tree to beach to Compound and back. Atwood wrote *Oryx* several years before *Flood* and then *MaddAddam* and thus her goals may have shifted during the interval, but it is useful to examine, in terms of the two main perspectives, why Snowman's conception of the world is so different from Toby's (the continuing storyteller from *Flood* to *MaddAddam*). That is, why do real-world place names, for him, seem to lack meaning, whereas they still hold value for Toby, Zeb, or even Jimmy, in their pre-JUVE narrations? In *Oryx*, essentially, the only way that Snowman can relate to specific places that we might connect to from our modern perspective is via the life experienced by Jimmy, and to having been Jimmy himself. Snowman conceives of the world through remembered remnants and references even as he struggles not to forget important words and historical events in his self-appointed role as the ostensible last man figure (a clear reference to Mary Shelley's Lionel Verney). Moreover, it is important to note that he is only able to

achieve this owing to the distance of storytelling, as he opens his series of flashbacks like the recitation of a fairy tale with, "Once upon a time, Snowman wasn't Snowman. Instead he was Jimmy. He'd been a good boy then" (19). Here at the beginning of Snowman's storytelling, and in the introduction to his past self Jimmy, Atwood upends the classic fairy tale opening with a distinct reference[112] to James Joyce's iconic *bildungsroman* and *künstlerroman*, the 1916 novella *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Both Joyce's *Portrait* and this switch to storytelling in Atwood's *Oryx* begin the same way, with "Once upon a time" (Joyce 20; Atwood 19). But Joyce's "very good time" continues with "a nicens little boy" meeting a "moocow" down the road, while Atwood's dystopian tale is presented with the "good boy" "Jimmy's earliest complete memory … of a huge bonfire" (19) constructed from "an enormous pile of cows" (19-20) and other livestock. Each supposed fairy tale is disrupted in its own time, but it is interesting that both Stephen Dedalus and Jimmy are already living in imperfect worlds, where social and political tensions boil under the veneer of the interpretive abilities of two very young minds who both become wordsmiths; Stephen does not yet understand the pressures that divide his family and society, and neither does Jimmy. But the later Snowman, it is implied, is no longer Jimmy, or a "good boy," either. Just like all the forgotten monuments, known places, and achievements of Jimmy's (and our) society, Snowman has fallen from grace, so to speak. Punishing himself mentally, he is comparable to the "'flagellants'" (*Flood* 114) of another time, but unlike the God's Gardeners, he does not otherwise appear to be religious, and nor does much of his society. He is a contradiction of penitence and secularism who lives apart from human constructs. In this sense he is both apostate and desirous of transcendence as he attempts to subsist like a rather

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[112] Susan Watkins also highlights Atwood's references "Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Samuel Beckett's *Mercier et Camier*, and Anne Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband*" (129). One of the epigraphical quotes from *Oryx* is also from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

irreligious hermit amidst the "flotsam" (*Oryx* 8) of his (and our) society and sleeps in a tree near some undisclosed beach, experiencing the end of all that he has known.

Snowman's style of storytelling is the first key difference separating his ability to survive from Toby's, what with the sweeping changes the world has undergone. Snowman *must* separate himself from Jimmy as much as possible to keep functioning—if we can even call his mode of living functional, given his lack of ability to forage or shelter himself. The progression of the MaddAddam texts, in fact, demonstrates a shift in the nature and role of storytelling, as Snowman is replaced by Toby (as well as Ren and Zeb), and Toby is later replaced by the young Craker, Blackbeard (*MaddAddam* 383-90). Storytelling itself is both resurrected as and cemented in social relevance with the advent of the new, hybrid society composed of Crakers, ex-God's Gardeners, ex-MaddAddamites, mixed-species offspring, and pigoons. This is ultimately not a world for Jimmy (even if he lives on through the naming of Ren's child),[113] and the role of Snowman is but that of an intermediary between past and present. He must depart and leave room for those who will inherit. It is with this passing along of storytelling duties that the cultural meaning of places is finally changed beyond how we understand them today, since subsequent storytellers will wield a new lexicon that is predominantly that of the Crakers and any forthcoming Craker-human hybrids; solely human stories, despite some survivors of JUVE, are unlikely to remain intact, and those survivors, unlikely to repopulate the planet to even remotely a pre-pandemic extent. Perhaps this fresh perspective and approach to naming places will also have secondary consequences, such as lessening a sense of a term like Glenn Albrecht's "solastalgia," or "the psychic pain of climate change and missing a home that's transforming

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[113] The Craker Blackbeard records that Ren's baby "is called Jimadam. Like Snowman-the-Jimmy, and like Adam too. Ren says she wanted the name of Jimmy to still be spoken in the world, and alive; and she had wanted the same for the name of Adam" (*MaddAddam* 380).

before your eyes" (Livni), among other things: the Crakers will hardly know the heartbreak that Jimmy's mother had for "the beach house her family had owned when she was little, the one that got washed away with the rest of the beaches and quite a few of the eastern coastal cities when the sea-level rose so quickly," or "her grandfather's Florida grapefruit orchard that had dried up" (*Oryx* 75), for example. Given that even Jimmy does not seem to understand his mother's sense of loss, since he says in a very derogatory manner that these were memories that she "rambled on about sometimes" and "used to snivel about" (75), obviously he represents the first stage of individuals in the MaddAddam books who cannot know how to fully mourn an environment changed from the present. It is not simply that he is angry at his mother for leaving when he was young; he cannot seem to fully understand what he has not experienced, arguably until he comes face-to-face with the alterations to the natural world that he finally encounters as Snowman on the beach and then throughout the return journey to Paradice and back.

Before the ultimate transition of storytelling from human to Craker, the narrative threads are still open to being labelled as ecocritical dystopian ones. The shift fittingly starts as Blackbeard first commences narrating[114] around the time of the passing of "Snowman-the-Jimmy," who is said to be "travelling in his head, far, far away, as he had travelled before" (*MaddAddam* 364). Here even the place names from Jimmy's time begin to be erased from the narrative vernacular—Paradice becomes "the Egg" (359), for instance—and certainly those place names like New York, as opposed to "Old New York" (*Oryx* 227) and New New York, leave the lexicon of the further future. By the time that Toby has disappeared and Blackbeard has taken on

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[114] Blackbeard is the one true narrator in the entire MaddAddam series, since he uses first-person narrative language (*MaddAddam* 357-64, 376, 378-79, 380-81, 385-90)—unlike everyone else, such as Snowman and Zeb, who tell the stories of their pasts, but whose stories of the present are given through more of an authorial voice.

the role of a storyteller, the meaning of places and their naming in the text, at least, has become

completely subsumed within the Craker understanding of the world, despite the fact that some

humans like Ren are still alive and thus these previous meanings still hold some value (a further

textual palimpsest in action). By the end of *MaddAddam*, it becomes clear that a loss of

geographic signposting is at the heart of Snowman's failure first to cope, and then to survive as

someone who implants the meaning of his cultural origins within the inheriting Craker notions of

places, which arguably arise through an anti-place lens since they initially only know the

confines of their enclosure in the Paradice dome. Though the narrative of *MaddAddam* shows

that the Crakers are developing their own ideas of place through locales like "the Egg" (3), or

their location of "birth" in the dome, they have existed, for the most part, by navigating the

spaces of the Paradice Project, the journey away from the RejoovenEsense compound, and the

beach. Constantly engaging with this perspective of setting complicates Snowman/Jimmy's

sense of his surroundings. Perhaps it is that, in having to give up such relationships as those he

had to ideas of places—that is, relationships of self-identification—Jimmy's already fraught

sense of self is never able to flourish, and survival and continuation are voided as his ultimate

outcomes. It is significant, though, that as the Crakers' second major teacher about the world

(after Oryx), Jimmy is unable to pass along such geographies. This circumstance shapes future

communal conceptions of the world.

Dystopia's Dissociative Fugue

Like Butler's Lauren in her flight from Greater Los Angeles, Atwood's Jimmy flees his past and

the site of trauma where he witnesses the majority of the human world wiped out (the Paradice

dome). But, in doing so, he creates a sense of reality markedly different from our current one.

This is not merely represented by how Jimmy becomes Snowman in his departure from the

RejoovenEsense compound, but by his flight from the experiential and semantic knowledge of

geographical places resonant with both the current day and Jimmy's social moment.

Snowman/Jimmy's formative past, present reality, and dubious future all contribute, from

different angles, to his identity shift to become Snowman: he "doesn't know which is worse, a

past he can't regain or a present that will destroy him if he looks at it too clearly. Then there's

the future. Sheer vertigo" (*Oryx* 179). His name-change from Jimmy to Snowman even contains

a hidden element in the "Abominable" as partly a connection to the elusive Himalayan variety of

the sasquatch / bigfoot / yeti kind, but also as a mark of concealed shame. That is, Snowman

refers to the "Abominable" as a "secret hair shirt" (10) that he keeps to himself, referencing the

often religious self-punitive practice of penitents and ascetics wearing a hair shirt to assuage guilt

for an assumed or even real sin,[115] which in his case refers to the moral weight of having been

connected with JUVE, even as an uncomprehending accessory to global genocide. But

Snowman's hidden shame is somewhat more permanent than the act of having to wear an

uncomfortable garment for a period of time, and accompanies both a transformation in

worldview and to a different world. While Katherine Snyder explains the temporality of trauma

for Snowman/Jimmy (even if she always chooses to differentiate between Jimmy or Snowman),

in a diagnostic sense, Snowman's presentation of trauma is much more than just about a

temporal disconnect. Through his fugue state of mind, which presents itself both through mental

changes and physical travel, and with which he must recollect his past in flashbacks, he also

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[115] This is hardly the only reference that Atwood makes to religious self-"cleansing," what with "the [God's] Gardeners depriv[ing] themselves of proper food and clothing and even proper showers" (*Flood* 114). Lucerne, a character in *Flood*, opines that "[t]hey were just like those people who used to whip themselves during the Middle Ages—those flagrants" (114); Toby corrects her with the term "'Flagellants'" (114).

presents a version of reality with seemingly few ties to the present East Coast of the United States. His process of changing selves enacts an erasure of knowledge about the specific places that he knew as Jimmy. The process of the JUVE pandemic wipes the map of the regional seaboard clean for Snowman/Jimmy, and even specific places cease to matter in the same way that they used to—perhaps because he feels that, if he is the only one who remembers the setting through an older geographical lens, then maybe such preservation of memory seems pointless. But the erasure is mental, not physical, even if a physical alteration of places has occurred from the current day. Snowman's identity transition and mental health are thus directly connected to a reconceptualization of places and spaces that is then presented in the shifting ecocritical and critical dystopian narrative modes of *Oryx*.

Jimmy's transition to being Snowman is more than just a change in name. It is a fundamental alteration in personality and identity. The personality shift is quite evident in the fact that Snowman is no longer the clown that Jimmy had been (though of course Jimmy's clowning had largely shifted to depression in Jimmy's adult years, pre-JUVE). The difference in identity, however, is beyond the bearded, emaciated caricature bedecked in Red Sox cap and floral bedsheet that portrays Snowman. This is not just a man trying to survive in the detritus of society, but the creation of a new individual who refuses to return to who he used to be because that would be personally self-destructive; Jimmy also represents an earlier, self-destructive mode of society that was the end-permutation of ours. The formation of Snowman is one of survival.

The currently most up-to-date resource on mental disorders, the *DSM-V* (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition), indicates that Jimmy (as Snowman) displays characteristics of acute stress disorder and dissociative amnesia, but is most likely suffering from some formulation of dissociative identity disorder with dissociative fugue. As the

DSM-V explains in language seemingly written to cover Snowman's condition, with dissociative identity disorder, "[d]issociative fugues, wherein the person discovers dissociated travel, are common" ("Dissociative Identity"). He succumbs to "[a]pparently purposeful travel" as well as an "amnesia for identity" and "other important autobiographical information" ("Dissociative Amnesia"): these elements align with Jimmy's transformation into thinking like and being Snowman, as well as his and the Crakers' exodus from Paradice. Since the "defining feature of dissociative identity disorder is the presence of two or more distinct personality states" ("Dissociative Identity"), Jimmy's transformation into his alter-ego is fitting. Moreover, Snowman's experience of a fugue state and loss of self are the sequelae of Jimmy's traumatic experience in Paradice, where he essentially watched the human world wink out site by site (*Oryx* 388-92, 404-10), witnessed and participated in the deaths of his two closest companions, then navigated the post-apocalyptic, post-pandemic urban wasteland as he fled. Enter Snowman, and exeunt Jimmy in the middle of this dissociative fugue.

Jimmy's identity transformation to Snowman is not only in name or self-perception, but also involves a physical change in location, even as semantic knowledge such as a conception of places is obscured or erased. Thus, understandings of real-world spaces and places are fundamental in differentiating between Snowman and Jimmy—just as they are in reading the critical and ecocritical dystopian resonances of *Oryx*. It is essential to this point that Snowman, unlike Jimmy, never names a single location that relates back to the present day. While he journeys back to the RejoovenEsense Compound (which, ironically, does not rejuvenate him either mentally or physically except to restore suppressed memories), it is notable that he does not locate this more succinctly in terms of geographical meaning from his past. Though Snowman gets much closer to being Snowman/Jimmy and then briefly surfaces as Jimmy again

in later MaddAddam texts, Rejoov (RejoovenEsense) resonates with both harm and balm for

him, and after his return to Paradice he never again recalls or names a geographical place

resonant with the present day. This process of return arguably sends Snowman back in a

mentally healing direction, but it also reflects the location in which he further harms himself—

and it is thus even more significant that, in Atwood's usual mode of wordplay in the

MaddAddam books, the term JUVE is embedded in the word "rejuvenescence," which is the

word and idea the name of the RejoovenEsense Corps references and even apes aurally. This act

of encapsulation is in the mode of the pandemic being "encysted" (*Oryx* 413)[116] in the

BlyssPluss pill created by the Paradice Project within that same Rejoov compound. Snowman's

return is fateful and pivotal on many levels and it is also meaningful that he is careful, as much

as possible before arriving back in Paradice, to not associate with having been Jimmy, only

initially stating that once he had been Jimmy through the lens of his fairy tale opening.

Despite what the narration tells us, "Snowman" is not *just* a name that Jimmy picks. He

says he does so for the yeti-like mythological aspect in defiance of Crake's rules in the Paradice

Project, since he forbade creatures like "unicorns," "griffins," "manticores," "or basilisks" (10).

Moreover, the name has a resonance with the changed climate that Jimmy has known after his

childhood, what with a lack of autumn (19) and an absence of any snowfall (271), or at least

enough to build the iconic "pebble smile and carrot nose" (271) figure made by children after a

typical, current day of North American precipitation in the winter. Much like the mythological

figure of the Abominable Snowman, the snowball-stacked figure also does not exist in

Snowman/Jimmy's world because of regional warming, and he wonders if he is like that "other

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[116] This is the term that Jimmy uses in his in-text letter as he attempts to document Crake's plan
for any future visitors to Paradice; Snowman later finds this note undisturbed.

kind of snowman," "here today, gone tomorrow, so easily shoved over, left to melt in the sun, getting thinner and thinner until he liquifies and trickles away altogether" (271). As with the yeti-figure, this "white illusion of a man" (271) is also not something "for which a physical equivalent" can still "be demonstrated" (10) and thus, again, defies Crake's rules. Snowman's time on the beach, post-JUVE, is also "long after the last time it snowed" (271), and in his "ecological grief" (Conroy) about the environmental state of his world, he says, "[m]aybe that's the real him, the last *Homo sapiens*" (*Oryx* 271)—the living memory of a world lost through anthropogenic climate change. But the shift to the new name of "Snowman" is also, importantly, a presentation of the mental health conditions that Jimmy is experiencing, and his change in identity is caught up in the location of RejoovenEsense and thus the narrative's dystopian registers.

Snowman presents clinically diagnostic aspects of several stress-related and / or identity conditions. For instance, he is subjected to what the *DSM-V* calls "[e]xposure to actual … death" since he witnesses it "as it occur[s] to others" and "the event" involves a "close friend" ("Acute"). Moreover, it is meaningful to Snowman's identity formation that this is "violent" ("Acute"), since, as Jimmy, Snowman watches his lover Oryx having her throat cut by his closest friend Crake and then subsequently shoots Crake with a spraygun (Atwood's version of a futuristic automatic weapon). When he finally sees them again (as corpses), he calls them, respectively, "his one true love and his best friend in all the world" (*Oryx* 399), and it is clear that their deaths have influenced his state of mind in a powerful way. Snowman finally relives the events of his traumatic experience but does not fully do so until his return to Paradice, and it is only such dissociative states "that persist beyond 3 days after trauma exposure [that] are considered for the diagnosis of acute stress disorder" ("Acute"). These acts of "replay[ing]"

(*Oryx* 382) events are "referred to as *flashbacks*, … and are associated with significant distress" ("Acute"). The flashbacks that Snowman is quite obviously having about his life events up to and eventually including the point of trauma directly relate to Snowman's mental state in his present time: "'I am not my childhood,' Snowman says out loud. He hates these replays. He can't turn them off, he can't change the subject, he can't leave the room" (*Oryx* 81). Snowman, with his figurative "backward-pointing footprints," mentally embodies a mode of experiencing both past and present as he deals with the "existing and not existing" (10) experiences with which he has crafted his current persona.

Snowman's feelings of guilt come into play as he is consumed by the sense of "not having prevented the traumatic event" or not having "adapt[ed] to the experience more successfully" ("Acute"). Concerned with a loss of knowledge and his perceived inability to both deal with and understand events, Snowman constructs his whole selfhood, really, "in a catastrophic manner, such that flashback memories or emotional numbing" are "a sign of diminished mental capacity" ("Acute"). Jimmy's transition after the traumatic events is one of "*depersonalization*" or "*derealization*" ("Acute") and his sense of his surroundings becomes distorted. Snowman is experiencing a difficulty in reconnecting with the actual traumatic events that have not only destroyed his world and past life, but also his past self, yet he also has constant "dissociative flashbacks" or a "behavioral reexperiencing of traumatic events" ("Dissociative Amnesia"). These returning memories further skew his sense of reality as he wrestles with recalling and retelling the event central to his change for a significant amount of time, and even loosely references a desire to not return to the location it occurred when he says, "'Let's not go there'" (*Oryx* 397). Snowman's refusal also links the apocalyptic future to the postmodernity of the past where human knowledge-production was devalued both externally and

internally. One example of this is the prevalence of plagiarism at the Martha Graham Academy

(187), where Jimmy completes his post-secondary education. This problem underlines Jimmy's

complicity in the fallible knowledge economy of his society and the fallout of this once the

erasure of human elements in the world begins.

Snowman's difficulty in remembering what is arguably the most important traumatic

moment of his life—fittingly encapsulated within the novel's title as a reference to the deaths of

Oryx and Crake—involves what is often his "inability to recall important autobiographical

information" ("Dissociative Amnesia"). While Snowman can remember much of his life as

Jimmy (albeit in fragments), it is the final evidence at the Paradice dome airlock that he has the

most trouble facing.[117] Moreover, he has also undergone a "traumatic environmental" experience

that, though not quite in the category of "natural disasters" ("Dissociative Amnesia"), registers in

a similar way. This last is an obvious factor comprising Jimmy and Snowman's world in many

ways—including of course the rampant effects of anthropogenic climate change. Snowman

cannot avoid this last as he physically lives in the affected environment, but his brain works to

block him from his other traumas. Until his return to Paradice, Snowman shies away from

describing (or perhaps is not able to describe) the world-shattering events that landed him on the

beach. He feels he must avoid facing what happened. Snowman admits that he had once been

Jimmy, but he is also not Jimmy in the moment of narration and thus has essentially removed

these events from the history of Snowman, which is fitting since he has forgotten his "personal

identity" ("Dissociative Amnesia") and "los[t] previous knowledge about the world (i.e.,

semantic knowledge)" ("Dissociative Amnesia"). Snowman increasingly appears to be losing

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[117] Importantly, Blackbeard, the Craker-narrator, and perhaps the most reflective of the Crakers, also has marked difficulty once he understands the import of the human remains at the Paradice bubble-dome entrance (*MaddAddam* 356, 359-60).

semantic knowledge—especially with regards to words. A key example is when he retreats to the trees during the heat of noon and a word suddenly appears in his head, but he cannot connect it to an idea. He suddenly thinks of the word "*Mesozoic*. He can see the word, he can hear the word, but he can't reach the word. He can't attach anything to it. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlists drifting off into space" (*Oryx* 44-45). Snowman blames his semantic memory loss on the heat, which is also related to climate change as an erasure of our current world's meaning, but the direct reality of his situation is that he has witnessed violent trauma and is increasingly suffering from generalized amnesia as a part of the dissociative amnesiac state that caused him to change both his identity and location.

Snowman's memory is not what he would like it to be as he ekes out an existence in his tree on this post-apocalyptic beach, as he is experiencing "pervasive discontinuities" with "self and agency, accompanied by many other dissociative symptoms" such as "major gaps in recall of life history" ("Dissociative Amnesia"). Tellingly, though the "memory loss of individuals with dissociative fugue may be particularly refractory," the "returning memory … may be experienced as flashbacks" ("Dissociative Amnesia").[118] Added to the fact that Jimmy experienced the trauma of watching the human world die then witnessed and participated in what was effectively the murder-suicide of the two closest people in his life, the actual state of the world also plays a factor in his susceptibility to mental health issues, which are exacerbated by climate related factors. Here, Atwood is ahead of the speculative writing curve and that of

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[118] It should be added, here, that some presentations of returning memory flashbacks "alternate with amnesia for the content of the flashbacks" ("Dissociative Amnesia"), which, in plain language, means that partial memories return but the individual forgets what they have just re-experienced. It is not clear that, in the narrative of *Oryx*, Snowman forgets the content of his flashbacks, or narrations of previous experiences—after all, this is not *Handmaid*, with "Offred's" three-time reconfiguring of the night she sleeps with Nick (327-28)—but perhaps an even closer reading might reveal such clues.

ecocritical dystopianism, with her ingrained psychological explanations of climate change

processes and their effects, since "the connection between climate change and mental health is

only just starting to be explored" (Mandel, "Psychologists"). Snowman has endured the

"overwhelming experiences" and "traumatic events" that characterise "Dissociative Identity"

since he was young, including the environmental shift of the world of his forebears to one in

which the seaboard had to be abandoned and day-to-day environmental conditions outside of the

Compounds reduce life expectancy—even though he has had a much better life than any

pleeblander child would have. This includes the trauma of climatic change that Snowman/Jimmy

endures in his life, experiencing a time when "the leaves still turned colour" (*Oryx* 19) with the

seasons, then living all the way to one in which tornadoes threaten his east coast region; this is

also a time in which so much flora and fauna dies off that the online game Extinctathon is born

to remember what was lost. The individual act of trying to recall the elements of such rapid

change would be challenging to anyone's mental health, but Snowman/Jimmy was also at the

epicentre of human near-extinction. While it is sometimes hard to say, with Snowman, what are

amnesiac memory losses or simple acts of forgetting, he also encounters "[r]ecurrent gaps in the

recall of everyday events" and "important personal information" as well as "gaps in remote

memory of personal life events" ("Dissociative Identity"). But diagnosing Snowman/Jimmy with

dissociative identity disorder[119] addresses the problems of plot, dialogue, and geographical

knowledge with an appropriate and clinically-relevant condition.

Upon further analysis, it is also significant that "[p]sychological decompensation and

overt changes in identity may be triggered by … removal from the traumatizing situation (e.g.,

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[119] The conditions of Brief Psychotic Disorder and PASD (post-apocalyptic stress disorder) may
also offer some insights into Snowman's mental health issues and narrative separations.

through leaving home) … or … the death of … abuser(s)" ("Dissociative Identity"). Jimmy's

fugue into Snowman is an unassailable truth, despite opinions and "facts" offered from what is

an obviously unreliable narrative perspective. Even if Snowman says that Jimmy clearly *decides*

to rename himself as Snowman (*Oryx* 414), he is not simply someone who goes by an alias. His

identity has fundamentally changed from the time of the Paradice dome airlock (where Oryx and

Crake die) to the time of the beach. Moreover, Crake's betrayal and apparent (or at least

probable) years of manipulation mark him as no longer Jimmy's best friend, but rather the

singular antagonistic individual in Jimmy's life story, if he chooses to ignore such aspects as the

oppressive and competitive corporations controlling his world, the militaristic policing of the

CorpSeCorps (the ubiquitous security for those corporations that is also corporatized itself), the

dangers of and to both his urban and natural environments, the rampant presence of technology,

and his own cascade of destructive and hurtful actions through his period of coming-of-age and

into adulthood (to name a few).

That Crake has manipulated and betrayed Jimmy becomes increasingly apparent as

details emerge about how he periodically dosed Jimmy with the JUVE vaccine (392-93, 413) and

thus forced him into the lonely existence watching over his Craker hatchlings. Crake craftily

plays off of Jimmy's guilty sense of desire and fascination for the child performer (who was

potentially a younger Oryx), and finally arranges his own interpersonal end-of-times chronology

so that Jimmy is emotionally compromised enough to take the life of his longest friend. None of

this absolves Jimmy of his own wrongdoing, however one wants to label it (after all, he started a

relationship with Oryx despite indications that Oryx and Crake were clearly intertwined in some

way), but this does make Crake Jimmy's main abuser (beyond self-abuse). There is a reason that

the *DSM-V* pairs the language of a "traumatizing situation" with the example of "leaving home,"

and Glenn (Crake) is also prominent in Jimmy's life as the stand-in sense of home after his is broken by the tensions of a parental falling-out and maternal disappearance, the loss of Killer (Jimmy's pet rakunk), and the probable death of his mother. After his parents split up, Jimmy no longer really has any family besides Glenn, who periodically returns to reaffirm such a role. Jimmy's father has been subsumed into the him-and-Ramona pairing, and Jimmy never really warmed to Ramona. Crake/Glenn is Jimmy's home-place, no matter where he is—which is another facet in the formulation of Snowman/Jimmy's dissociation from a sense of specific places. Crake may even have had real affection for Jimmy and a trust that Jimmy would perform his assigned role in Crake's mad-scientist plan for the future of the world, and Jimmy was also arguably Crake's only sense of home, if Crake could be said to have such emotional connections, given the suggestion of his detachment from the world with the "Asperger's U." (234) clue.[120] This disconnect even carries over to the fact that, when visiting him at school, Jimmy learns "Crake never remember[s] his dreams" (264), even though "every night he was there" they involved "[m]ore than shouting," but instead "screaming" with "no words" (263). Not only is Crake disconnected from others; he is disconnected from himself.

This detachment carries over into the manner in which Crake logically describes, "'for the sake of argument,'" "'that civilization as [they] know it gets destroyed'" (269), and insists that "'[a]ll it takes'" "'is the elimination of one generation'" "'and it's game over forever'" (270). This seemingly innocuous, philosophical discussion precedes what Snowman says were "signs" he "missed" (384) before Crake takes matters into his own hands by attempting to wipe out humanity with JUVE and install his bioengineered humanoid creations. Crake even hints

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[120] Crake/Glenn's home-place was also significantly disrupted when his father's suspicions about HelthWeyzer, according to Crake, lead to his highway overpass death.

earlier that his reasoning is "'not altruism'" but "'[m]ore like sink or swim'" as "'very soon, demand is going to exceed supply *for everyone*'" (356). He assumes that manipulation of events is the surest way to proceed instead of honouring a brotherly or familial bond, or a communal one. Yet while Crake is not the only influence on Jimmy's psychological split, it is clear by the diagnosis that "[i]ndividuals with [Dissociative Identity] typically report multiple types of interpersonal maltreatment during childhood and adulthood" ("Dissociative Identity") that Crake's role in Jimmy's life factors into the development of Snowman. Crake goes by the numbers rather than by personal bond or emotional connection, and this is likely the ultimate betrayal that Crake performs, at least in terms of how Jimmy interacts with, understands, and hopes for the human elements of the world.

Crake's betrayal, alongside the other traumas leading up to the exchange at the airlock, the exchange itself, and the fallout from both that and the propagation of JUVE hardly represent a singular temporal breaking point or process for Jimmy. All aspects contribute to his subsequent dissociative fugue and dissociative identity disorder; all contribute to his self-separation from history, place, and time. Snyder rightly troubles the idea of the "*post*-traumatic" in *Oryx*—as she argues, "the narrative's doubled time scheme manifests the temporal delay that is a defining feature of trauma and contributes to the protagonist's disrupted sense of self and of his place in the larger world" (474). Snowman is hardly past his trauma even at the end of the novel, after having journeyed back to Paradice and then returned to the Crakers on the beach. He is still Snowman at this point, and not Jimmy, though a part of this state of mind is, understandably, confused by the fact that his foot wound is making him feverish. Since Snowman/Jimmy later wakes from his coma in *MaddAddam*, perhaps the physical and mental return to Paradice and the main site of Crake's betrayal are indeed cathartic and healing for Snowman, and the foot wound

simply delays his recovery. As Ryosuke Tsuruta and Yasutaka Oda explain, an infected wound can shift one's body chemistry and impose "sepsis-associated delirium (SAD)," which "is considered a diffuse cerebral dysfunction caused by the systemic inflammatory response to an infection" (1). The question at the end of *Oryx* of whether Snowman will survive is a prominent one that persisted from the novel's publication in 2003 until *Flood*'s unexpected release in 2010.[121] He is "shivering" and "feverish," with a "foot … like a shoeful of liquid fire" (442). But, most notably to both his delirium and his general mental health, he is hearing voices that arguably increase in intensity within the last two pages of *Oryx*, yet give no answers to his question of what they "want [him] to do" except to remind him of his sense of responsibilities when they say, "*Don't let me down*" (443) in an echo of both Oryx (387) and his mother (313).[122] Snowman is unquestionably delirious, even if his narrative does not directly highlight this in *Oryx*, and his delirium means that he has further become an unreliable narrator, on top of the mental health changes associated with his switch from Jimmy to Snowman.

The narrative perspectives in *Flood* and *MaddAddam* much more clearly accentuate Snowman/Jimmy's delirium. Toby and Ren's contributions are invaluable in confirming Snowman's altered sense of reality, and both demonstrate that the man who enters the beach clearing at the end of *Oryx* and *Flood* (a.k.a. Snowman/Jimmy) is not quite cognizant of everything that is happening around him, which again places him within the category of an unreliable narrator in the preceding novel. Suffering from his wound and the associated delirium, Snowman/Jimmy then proceeds to enter a coma-like, or "'dreaming'" (*MaddAddam* 101) state

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[121] Atwood said at the time that she never expected to write a trilogy (Slone). The MaddAddam books are her first such grouping, though she is also now working on a sequel to *Handmaid* called *The Testaments* (2019).

[122] Crake says something similar with his "I'm counting on you" (*Oryx* 394).

nearly until it is time to return once again to Paradice for the final confrontation with some escaped, repeat-offender criminals called Painballers in *MaddAddam*. Tsuruta and Oda also indicate "a transition from delirium to coma" (4) for sepsis-associated delirium, which is valid for Snowman's shift. In terms of his real-time perspectives, especially given that the reader enters the MaddAddam world initially through Snowman's eyes, post-trauma, it is true that his role in the books is to always destabilize the expectations of current cultural understandings of places and spaces, whether through mental health presentation or sepsis-associated delirium (or both, I would argue). His role is that of fugue from both Jimmy's understanding of reality and our understanding of reality, even as he suffers a further fugue from his knowledge of the world. He is both the voice of the critical dystopia, and the narrative promontory from which Atwood can launch into an alternate generic form with the ecocritical dystopian conditions presented by first Jimmy, then Toby, Ren, and Zeb. Through this presentation, Atwood can demonstrate the environmental impacts to our world that, left unchecked, might very well produce Snowman's world and his resultant psychological trauma.

In Snyder's focus on the traumatic and Snowman's post-apocalyptic world, she emphasizes the fact that Snowman's existence and (his past self) Jimmy's represent two different times, which are marked by a "[d]isruption in identity [that] involves marked discontinuity in sense of self and sense of agency, accompanied by related alterations in affect, behavior, consciousness, memory, perception, cognition" ("Dissociative Identity"). *Oryx* itself is split into a narration of two separate lives,[123] where

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[123] This excludes Snowman's account of Oryx telling her "story"—about which we should likely remain *highly* skeptical, as Jimmy practically forces her to tell him about the past he wants to hear. She even checks in with him to make sure that she has been telling it according to his assumptions (*Oryx* 110-111).

temporal delay is as much a way of coping with a traumatic event as it is a sign

that the event could not be coped with at the moment when it occurred, a sign that

the event was, and is still, traumatic. As Caruth, following Freud, describes it, a

traumatic event only has its full impact upon the individual in retrospect, after a

later event triggers the psychic effect of the earlier event. Thus, a trauma is always

composed of at least two moments in time that stand in a mutually determinative

relation to each other. The future moment activates the meaning of the past

moment, but that past moment also endows the future moment with meaning; the

past determines the future, but the future also retrodetermines, or gives new

meaning to, the past. (Snyder 472)

Snyder is correct to separate Jimmy and Snowman into two distinct narrative foci, or at least

temporal reflections of the narrative, but it is also important to locate how and when Jimmy

became Snowman. Not only does this inform an understanding of the complex Snowman/Jimmy

narrative process, but it also imparts a better conception about the circumstances under which a

change occurs from the particular understandings of place that Jimmy presents. While *Oryx*

structurally sets up the fact that the two are identities attached to the same physical person—and

does so early—the movement from one to the other is presented much later, and much more

subtly.

Atwood's text allows the careful reader to determine precisely when Jimmy became

Snowman. It is initially certain that, at the point of deciding to lead the Crakers out of Paradice

and take them "'home'" (*Oryx* 421) to the beach, he is still Jimmy, and that at the start of

narration on the beach in *Oryx*, he has become Snowman, but a shift actually occurs within his

first conversation with the Crakers under the secluded Paradice dome, when he reveals himself

as the only clothed human they have seen to date (414). The exchange is a meaningful and

memorable moment for both parties, but most importantly to the narrative, his introduction to a

new social group allows him to reinvent himself. When Jimmy is asked who he is by the Craker

Abraham Lincoln, Atwood again uses the formal aspects of her text—this time to transition

Jimmy to Snowman. The reply, "'My name is Snowman,' said Jimmy" (414), initiates this

process. Jimmy reasons here, through his narration, that he "had thought this over. He no longer

wanted to be Jimmy, or even Jim, and especially not Thickney: his incarnation as Thickney

hadn't worked out well. He needed to forget the past—the distant past, the immediate past, the

past in any form. He needed to exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation"

(414). Thickney, of course, represents the period in which he helped propagate the pandemic-

filled BlyssPluss pill through his role as a word-wielding ad-man; this is also the time during

which he was engaging sexually with what may have been his best friend Crake's love interest

(again, if Crake can be said to feel such things),[124] and even the same person he may have seen

online performing sexual acts as a child (that is, Oryx). In both scenarios, the culpability is

prominent and the idea that it "hadn't worked out well" is really an understatement. After Jimmy

introduces himself to the Crakers, Atwood then pulls one of her subtle textual manipulations, and

the next time that "Jimmy" speaks and is named in the narration, the "said Jimmy" has been

replaced by "said Snowman" (415). This is a textual shifting that moves past dialogue and into

the text proper, where the narrative voice proceeds to no longer identify Jimmy with his past self,

but with "Snowman" (416) instead. Besides conjuring an image of the loss of the iconic

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[124] Jimmy says that Crake is "in love" because he can hear it in "the tone of voice" (372), but
Oryx is also more of a possession to Crake than a loved one because he fully intends for her to
join him in death (385), no matter what her desire. Moreover, she is the tool that Crake uses to
get Jimmy to "'commit euthanasia'" (384)—which is more like rage-induced murder—against
his will after Crake "slit[s] her throat" (394).

"Christmas" (271) snowman and thus enacting an erasure of place and self in this post-

American, eastern seaboard region, the name change is related to deeply-rooted personal trauma.

Jimmy's transition to Snowman is also, in part, the result of having witnessed and dealt

death. His decision to leave Paradice occurs after the point of experiencing the death of Oryx and

responding with the killing of Crake—not to mention remotely witnessing the likely extinction

of much if not all of the human race. His reaction to this trauma is ongoing even at the ends of

both *Oryx* and *Flood*, since he cannot yet quite realign his identity. This does not happen until

the text and time of *MaddAddam*, when "Snowman-the-Jimmy" awakens from his coma (145-

49) or "'dreaming'" (101), and rather groggily reasserts that he is, in fact, Jimmy and *not* the

"Snowman" persona through whom he introduced himself to the Crakers initially. This primarily

occurs as he wakes up and immediately recalls killing Crake after Oryx's throat was slit (146-

47). Here Jimmy experiences a direct return to the moment of his trauma, and to his pre-

Snowman state and memories. Though Atwood's clever textual manipulations in *Oryx* transition

Snowman during his initial conversation with the Crakers—and suggest there is a *decision* to

change, mind you, not an inadvertent change—the reality of the shift is apparent immediately

within the narrative of *Oryx*. As Snyder argues, a split has occurred, and the two narrative

tempos are distinct:

> the narrative alternates in consecutive chapters between the present story of
>
> Snowman and the past story of Jimmy, moving forward in a more-or-less linear
>
> fashion through each story until the point at which the past 'catches up' with the
>
> present. While both time schemes move forward in an essentially chronological
>
> manner, that of the present is structured around a physical journey backward.

Snowman retraces his steps to the place that marked the beginning of the end for

humankind as a whole and for him as an individual. (Snyder 475)

Yet, though Jimmy is not Snowman, ultimately Jimmy is both his previous self as Jimmy the

joker and Snowman the survivor—even if Jimmy is referred to as "Snowman-the-Jimmy," or any

other combinations.

Snowman's presentation of dissociative identity disorder also plays into other elements of

Oryx, since there are two narratives being told around the traumatic event of the JUVE crisis, but

also a continually-unfolding environmental catastrophe or shift that moves "beyond" human

concerns. Given Snowman/Jimmy's perspective(s), it is much too easy to read *Oryx* through an

anthropocentric lens. J. Brooks Bouson speculates about the possibility of a "game over forever"

(149, 153; also qtd. in Rozelle 63), yet Lee Rozelle critiques this approach as one that, in merely

a binary relationship with "human survival … dismiss[es] the complex viability of remaining

flora and fauna that still thrive in the novel. This problem is symptomatic of recent Atwood

criticism that uses anthropocentric theoretical paradigms to wrangle with environmental issues in

her works" (63). As Ingersoll might indicate, the anthropocentric reading is authorial in nature,

and is Atwood-driven. At the beginning of Snowman's narration on the beach at the start of

Oryx, the fact that his immediate focus synchronizes the sound of nearby waves to a decidedly

anthropocentric "heartbeat" indicates his bid for survival as a human even in the face of his post-

apocalyptic surroundings. Jimmy/Snowman does, however, change over the course of his

experiences as Snowman,[125] but this is not until that original anthropocentric lifeblood is

somewhat more coloured by the alterity of the natural world he experiences. Initially, he works

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[125] Here I adopt Rozelle's directionality of Jimmy/Snowman because he is highlighting a process
of the first becoming and experiencing being the later.

to survive and preserve some of his humanity, even if survival in this post-apocalyptic world requires some adoption of a hybrid state with the natural world as the half-human, half-animal, hybrid loss of both humanity and climate "normalcy," yeti-like Abominable Snowman. Rozelle asserts that this newly-minted Snowman is creating his own niche, even if his situation seems doomed: "In this first passage Jimmy/Snowman's interactions include flicking a spider, urinating on grasshoppers, and rubbing ants off a mango. It's clear that Jimmy/Snowman's relationship to place and environment, his range of vision, has drastically changed" from Jimmy's, since he "is now a niche within an ecosystem concerned with predators and sustenance, his primary concerns not social but ecological" (64). Later, as he transitions into his fever dream of transformation, Snowman actually approaches a more eco-inclusive perspective, even if the ecological world still seems threatening to him.

This transition toward eco-inclusiveness is perhaps the most lingering and important concern of the MaddAddam books, what with the formation of a hybrid-species community in the last novel. Toward the end of *Oryx*, Crake says "I'm counting on you" (394), but it is telling that, in the end, Snowman/Jimmy instead recalls the "*Don't let me down*" phrase from both his mother and Oryx. The former also says, "Remember Killer" (313), which is a direct appeal to also care for animals not for human pleasure, but for their own needs, and though the latter's comment is specifically about being "'kind'" (387) with the Crakers, both are calls to shift away from the anthropocentrism that plagues Jimmy's society as an extension of our own. This is significant since Snowman/Jimmy is trying to decide whether to join the only remnants of humanity he has met after JUVE or to protect the Crakers. But the real question at stake is whether he will adhere to his humanity, fulfill Crake's Paradice Project and phase out his humanistic sense of self by continuing to become more animalistic, or learn to foster a

combination of the two. It seems likely that both his mother and Oryx would have preferred the latter, in opposition to Crake's logic of wiping out humans and replacing them, though the specific message they both give is perhaps the only suggestion that Snowman/Jimmy might be shifting toward living like a human who also fosters environment and ecological community. Ultimately, though, perhaps the closing "*Don't let me down*" comment is more effective as a message of environmentalist appeal toward the reader of the novel—especially since Jimmy, once he wakes up again in a return to his "original" self in *MaddAddam* (145-49), still does not trust the pigoon characters (266-67, 269, 344, 348, 349-50) that become prominent in that end sequence of the narrative. Toby, for instance, is much more successful at integrating into this increasingly nature-forward environment of the post-viral apocalypse, and Snowman/Jimmy (who is ultimately just Jimmy, after all) fails in the end, to his demise: despite his "awakening" into being Jimmy, he is later unable to survive.

It is essential that Snowman's journey to recover the truth of events and find "himself" is a retracing of his steps, but it is just as important that, afterward, he returns to the beach-space of the Crakers, for his return to Paradice, though clarifying, does not resolve his situation or absolve him of his responsibilities. Rozelle, like others, highlights the role of the footprint Snowman finds on the beach when he says that "Jimmy/Snowman scrutinizes his own ecological footprint alongside Crake's genetically modified life forms and various indigenous species, [and] he now lacks the capacity to replicate the unsustainable methods of the past" (62). But while Rozelle is correct in highlighting a character of liminal potential, Snowman/Jimmy cannot go the distance. Instead, he might be better understood in how Danette DiMarco pinpoints the "liminal position and potential power … to repeat a past cycle of aggression against nature in the name of personal profit, or to re-imagine a way for future living grounded in a genuine concern for others" (170).

The potent ambiguity at the end of *Oryx* and even *Flood* more accurately embodies the multiple directionality DiMarco's reading channels.

Even though the ecological features of the world post-JUVE stand more of a chance, as Rozelle indicates about the inability of a single individual to wield ecological devastation on its previously grand scale when he points out that Snowman/Jimmy "now lacks the capacity to replicate the unsustainable methods of the past" (62), with the shift from the perspective of *Oryx* to the later MaddAddam novels, Rozelle is no longer quite accurate in featuring Snowman/Jimmy in the realm of potential change. He says that Snowman/Jimmy's "transformation provides speculative groundwork for a new convergence of humans and ecosystems. Like the liminal land itself, Jimmy/Snowman embodies the resilience and promise of places considered doomed" (62). The contrast, past the text of *Oryx*, is instead between the doomed and actually rather static Snowman/Jimmy and the more transformed Toby. It is the latter character with whom the future ultimately rests, for she is the true survivor of the overall MaddAddam narrative, and Snowman/Jimmy, despite his time with the Crakers, cannot, in the end, transition past his anthropocentric mindset and anthropogenic impacts. In this sense, the MaddAddam books contain a narrative rift comparable to the fracturing in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). This happens in many ways, but is especially true when John the Savage is introduced partway through (or when the Controller Mustapha Mond deigns to intervene in events). The insertion of the Savage diverts the path of the narrative previously developing with Bernard Marx and Lenina Crowne, and this ultimately ends in tragedy; Snowman/Jimmy's story is really not that much different and, like the Savage, he never had a place in the future of the world. Instead, Toby's narrative and transformative process through the

MaddAddam books resonates with "the resilience and promise of places considered doomed," with which Rozelle had attributed Snowman/Jimmy.

But Rozelle is quite astute when he says that the "basis for hope in this novel is in *place*," and "a study of existent flora and fauna in the novel indicates some chance for the environmental reincorporation, reconciliation, and transcendence" (62). As he argues, the novel "reminds us that place is always being born" (62). In this light, it is inevitable that the New York of today, for instance, will become an underwater place without geographical, cartographical registers; even its inheritor, New New York, is imbued with a sense of placelessness by Snowman's time since it appears to be near the eastern seaboard, but the narration makes it incredibly difficult to pin down through a sense of current day cartography. Yet this "placelessness" is only in terms of registers from today as they are gradually expunged by the loss of human perspective and experience and thus become, in a sense, *other* places even though they are geographically similar. The end of *MaddAddam* demonstrates that some humans will carry on into the future, though not Snowman/Jimmy, and therefore a sense of their lives and understandings of locales will undoubtedly continue to influence the communal culture, but theirs will also not be the only perspectives on those locales. A sense of place will be influenced by Crakers, pigoons, Craker-human hybrids, and perhaps others in this new ecological community, and this focus on changing place becomes paramount to regeneration and healing in the overall narrative of the books. Thus, from the dystopian, post-apocalyptic remnants of the trope of humanity waiting on the beach—following works like William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" (1925), and Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957)—Atwood's overall set of MaddAddam books shifts to something imbued with ecotopian promise.

Rozelle aptly references an earlier "telling moment with a caterpillar" (65; see *Oryx* 48)

in his consideration of both Snowman/Jimmy's metamorphosis and that of the "bioregion" (66),

and this encounter with what he classifies as a "lepidopteran" (65) communicates the clearly

transitional territory that Snowman/Jimmy inhabits. The question, however, is whether

"Snowman-the-Jimmy" will be able to survive his metamorphosis. As Jimmy, he is purely

anthropocentric and requires the fugue from Paradice to the locale of arboretum and beach to

fully formulate his new identity.[126] His dissociative fugue not only works to erase the dominance

of anthropocentrism in the world, but his symptoms also portray a flight from the codes of his

society and his role in upholding them. While Snyder employs contemporary trauma theory to

discuss the temporality and sense of loss displayed within Snowman's state, perhaps here she

comes up against the limits of what that theory offers as terminology—and a shift to incorporate

the language of clinical diagnosis is necessary in sifting through the various symptoms that

Snowman exhibits. That being said, since Atwood does not model Snowman perfectly for an

easily diagnosable presentation of symptoms (and, really, which realistic presentation would be

"textbook"?), when Snyder compares Snowman's condition to "post-traumatic amnesia" (475),

this determination is still partially valuable, as some "individuals with PTSD cannot recall part or

all of a specific traumatic event" ("Dissociative Amnesia"). Snyder reminds us that the

> original trip out of Paradice is unrepresented during the bulk of the story's telling.
>
> It is a narrative blank, comparable to post-traumatic amnesia. This blank gets

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[126] I spent over a year researching the likely real-world location(s) of the arboretum and the cobb house (something not yet addressed), and the discussion is certainly related, but I will engage with this elsewhere. Placing these elements, however, further entrenches the MaddAddam books in the ecocritical dystopian tradition. For reference, my work currently locates the most viable arboretum near a submerged New York vista rather than the pervasive assumption of Snowman's beach vantage overlooking Boston (though it is a possibility). Placing the "cobb" house is more problematic, as it may only exist as a rumour in the real world; I have not yet located it.

filled in only after the past and present time schemes converge late in the novel, a

convergence which takes place, significantly, after Snowman returns to Paradice,

"ground zero" for the pandemic, the traumatic event that divides then from now,

pre-apocalypse from post-apocalypse, Jimmy from Snowman. And it is only after

this temporal and physical convergence that Snowman's present narrative begins

to move forward without the past simultaneously unfolding in the even-numbered

chapters. The alternation between present and past time schemes ends with

chapter 12, which narrates the final events of the past and the first events of the

present. In the remaining three chapters of the novel, the narrative remains in the

present. (475-76)

Though I completely agree with Snyder's assessment of this "narrative blank" and the novel's

movement to reconcile Snowman with his past as Jimmy, "post-traumatic amnesia" is not quite

specific enough of a diagnostic term. The loss of memory about an event is incorporated into the

term, but it does not adequately explain the change in identity, nor the all-important, *physical*

fugue from the site of trauma, alongside, of course, the mental fugue about places that transitions

the narrative's dystopian sense of the world. This physical movement—Jimmy's change from a

specific place to his identity as Snowman at another, and his later return to the site of trauma—is

essential to not only Snowman's condition, but, as Snyder points out, to the progression of the

narrative itself. Moreover, it is relevant to the subgeneric registers of *Oryx*.

Atwood's Ecocritical Dystopias

As with all of the primary texts in this study, not one of Atwood's MaddAddam books is solely

an ecocritical dystopia, for each contains other generic and subgeneric elements—each has other

relevant formal considerations at play. That being said, these novels also notably incorporate

ecocritical dystopian aspects into their narratives. Rather than simply presenting critical

dystopias in the vein of how Moylan might advance a reading, with their fictional locales merely

representing a *sense* of current society instead of directly referring to recognizable geographic

locations and places from today, the MaddAddam books also resonate with the traces of the real

world. They, as Lawrence Buell puts it earlier in his seminal reframing of the "environmental

imagination," "[require] us to rethink our assumptions about the nature of representation" (2),

among other things. That is, "[h]ow we image a thing, true or false, affects our conduct towards

it" (3), and vice versa, which is a fitting commentary that can also be applied to ecocritical

dystopianism, including Atwood's, since a shift in perspective to understand that we are part of

the ecological community of a particular place is vital if we are to "make the rescue of the

environment the central organizing principle for civilization" (Gore 269). By imagining the

future as a tangible process of environmental change to places we know in the real-world,

Atwood's MaddAddam books indicate that our own existence is "what's at stake." In all three of

these texts, Atwood speculates about how geographic places are environmentally altered within

her imagined future, and how this has deep-set ramifications beyond a simple need to change a

map. Though the cities and infrastructures from our time are either gone or are being replaced

within the dual timelines of pre- and post-JUVE, Rozelle's indication of "hope … in place"

offers an ecological perspective on the process of alteration. For the first novel, he says that, in

"its representation of liminal life from a biocentric perspective, *Oryx and Crake* reminds us that

… [l]ife emerges to confuse the dividing edge, adapting and multiplying to reconnect pieces that

have been broken" (62). While Rozelle reads *Oryx* as dystopian merely in terms of genre,

perhaps it is only the earlier timelines in each of the MaddAddam novels that are dystopian, at

least from an ecological perspective. From the later, "biocentric" view that he indicates, it is not

terrible that humans (that is, in Snowman's time and in his future) will most likely stop or pause

for a long time before continuing to build the urban class-partitions of pleeblands and

compounds. Such a future, biocentric world will even avoid the creation of our current asphalt

laden lands on a large scale. Post-JUVE, whatever Ingersoll's impression of the "Mad Scientist"

character in Crake (Ingersoll 166-67), the world's biota, albeit already radically altered, will at

least have more of a chance of survival with humans mostly out of the picture.

The indications of real-world places are few and far between in *Oryx*, but it is still of note

that *Flood* does not jump right into naming specific places based on recognizable aspects of the

current day. Neither Toby nor Ren (the two narrative foci in *Flood*) immediately locates the

respective AnooYoo spa or Scales and Tails exotic dancer establishments that they are holed up

in with explanations that correspond to geographical codes and meanings reminiscent of North

America. Toby drops a few hints that they are indeed on North American soil when she

references her father's "Ruger 44/99 Deerfield" (24), the "Martha Graham Academy" (26) that

Jimmy also attended (as well as some other names associated with the narrative of *Oryx*), and the

"Salvation Army" (39), but most of the names, on their own, would not necessarily locate the

plot of *Flood* in future North America. A space like the Painball Arena, which is much like the

arena of Suzanne Collins' 2008 *The Hunger Games* (published the year before *Flood*)[127] that is

complete with "cameras … in the forest, hidden in trees and built into rocks" (*Flood* 98), only

implies a civilization on the decline, as with gladiatorial Rome, since the forested arena itself

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[127] This "copying" is tit-for-tat: Collins's "mutts" are creative facsimiles of the hybrids first
appearing in *Oryx* five years prior to *The Hunger Games*. Though Collins seems to take her
"mutations" a step further with the very human "mutts" created from fallen tributes, Atwood's
"pigoons" already had their "human-to-pig neocortex transplant material" (*Flood* 248; *Oryx* 66)
as early as *Oryx*, and she ends *MaddAddam* with Craker-human hybrids.

does not exclusively suggest North America. Of course, Collins's Panem name (alongside other tenuous registers) is vaguely indicative of a future pan-American (but post- United States) empire, but really the term is just as inadequate in geographically locating that civilization in a future North America as any of the names of Atwood's Corps. AnooYoo, for instance, is horrifyingly reminiscent of the pharmaceutical yoke that real-world corporations have on "beauty" and "health" in the modern day[128]—what with names such as Olay Regenerist, L'Oréal Revitalift, or Lancôme Absolue Precious Cells—but many of those companies are French rather than direct products of North America and while present day "beauty" companies seem to ubiquitously promise a regeneration of youth or delay in aging, the trend is markedly relatable to the globalization of capitalist endeavours, and thus "Western," if anything, but do not specifically point to the United States.

In *Flood*, the first setting besides "the cobb house" and "upmarket Fernside" (22)[129] that is named could be anywhere, and is certainly not a direct description of the space it indicates. Toby's time in the "Sewage Lagoon" (30) area of the pleeblands demonstrates how the local residents feel about their living space. It is "one of the worst pleebs—Willow Acres was its name, though the locals called it the Sewage Lagoon because a lot of shit ended up in it" (30). The adjacent pleeb where the Gardeners had their Edencliff Rooftop Garden (51) is "the Sinkhole" (48) or, more officially, "Apple Corners," and is just as evocative in its tendency for individuals to disappear "into it without a trace" (71). Surely even "Buenavista Condos" (79), where the character Bernice's family lives, conjures the image of every run-down apartment

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[128] Menne also comments on Atwood's invented brand names (718-19).

[129] Fernside is not a real-world place name not only because of its generic sound, but also because it is one of "the rich pleebs" alongside "Golfgreens, and the richest of all, SolarSpace" (*Flood* 68). These names evoke the suburban Utopian project.

complex wedged between urban North America and suburbia, but also cannot pinpoint a geographical or cartographical location. None of these names is indicative of a specific real-world place, and Atwood does this deliberately to imply a Nowhere, America, feel. Perhaps it is that both Toby's and Ren's narratives begin while they are in hiding, but the first indication of a North American place in *Flood* does not surface until the eleventh chapter, when Ren calls her friend Amanda (pre-JUVE),[130] who is working on an artistic installation "in the Wisconsin desert" (56).

It is important that the novel's first speculation about a real-world place carried into the future immediately indicates a region where fundamental change through climate shift could be catastrophic. The "Wisconsin desert" is not merely Atwood's creation, but actually refers to the Spring Green Preserve, which "is a place where forest meets bluff, and bluff levels off into plains and dunes. It is located in the unglaciated region of the state" (Nature Conservancy, "Spring"). Yet in Ren and Amanda's time, directly before the outbreak of the JUVE virus or Waterless Flood, "Wisconsin's covered with cow bones, ever since the big drought ten years [before] when they'd found it cheaper to butcher the cows there rather than shipping them out—the ones that hadn't died on their own" (*Flood* 56). Atwood's suggestion here is not merely about economics but also about the inability of at least some of the cattle to survive within this ecosystem and its climatic conditions. Before we start thinking that such intense environmental shifts are unrealistic, in an unfortunate and bizarre twist, August 2017's Hurricane Harvey left "thousands of cattle stranded on small patches of dry land, still surrounded by deep water" (Rogers). In

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[130] Like with the name Snowman, Amanda is actually a pseudonym for "Barb Jones" (*Flood* 85); unlike Snowman, Amanda is much more able to adapt to her circumstances, and does not appear to overtly suffer from mental health issues (until she suffers the trauma of sexual assault toward the end of *Flood*).

contrast, within the Wisconsin region indicated in the novel, though partly grassland in the current day, the "cacti …, sand dunes and dry grasses" (Nature Conservancy, "Spring") seem to have taken over enough that livestock is incapable of successfully ranging the new landscape. The suggestion seems to be that the "Wisconsin desert" has not only intensified its arid qualities, but also expanded its range,[131] and with no other indications of that state in the MaddAddam books besides this process of desertification and rampant bovine death, the impression given is that the region related to the entire state of Wisconsin has transitioned into a landscape unable to support ungulates—even if it is apparently still rife with "insect life" (*Flood* 56) and thus does not indicate a complete eradication of ecological health, but rather a shift in biome classifications.

Atwood's speculative future world vividly shows the effects of environmental decline on even the interior landscapes of North America. After Wisconsin, the next real-world place-based reference in *Flood* comes with the "Tex-Mexican" (56) or "Tex-Mex" (57) workers that Amanda hires for her art project.[132] Ren later calls Tex-Mex a language (131), which must have its origins in the Hispanic English of refugees from Central and South America increasingly coming to live in North America in the present day (Wolfram et al.). Importantly, the United States as a country does not seem to be a sovereign nation-state with centralized government in this permutation of the future because society has become more organized around a sense of Compounds versus

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[131] For an interactive resource on climate change in the Canadian prairie context instead, see the *Climate Atlas of Canada*, which suggests that widening desertification will occur in the future, and bases its mapping on "climate science, mapping, videography, and storytelling to bring the global issue of climate change closer to home, and is designed to inspire local, regional, and national action and solutions."

[132] Though, horrifically for her, by the end of *Flood*, Amanda is revealed as the unknown woman in the trio at the end of *Oryx*; interestingly, in *Oryx*, she is referred to as a "tea-coloured woman" (441), which perhaps is an initial nod to Atwood's later "Tex-Mex" hybridity in *Flood*.

pleeblands, further segregating the economic classes created and removing an emphasis on the

role of the nation-state in safe-guarding its citizens through a democratically-elected

representation of the people's will. This also creates problems for environmental issues in what

was the contiguous United States, at least (though likely also beyond as well), since corporate

land use, resource extraction, and emissions and other pollution, etc. are unchecked by

governmental regulations: the Corps of the MaddAddam books can essentially do what they

want, despite ecological destruction, because they have become the ones in power. Beyond the

real-world country's current progression toward increasingly insulated and guarded tendencies

alongside a surge in American exceptionalism, the fictional country's championing of

transnational corporations in the years leading up to JUVE—which chapter sub-sections in *Flood*

give as the "YEAR TWENTY-FIVE" (7)—has not succeeded in erasing all cultural registers, or

those from other communities distributed globally. But alterations have indeed occurred. Ren

mentions "Eurotrash" (130) in a discussion of sex workers, which of course takes a

contemporary term referring to rich European socialites usually living or working in the United

States and offsets them from the current day by presenting them as future sex workers first

smuggled in and then given the more demeaning "basic bristle work" (130). This is hardly the

"see-and-be-seen" lifestyle currently associated with so-called Eurotrash, and while the Tex-Mex

workforce is clearly a reference to the until-recent (that is, before Trump) number of

undocumented and underpaid "temporary," exploited labour from south of the U.S.-Mexico

border, both of these examples have been adapted to future scenarios that also indicate more

about Atwood's speculative changes to places. Some of these, like the Tex-Mex characters, are

both cultural and climate refugees, but the need to escape from environmental destruction is of

course not limited to outside of America. In the post-national world of the MaddAddam books,

the argument is that the current process of literally walling the United States off from the Global

South (and Canada) is mirrored by a further distancing from Europe, as both have become

sources of "undesirables." The future of Atwood's post-national America is one where the

United States has become insular even to the point of self-disintegration.

Amanda, who, through Ren's narrative, first focuses the real-world place in *Flood*, is

from Texas (76), which succumbs to drought (77), hurricanes (77, 84), and flooding (84) on a

scale such that it becomes uninhabitable (at least to suburban and trailer-park living). With this

situation in Texas, Atwood is referencing the 2005 fallout of Hurricane Katrina with the New

Orleans stadium full of refugees and deplorable conditions (84-85), but into this alteration of the

real world, Atwood also brings a reversal of sorts—invoking the real-world wall between Texas

and Mexico whose construction by the United States is ongoing (see Wendy Brown's *Walled*

States, Waning Sovereignty or Derek Lundy's *Borderlands*). As Amanda reports, Atwood's

imagined wall is the one "they're building to keep the Tex refugees out, because just the fence

wasn't enough. There's men with sprayguns—it's a CorpSeCorps wall" (*Flood* 85). Atwood

places the barrier between Texas and the rest of what might be called post-American space,

which I am tempted to award with the dubious epithet "CorpSeMerica" for both its corporate

fanaticism and its dying natural world. But unlike the current political far-right's push to wall off

Texas from immigrants to the south, Atwood's narrative instead employs a wall like a tourniquet

after disaster. This echoes the similar issue in Octavia Butler's earlier *Sower*, which hints at a

dissolution of the United States into "a lot of little states" that could segregate themselves from

their neighbours (327). In both speculative future worlds, the physical effects of anthropogenic

climate change and related processes are treated like wounds or injuries to be isolated from the

rest of the system, with the opinion that they are temporary and will ostensibly go away.

Atwood's future social world treats those problems—at least, those it acknowledges—simply as crises that can be overcome, though, as Eric Paglia argues, the ongoing "environmental crisis is not a 'proper' crisis, as many of the anthropocentric alterations and impacts on nature cannot simply be 'managed' with short-term measures or rolled back to a pre-crisis state" (249). This fact is clearly articulated in how Atwood's MaddAddam books reveal anthropogenic effects that persist past the time of Crake's "solution."

In *Flood*, the God's Gardeners "hold in their minds the Great Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico; ... the Great Dead Zone in Lake Erie; ... the Great Dead Zone in the Black Sea; ... the desolate Grand Banks of Newfoundland, where the Cod once abounded; and the Great Barrier Reef, now dying and bleaching white and breaking apart" (*Flood* 196-97), and Atwood suggests some degree of societal remorse, since at least some of those scenarios have actually resulted from social systems affecting the real world of the reader (such as with pesticides, hormones, and other pollutants spreading into the Gulf of Mexico). The real world is home for the reader. This is an essential gear in the functional clockwork of the ecocritical dystopia, or even in the often non-speculative "ecosickness" that Heather Houser associates with current environmental destruction and its affect. Even by including this list of defunct bodies of water and their related ecological systems in the MaddAddam books,[133] as well as the biotic extinction referenced in *Oryx* through the online game Extinctathon, there is a suggestion that the current, ongoing real-world trends of pollution and the 6th Mass Extinction produce the storyworld in which Snowman/Jimmy awakens, or even the previous world that him, Ren, Toby, and Zeb describe for the time directly following ours. The MaddAddam books are full of such references, of course,

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[133] For instance, the present destruction of coral reefs is cited within the literature of ocean acidification, which is one of the Nine Planetary Boundaries ("Nine Planetary"; "Planetary"; Steffen et al., "Planetary").

like when Pilar indicates the trouble that bees and other pollinators have been having in recent years. She suggests that "it was the pesticides, or the hot weather, or a disease, or maybe all of these" (*Flood* 100), but beyond the very likely culprit of neonicotinoid-class insecticides that Basma Kavanagh also indicates in the poem "The day it rained wasps and bees began" (74), what is really implied is that anthropogenic impacts can either damn or foster other elements of the natural world, including the fictional presentations of places that readers hold in their minds from present-day culture. But whether we view those landscapes as ruined by the "greedy Spoilers" (*Flood* 1)—that is, us—or in a process of rehabilitation, they are certainly, at least by Jimmy's time, advanced from the time of the reader's understanding of the real world.

Atwood's future world is obviously a world somewhat altered from the present, even as it attempts to recover from human-imposed destructive practices. As Rozelle puts it, "life survives in increasingly diverse forms in *Oryx and Crake*, slowly adapting to the new topography left by the human cataclysm" (69). This new topography is not only in descriptions of places from Snowman's time but also in the changes made from our time to Jimmy's. In the MaddAddam novels, besides the aforementioned aquatic dead zones and states, a clear reference to our current world is made through indications of future Mexico, Boston, New York, the Mackenzie Mountains, San Francisco, Santa Monica, and other places. For example, Moosonee, Ontario, is referenced when Jimmy is "invited to the Moosonee HelthWyzer Gated Vacation Community" (*Oryx* 217) after graduation. The place that Crake and Jimmy visit is referred to as a "[c]ommunity on the western shore of Hudson's [sic] Bay, where the top brass of HelthWyzer [go] to beat the heat" (217) in an ironic shifting of resort geography from current equatorial or southern hemisphere destinations to the relative Canadian north. The climate crisis has clearly

produced "favourable" conditions for this move, and the association is that of a resort of excess and leisure for the affluent and connected.

A further issue is that Moosonee, in the real world, is both adjacent to the Moose River Migratory Bird Sanctuary and across the lowest portion of Hudson Bay from the (slightly more distant) Hannah Bay Bird Sanctuary. Given Atwood's admission in "Writing *Oryx and Crake*" of a fondness for bird sanctuaries, this juxtaposition of Corps-owned resort on bird sanctuary land is no surprise. Condemnation of this destructive behaviour is also underlined by Atwood's 2009 tour to promote *Flood*, where one of the commitments was to "request the event venues to serve only shade-grown, organic, fair trade coffee, which is bird-friendly—unlike sun-grown and pesticide-sprayed, a huge destroyer of songbirds" (Atwood, "Greening"; Atwood, "Bird-Friendly"). Moreover, the implied alteration of the Moosonee bird sanctuaries extends beyond leisure and into the Corps-backed continuation of environmentally-detrimental modern coffee-growing policies.

We can assume that the HelthWyzer compound has altered the local landscape and riparian zones in favour of the convenience of its human guests rather than its avian ones. The certainty of this insinuation is further upheld in how it is in this location that Jimmy, Crake, and the HelthWyzer "top brass" Uncle Pete witness the Happicuppa riots from their location quite a safe distance from Boston and Maryland (221)—though it is interesting to note that Boston is not specifically mentioned as a location, even if "a Boston Coffee Party [springs] up" (*Oryx* 219). Perhaps, like "Old New York," most of Boston is underwater. Harvard definitely is (211). Atwood's further condemnation of this veritable ruling class comes under the veil of Uncle Pete's opinions about the Happicuppa resistance efforts when he references how the economic entanglements and priorities of the various Corps are anything but protective of "natural"

environmental conditions (220). In this future world, known real world places such as the Moosonee area have been altered for the convenience of that society, and shifts in the real-world environment are extended and predicted within these references, which implicate the spectre of the reader in their extreme alterations. The alterations from our time into Snowman's future are also engaged in processes of change that feature both erasure but also creation of place, and someone like Rozelle "encourages the re-examination of human relationships to post-natural areas such as abandoned lots, defunct corporate enclaves, and even graveyards" (Rozelle 62). Like the bird-populated offshore towers Snowman watches, the question is what these post-natural places and spaces will become after JUVE has removed most humans from the earth.

But it is also important to note here that, somewhat in the vein of Snowman's descriptions of settings, neither Toby's nor Ren's narrations of their present time—that is, their time post-JUVE and post-Waterless Flood—reference the real-world places that are associated within their flashbacks. By this I mean Wisconsin rather than AnooYoo, or some other fictional moniker; names of real-world places have vanished in the "present" of the narrative, except as recollections situated within the recent past. Until he ventures back to the site of Paradice, Snowman is also further detached from even the world of the Corps—the world of OrganInc, HelthWeyzer, and RejoovenEsense. In comparison, Toby and Ren are effectively separated from at least a certain aspect of the meanings and codes related to particular places that are still used by their former civilization, and obviously ours, yet are still one step closer to reality (or our present-day conception of it) than Snowman. They are therefore potent embodiments of the tension between realistic and sf elements in the MaddAddam books. While Amitav Ghosh, "following Margaret Atwood" (Streeby 5), argues that "the Anthropocene resists science fiction" because of a focus on "an imagined other world located apart from ours" (Ghosh, *Great* 72;

Streeby 5), Ghosh is referencing Atwood's infamous argument relegating "Science Fiction,

Speculative Fiction, Sword and Sorcery Fantasy, and Slipstream Fiction" to "the same large

'wonder tale' umbrella" that is supposedly disconnected from our real world (Atwood, *In Other*

Worlds 8; 61; Ghosh, *Great* 72). But in her review of *Flood* and elsewhere, Le Guin is well

known for questioning this Atwoodian contention, with its "arbitrarily restrictive definition" (Le

Guin, "Year"). Notably, *Flood* demonstrates both real-world and sf qualities, which are equally

important to an understanding of the narrative. That is, Atwood's MaddAddam books, with their

investigation of changing geographies, adhere to at least some elements of this world—set in an

imagined future though they are—and therefore complicate both Atwood's and Ghosh's

positions.

In Suvinian terms, our cognitive estrangement is comparably less, or at least of a different

nature, in imagining Toby and Ren's narrative than in immediately imagining that of Snowman's

beachscape before having been introduced to Jimmy's somewhat-relatable, yet somehow offset

bildungsroman. These separations from our time demonstrate Atwood's formal presentation of

dystopian[134] aspects, whether ecocritical or critical.[135] Whether Atwood is deliberately working

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[134] In his review of *Flood*, Jameson also posits that "[i]t is an interesting theoretical question
whether to distinguish this generic version—Apocalypse or the end-of-the-world story, Mary
Shelley's *The Last Man* and the post-nuclear landscapes—from the densely inhabited dystopias
of various kinds of which these books have also given us a sample. [His] … feeling is that the
post-catastrophe situation in reality constitutes the preparation for the emergence of Utopia itself,
which, to be sure, in Atwood's [*Flood*] we reach only by anticipation" ("Then" 7). Of course, at
the time of the review, *MaddAddam* was still four years from being published, and the hard-
fought achievement of its tenuous Utopia an unlikely consideration what with the limited
perspectives seen in *Oryx* and *Flood*. Who would have guessed that the pigoons would become a
part of this complex community?

[135] She also offers some of her own terminological ideas with "ustopia" (*In Other Worlds*). It is
unclear whether this term will enter common usage, and even if it does not appear to have done
so on a large scale since she suggested it in 2011, at least three critics borrow the term: Marleen
S. Barr ("America"), Eduardo Marks de Marques, and Shelley Boyd. The latter two write about
Atwood's MaddAddam books.

to shift generic categories and sub-categories is unclear, though she does comment elsewhere about trends in these genres, such as in her interview with Halliwell where she discusses the "kind of utopian thinking" that features "first catastrophe, then blissful wonderfulness" (Halliwell 257-58)—a comment which might actually be an accurate model for the overall plot of the MaddAddam texts. What is undeniable, however, is how the narratives present information in relation to the actual timelines being referenced. In the timeline or order of events for each book, a sense of places either moves from known to representative, and thus from ecocritical to critical in dystopian generic terms, or from "known" place to unrecognizable (or nearly so). The latter is different than the critical dystopian presentation, which is not interested in a specificity of place, and features an extrapolated alteration to the geography involved (which is potentially traceable). But the critical dystopian presentation has no evident connection to physical reality. For example, though, in the real world, the RejoovenEsense compound may have referred to a particular geographical feature, landmark, or even address, even with its proximity or access to New New York, it instead stands in for yet another corporate stronghold and not a particular place. Yet the presentation of each set of dual timelines is offered in reverse, with Snowman's beach, Toby's AnooYoo hideout, and the world of the cobb house given first, and discussions of altered real-world place names after (that is, in the flashbacks in each MaddAddam book). Each of Atwood's iterations of this set of texts therefore moves *formally* from critical to ecocritical dystopia, even if the "present" and closing scenes of each narrative remain altered and somehow alien to the current day reader. By the end of each portion of the MaddAddam narrative, readers emerge with a somewhat more nuanced understanding of the geographical markers extrapolated from our time, even if the sense of cognitive estrangement is still strong. With an impression of real-world places inflecting the narrative(s) in this formal

manner, these books are, overall, significant contributors to the ecocritical dystopia. But generic shifts aside, the suggestion is that our known world has become unknown, which is the work of ecocritical dystopia. Ultimately, even the critical dystopian resonances from the time between ours and Jimmy's formative years (that is, pre-JUVE) will fade as ecological agents overcome the remnants or as the mixed and likely very different cultural values of the new human, Craker, and pigoon community take hold.

Chapter 4

The Dystopian Now: Placing Indigenous

North America in King's *Back of the Turtle*

Thomas King's *The Back of the Turtle* (2014) is bookended by and seeded with storytelling, which is a mode characteristic of the author, and opens as the non-Indigenous,[136] blue-eyed, red-bearded, tall, lanky, and balding Nicholas Crisp (*Turtle* 31) and his companion dog sit by a foggy ocean shore at dawn, somewhere north of Vancouver (153, 333, 426). But the narrative is not about these two characters, *per se*, since they fill somewhat of a choric role in the overall novel and their involvement is intertwined with the lives of others. The most urgent story being told here is about what happened to their community and what its remnants will do after having been subjected to the horrible environmental devastation of a lab-engineered defoliant application gone awry in the fictional Kali Creek and its watershed. "One hundred and thirty-seven" Indigenous individuals were killed and "three hundred" subjected to hospitalization[137] when the disaster occurred on "March 9, 2011" (426),[138] but the event also carved out a terrestrial and oceanic spread of ecological death at the same time. At its heart, *Turtle* considers the difficulties and possibilities of rebuilding community after such a disaster.

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[136] Crisp's non-Indigeneity is established when he begins to tell the Creation story of Sky Woman (*Turtle* 222).

[137] The character Mara recalls that, then "the government had forced the surviving families off the reserve. For their own safety, the officials had said … the families had been relocated to Saskatchewan and Manitoba, to communities … far away from Samaritan Bay" (156).

[138] This is the same date as the first foreshocks of the Great Sendai Earthquake, "beginning … with a M 7.4 event approximately 40 km from the epicenter of the March 11th earthquake, and continuing with another three earthquakes greater than M 6 on the same day" (United States Geological Survey, "M 9.1"). The event on March 11, 2011 spawned the infamous tsunami that caused the Fukushima Nuclear Accident (Pletcher and Rafferty).

The origin of that catastrophe seems to begin with Dr. Gabriel Quinn (454; 408-409), who was until recently an employee of the Domidion company and who goes missing alongside a sea turtle from the tank in the corporation's lobby. CEO Dorian Asher[139] works to have his people (namely the imperturbable personal aide Winter) uncover not just what has happened to Gabriel but also how the damage to public perception of the company might be mitigated or even undone. Tellingly, Dorian does not seem to really care what happened to the turtle, which says a lot about Domidion and its relationship with the ecological world—and especially its efforts to manipulate life in the service of its economic end-goals. This carries over to the development of the defoliant: by "'rearrang[ing] the DNA'" (454), Gabriel helps design the product "GreenSweep" (*Turtle* 91) that causes the devastation. Yet it is important to note that, despite his recommendation to shelve what he sees as a dangerous creation, the company still uses it outside of the laboratory. The bioengineered substance is subsequently applied at a greater-than-desirable magnitude along a shoreward path through Pacific Northwest foliage in order to carve a route for a pipeline project leading from the Alberta oilsands to a "proposed … deep-water terminus" (*Turtle* 83). This fossil fuel industry catastrophe is also later echoed by seepage from and then a failure of contaminant-laden waste water pond walls near the Alberta oilsand sites along the Athabasca River, which induces a "'higher than expected mortality rate'" in adjacent "'Native communities'" (437). Gabriel's culpability is thus only partial, as it is revealed that Domidion is King's representation of a transnational biotechnology corporation intent on covering up its many environmental mishaps, and that there have been a great many throughout

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[139] The CEO's name is an obvious play on the eponymous character of Oscar Wilde's 1890 *The Picture of Dorian Grey*. In an interview with Jennifer Andrews, King comments that, in *Truth and Bright Water* (1999) "the bridge itself is a *Picture of Dorian Gray* kind of structure" (Andrews 173), so he has had this iconic narrative on his mind for a while.

its shady history. Nevertheless, feeling the weight of his role in engineering GreenSweep,

Gabriel comes to the site of devastation near the fictional town of Samaritan Bay to atone for his

part in the company's error, and Crisp and the dog (called Master Dog, but also Soldier and later

Salvage) watch Gabriel wade out on a "sand flat" toward the Apostles, a set of ocean-battered

basalt columns that jut out of the water (4). There, he plans to give himself to the incoming tide.

Turtle is a novel of return, for both Gabriel and Mara, a local from the nearby Smoke

River Reserve, come back to witness the destruction wrought by the defoliant. After growing up

on the reserve, Mara eventually left to study and make art in Toronto as a stepping-stone toward

her dreamed-of art centre in Paris, and thus did not succumb to the disaster that is also called the

Ruin. She returned only to discover a world devoid of most life. In a dramatic twist, Gabriel also

has ties to this fictional Indigenous community adjacent to the affected waterway, the beach that

Crisp and the dog watch, the beachside Ocean Star Motel where Crisp's orphaned nephew lives,

and the further (ostensibly unaffected) non-Indigenous town of Samaritan Bay. Those living at

Smoke River were nearly wiped out by Domidion's biotechnological manipulation, and two of

the casualties were Gabriel's sister Lilly and nephew Riel. In a further complication, Mara was

Lilly's best friend. But Gabriel had neither met Mara nor his nephew, for he had long been

estranged from his late mother Rose and his recently deceased sister after their father moved to

Minneapolis to work as a police officer and split the family apart. Rose refused to go south of the

border and eventually returned to Smoke River after her husband died and she got "sick" (361)

with "'Dementia'" (401)—only, Gabriel had never lived there and so had no knowledge of

where to find his mother and sister after his father was shot and killed. In fact, his mother often

discouraged him from asking about Smoke River when he was growing up, saying, "'It doesn't

exist'" (315). But Crisp sends Gabriel an anonymous, blank card with a photograph of his sister

and her son (312); the only place identification is the Samaritan Bay "postmark" (314), which is the clue Gabriel needs to find where his mother and sister had vanished to. It is here, in this location within his matrilineal family's traditional territory, that he plans to hold the ceremony of his death, to sacrifice himself for what his work wrought in the name of science and industry, as he created a post-apocalyptic, dystopian setting. Instead, he is saved by the emergence of strange people from the surf[140] as his altruistic nature takes hold, and then later saved again by the process of dealing directly with his grief as he gets to know Mara and as he transitions into being a member of the new community forming after the devastation of the old.

King's novel does not immediately seem dystopian, apocalyptic, or speculative in the traditional sense of the terms, but it still explores dystopian conditions within specific places, and navigates the aftermath of environmental catastrophes that, for the localities experiencing them, are nothing but apocalyptic. Maybe the point is that the supposedly speculative elements of the narrative—a dramatic man (Crisp) who orates with the intensity of a Greek demigod, an ostensibly sentient dog (Soldier) who seems caught up in influencing important events, a supernatural-like people emerging from the sea, and a set of disasters that have not yet occurred in the real world—can all be anchored in reality. The various environmental fallouts in the story certainly all can, and it is essential to note that, unlike the false speculative elements just mentioned, the crises with environment are the aspects that also actually allow the novel to resonate with sf literature. With this in mind, *Turtle* is an excellent lens through which to view how close and current the disasters and dystopian conditions of the near future (of the *present*) are and have been displayed in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous literatures, as seen through

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[140] These turn out to be Taiwanese (*Turtle* 433) people who had been trapped abord the Domidion-owned, GreenSweep-laden ship, the *Anguis*.

King's bringing together of peoples, locales, and regions. For these reasons, including King's use of some real-world places negatively affected by environmental issues, I count *Turtle* as contributing to ecocritical dystopianism.

Though topical to some core issues featured in novels about dystopian futures and other speculative visions of ecological and cultural catastrophe, *Turtle* does not appear to be set in the future. At most, it is set either in the very near future or perhaps in the present. Seen this way, *Turtle* is not a novel that might normally be considered dystopian according to definitions like Fredric Jameson's, for instance. Yet King's narrative still features a catastrophe of magnitude that has never occurred in the real-world, and its avoidance of explicit futurity does not discount it from depicting a dystopian setting. In fact, keeping in mind the ecocritical dystopian mode of exhibiting a more immanent catastrophe than that of classic or critical dystopias, and of working to reduce the temporal gap that typically separates the time of the reader from that of the narrative world in established dystopias, the novel's resonance with the present is quite fitting— as are the crises themselves. *Turtle* introduces "current" environmental disasters with speculative elements that involve the defoliant-gone-haywire and the somewhat-related failure of what are several contaminant-laced, Domidion-owned fossil fuel industry settling pond walls (287-88). Both, as well as other secret ecological mishaps buried in the past, can be laid at the proverbial doorstep of the fictional company, a transnational corporation reminiscent of Monsanto. As Daniel J. Rowe cleverly interprets, the fictional company name also stands in for the colonial nation-state that transitioned into modern-day Canada, since the name is "Domidion (dominion, get it?)" ("Thomas" 16). It is important to a critique of both continued resource extraction and colonialist thinking that King sets up this comparison. As Imre Szeman reminds us, Canada (including its previous state as a Dominion), is "a country built up around extraction" ("What").

In the real-world nation at the time of King writing *Turtle*, the disasters portrayed in the novel were partly fears and partly possibilities—thus effectively fitting *Turtle* within the speculative fiction realm, yet also toeing the line to keep a strong connection with realism, which is the purview of the ecocritical dystopia. Industry-related environmental catastrophes were certainly not unknown before King's novel came out; yet the relatively well-known and ongoing local or regional issues of the comparable Mount Polley containment wall failure in the Cariboo region of British Columbia and of increasing evidence about tar sands settling pond contaminant seepage into the Athabasca had either not occurred or had not been fully examined. Interestingly, the Mount Polley disaster began on August 4, 2014, only thirty days before the original publication of *Turtle* on September 2 that year, which essentially means that it is highly unlikely that King would have rewritten or added his narrative's Athabasca oilsands issues at the very last minute, given what is usually an extended writing, editing, and publication process with any novel. Moreover, while many human-caused and / or bioengineered environmental catastrophes have occurred in the world, none has been like GreenSweep as it coursed down Kali Creek, along the Smoke River, and out into Samaritan Bay.

The primary narrative vehicle for speculative, dystopian environmental elements in the novel is GreenSweep, the rather innocent-sounding defoliant product that is King's direct critique of corporate greenwashing since it is named "[a]s though it were a handy household cleaning product" (464). Yet GreenSweep also causes the Ruin, which Laura Eggertson notes is, in true King fashion, "That One Bad Day" (see also Reid) when the Kali Creek watershed that feeds the Smoke River and Gabriel and Mara's homeland is decimated, including "all life in the bay and [a] kill zone out into the ocean some twenty kilometres" (*Turtle* 324). While this extent affected is eclipsed by the real-world accumulation of nutrient enrichment at the mouths of major

ocean tributaries and the resultant hypoxic areas that can vary from location to location globally,

King's message is encapsulated in the destructive potential of human-made products, which can

include fertilizers, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, and many other lab-made products. The Gulf of

Mexico dead zone, for instance, results from the Mississippi River carrying "massive amounts of

nutrients—particularly nitrogen and phosphorus—from lawns, sewage treatment plants, farm

land and other sources" (Nature Conservancy, "Floods") into offshore waters and "can cover up

to 6,000-7,000 square miles" (Bruckner). Its "largest dead zone ever recorded" was the size of

New Jersey (Smith, "New"), which outstrips the oceanic impact emerging from Kali Creek and

the Smoke River. But despite the extent of some of these real-world occurrences, the range of

GreenSweep's kill zone indicates a prodigious area of devastation that includes a dramatic

mortality rate well-inland upon the route of watershed delivery to the ocean. This, just as

tragically, includes the disappearance of a community of people, which is, as a further tragedy,

never investigated[141] or resolved on a governmental level in the narrative, except to effect a

removal of survivors from the reserve. Tellingly, since the nearby town of Samaritan Bay

appears to be unaffected by GreenSweep's ecological ruination, King is commenting on levels of

privilege and ignorance in North American society when it comes to ongoing environmental

issues.

     Turtle is an ecocritical dystopian novel that also falls into the realm of Indigenous

speculative fiction—a genre often engaging in resistance to and taking action against ongoing

settler-invader colonialism. In Shelley Streeby's discussion of climate change and activism, she

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[141] The Domidion CEO Dorian says that "it would have been front-page news had it not been for the earthquake in Japan and the resulting tsunami that destroyed the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear facility …. For the next month, every news outlet settled on that single story, and … Kali Creek [was] subsumed and forgotten in the more powerful images of nuclear Armageddon" (324).

opines that "people of color and Indigenous people use science fiction and other speculative genres to remember the past and imagine futures that help us think critically about the present" (5). King's novel is only in the loosest sense a work of science fiction, but a biotechnological imagining does drive the main crisis of the narrative, and Gabriel's journey alongside that of this community is definitely one of overcoming the violent colonial processes still fundamental to late capitalism, or in this case what Andreas Malm calls the mechanisms of "fossil capital." GreenSweep is Domidion's laboratory adaptation of "'the SDF 20 variation'" (*Turtle* 42) of the *Klebsiella planticola* bacterium found in plant root systems, and "while SDF 15 was a beneficial bacterium, the genetically modified version … turned out to be an environmental nightmare" that "killed all plant life" (42). Its further adaptation by Domidion indeed resonates with science fictional work—though the specific connection of *Turtle* to that genre fades there and the further focus is on the current drives of hypercapitalistic constructs as they conflict with living and cultural systems. The two parts of the research team to which Gabriel belongs are told to "'increas[e] the virulence'" yet reduce "'its life cycle'" and extend the "'environmental range'" even as they prevent "'horizontal gene transfer'" (408). But "'limiting the … life cycle'" and "'eliminat[ing] the risk of genetic transfer'" (408) proved unachievable, and Gabriel's suggestion that Domidion end the project was made because "'GreenSweep had the potential to become an event horizon'" (409). Tellingly, the destructive swath of GreenSweep echoes other comparable compounds in speculative fiction, such as the disastrous *ice-nine* from Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963) or the mutated, plastics-eating *Pseudomonas* bacterium from Scott Fotheringham's *The Rest Is Silence* (2012). King even inserts a phrase into *Turtle* that, as with Vonnegut's novel, connects to J. Robert Oppenheimer's oft-repeated comment in relation to the "'Bhagavad-Gita'" (*Turtle* 62): "'I am Death, the destroyer of worlds'" (454, 62). But King's

GreenSweep does not reach a globally-distributed stage in the arc of the novel, and the impact is instead currently regional or local in the present of the story.

That being said, it is also true that the implications of the product and Domidion's influences transition toward a larger, more international scale by the end of *Turtle* (513-15), where it is suggested that they might sink (515) "'10,000 litres of concentrate'" (441) either on its ocean journey or in "'The Gulf of St. Lawrence'" (515). Given adoption into industrial usage and/or free reign to enter ecosystems on a larger scale, such a speculative compound as GreenSweep might have the magnified environmental impacts with more widespread damage on the scale of the now-banned insecticide Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (known more commonly as DDT, and featured in Carson's *Silent Spring*) or maybe approaching the total change of *ice-nine*. As Rowe writes, King's novel is "a cynical look at Canada's environmental policy centered on a catastrophe involving a chemical spill similar to Agent Orange (the chemical defoliant sprayed on the Vietnamese countryside in the Vietnam war) that destroys a big swath of pristine nature on the Pacific Ocean. The catastrophe destroys a turtle habitat, and the Smoke River community that sits adjacent to the turtles' nesting ground" ("Thomas" 16). Of course, GreenSweep is of a magnitude greater than Agent Orange since it is presented as wreaking more widespread havoc and death than the latter is known to have done and, as the Domidion CEO Dorian explains, Agent Orange is "a chemical combination of two phenoxyl herbicides that had been contaminated with dioxin," while "GreenSweep [i]s a bacterium" (*Turtle* 320). This fictionally-adapted bacterium kills mammals and sea-life outright, whereas Agent Orange was only known to have produced severe health problems such as rare cancers ("Veterans")—as horrible as those effects were alone. But though the Ruin is a fictional, speculative element in the novel, at least the initial adaptation of the bacterium is not, since a

real-world European biotech company worked on modifying it under what seems to be shady oversight procedures.[142] King introduces friction between the speculative and the real, and to further provide tension here, also has Gabriel continually make reference to human-caused ecological disasters throughout the real-world. King's narrative thus has much to anchor it in tangible concerns, so despite the fictional mode of the Smoke River Reserve and its surroundings, with GreenSweep and its speculative aspects, the imagined holding-pond failures, and *Turtle*'s roots in realism, the combination produces the necessary elements comprising the ecocritical dystopia.

King's Ecocritical Dystopia

King is not an author known in general for his dystopias. It is true that he tends to play with perceptions of reality that trouble particular worldviews, but he neither sets most of his stories in the near-future nor usually articulates these narrative worlds in classical, critical, or ecocritical dystopian terms. Some of his works even present speculative approaches that nevertheless have nothing to do with imagining futurity. Instead, though these other stories also work to trouble settler-colonial social and cultural expectations, they offer *alternate* aspects of reality that resonate with Indigenous worldviews. Here I do not mean that they represent the subgenre of "alternate history" fiction in its sf vein,[143] but that they offer different perspectives toward viewing "reality" than those usually understood by Eurocentric ones. But, in *Turtle*, King

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[142] There was a controversy around the adaptation of SDF 20, with the initial concerns raised by one Dr. Elaine Ingham and colleagues (Holmes et al.), which King acknowledges: "In the 1990s, a German company genetically modified the original bacterium to allow it to accelerate the decomposition of plant litter and produce alcohol as a by-product" (*Turtle* 42).

[143] This is the tradition that considers the "what if" of alternate historical outcomes (like Nazi Germany prevailing), and thus imagines narratives situated in such storyworlds.

presents different generic traits, even if we can say that novels like his *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) engage with a post-colonial spectrum of speculative elements like Ibis Gómez-Vega's suggestion of "magical realism" (see also Slemon). With *Turtle*, such terms become problematic, as the sf contributions instead shift toward considerations of realism, technology, and time that imagine forward rather than work to destabilize present history through the specific invocation of cultural understandings. Despite how postcolonial readings can be tied to literary and critical traditions (Slemon), the problem here is that the current day situation for Indigenous peoples worldwide—including North America—is hardly *post*colonial. This is a fact reflected across emergent Indigenous sf literature.[144] Ultimately, *Green Grass* and *Turtle* have different generic resonances, and this separation is underlined by their approaches to alterations of reality. In *Turtle*, King echoes the real-world settler colonial industrial practice of proceeding with projects despite impacts on Indigenous cultural histories and traditional spaces when GreenSweep scours Smoke River traditional territory from Kali Creek to the ocean, and also with the wastewater leakage and dam failures from oilsands company constructs into the Athabasca. Though these events are set in the near-future, the environmentally-related alterations are the narratives of the dystopian now, of the ecocritical dystopia set in such close proximity with the present moment that a temporal separation is almost non-existent: *Turtle* is a valuable example of the intersection between reality and futurity, and of how Indigenous sf relates to ecocritical dystopianism in a unique way.

A reading of each of *Turtle* and *Green Grass* depends on what one views as "real," which is a point delivered in the latter through how characters have trouble navigating shifts in realism

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[144] The magic realism terminology, at least when directed toward Indigenous literature, also strikes me as the Western literary tradition attempting to make sense of cultural systems and literacies from the colonist's perspective rather than from the perspective of origin.

(a speculative fiction trend in Indigenous literature explored in novels like Eden Robinson's

2000 *Monkey Beach*, for instance). In King's earlier novel, the Trickster Coyote not only affects

events and the expected normal conditions of the world according to settler-colonial, non-

Indigenous society's worldview, but also playfully dreams of a dog that then styles itself a god

and further promotes its status, with capitals, to "GOD" (1-3). Chaotic and apocalyptic overtones

ensue, and the major plot arc of *Green Grass* is in attempting to resolve this conflict, from the

"supernatural" world and into the lives of humans. But though, in *Turtle*, Crisp gives off hints of

supernatural or divine interventions in his conversations with his companion dog, the actual

human drama of the narrative seems much less impacted by these forces (if at all) than in *Green

Grass*. While it is true that there are at least three instances in *Turtle* where King plays with the

reader's sense of the real world, two of these are not really highlighted as "supernatural" in the

way that Coyote's actions are in *Green Grass*. These involve the question of whether the egg-

laying turtle Big Red is the one who vanished from the Domidion tank (492-93) and how the

Domidion ship *Anguis* gets from the West Coast (498) to a route that might end in the St.

Lawrence (515). Neither of these dilemmas is resolved, and it is their inherent uncertainty that

seems more relevant than a presentation of speculative elements; in contrast, it is quite clear that,

in *Green Grass*, Coyote's dreaming and actions provoke a "slippage" in reality, but neither of the

uncertainties of the turtle or the ship in *Turtle* are framed in the same way. Rather, in the latter

novel they are simply anomalies that cannot be reasoned with from the speakers' perspectives,

and not pivot-points that alter the plot.

    Such is the aura of mystery with which King also styles the dramatic character Crisp,

who, for me, embodies a tendency for outside observers to apply significance to events that are,

in reality, merely ordinary. He plays into the third instance of potentially shifting reality when an

ostensibly homeless "woman" with "blue eyes" (469) and (as it turns out) "red" hair (471) offers

to tell Dorian his "'fortune'" (469) on the streets of Toronto. This rather indeterminate person,

whose features keep changing, not only talks in general like Crisp, but says "'I am well … if you

are well, too'" (471). The exchange echoes how, in the bookending sections of *Turtle*, Crisp says

to the dog "'I am well, if ye be well, too'" (2; 518), but this is simply a mirroring set up to

suggest meaning. That is, King is saying that not only Dorian, but also people in general ascribe

significance to the day-to-day, looking for the miraculous and the portentous. The reader is

included in such a determination, but the woman on the street is merely another person that

Dorian encounters, and is not Crisp, even though King deliberately uses the word "crisp" (469)

in describing the woman's eyes. There is nothing else to solidify that this is, for instance, some

multifaceted, doubled version of a deified Crisp; it is instead more possible that this "woman" is

Crisp's vanished sibling, if anyone, and if the character Sonny's missing dad has transitioned

into a woman (there are no other indications of this in the novel). But it is far more likely that

this is only just another person living on the streets of Toronto. This would fit with countless

narratives of Indigenous individuals moving to urban areas. Yet it does not seem as if Crisp and

his family are Indigenous—at least through his reticence when about to tell the story of Sky

Woman, which is shown in the following exchange:

> "but it's not my story to tell. I only do so when there's not a proper human
>
> being in the assembly."
>
> "He means an Indian," said Mara.
>
> "It's a story that comes with the land, and the two are forever wedded."
>
> (222)

Perhaps the nod is instead to non-urban community members having similar experiences, when arriving in cities, but the conversation demonstrates not only that Crisp is not Indigenous, but that this matters to the story being told. As with the potential misreading of the role of Soldier, Crisp's dog friend, I read these deliberately drawn connections as King playing on readers' expectations from having engaged with *Green Grass*. After all, it is Crisp who suggests that his companion dog might have a more substantial influence on the narrative than just a regular dog, even if the dog never shows proof of the sentience given to Coyote in *Green Grass*. Crisp is, in the end, just a man who is far less omniscient and omnipotent than his rhetoric would have him be. He is just another person living in the world, with human passions and failures, such as with his inability for much of the narrative to bond with his nephew, Sonny. There is some potential slippage into the territory of *Green Grass* here, but *Turtle* is ultimately a different type of book, and its registers must therefore be read as such. This is also why *Turtle* is of such note in the body of King's writing.

While writers of Indigenous ecocritical dystopias obviously imagine future alterations to places, environments, and society, many also present changes applied to changes already imposed upon Indigenous cultures in the long process of alterations since Contact—for the dramatic shifts that occurred are still ongoing, which also means that such processes will continue to affect cultural aspects, ecological factors, and a sense of places and spaces into the future. This is illustrated by the fact that existing constructs like suburbia and the concrete jungle are rather new to this landscape; they are a glaring departure from what used to be. As Alan Weisman recalls for us, even Manhattan, that quintessential bastion of skyscraper and capital, had "more than 40 brooks and streams that traversed what was once a hilly, rocky island" that "the Lenni Lenape" called "*Mannahatta*" (23). Here the Lenni Lenape "cultivated corn, beans,

squash, and sunflowers" amidst a backdrop that was otherwise "green and dense" (33).[145] This example also makes clear that the naming of geographical markers has been vastly inflected by the social control applied by colonial settler-invader society; though there is a suggestion through several recent examples that place-name based reconciliation efforts are indeed underway, it is also true that many of these are merely token gestures that do little to reverse actual living conditions and historical experiences under colonial rule.

In *Turtle*, King is critiquing just that when the Domidion CEO Dorian indicates that his corporate "world headquarters" (*Turtle* 14) is on "'Tecumseh Plaza'" (284, 14, 15-16), which is "a bunkered arrangement of concrete low-rises that was supposed to resemble a circle of Native longhouses" (14). Instead of fostering community, this is a location where, "[i]f you were supposed to be in Tecumseh Plaza, you knew where to go. Otherwise, you had no business being there at all" (14). This is a locus of privilege derived from financial status. Several aspects of our established social infrastructures corresponding with this "new world protocol" (14) currently impede a renewal to values more aligned with traditional Indigenous worldviews and ways of living:[146] the places of contemporary North America have very clearly undergone extreme shifts from the moment of Contact onward, and King captures their iterations in the petromodern constructs and hypercapitalistic dead zones of the current day. His insertion of Gabriel's return to his childhood home resonates with how the suburban community project expands Lethbridge

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[145] See also Brent Bellamy and Imre Szeman's critique of Weisman's "thought experiment" (193), since the "only reason to think of a world without us is to use the knowledge generated through such a narrative experiment to reimagine a world *with* us" (194).

[146] A comparable example in fiction of such an extension of knowledge is the book from Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1994), which has "diagrams of plants" with "[a]rrows point[ing] to parts of them that were useful for healing, a root, a leaf" (256) and "symbols for sun and moon which depicted the best times of day to gather the plants" (257); the discovery of such a source promises to extend cultural legacies, though this suggestion in *Solar Storms* of having to rely on written records is also problematic from a traditional perspective.

into vital riparian marshland and edges out the "pelicans" (339, 341-42, 361, 405) that Gabriel

had seen with his sister when he was younger (341-42). On his way toward the house, he

"walk[s] down to the river bottom," steps "off the path to stand in the stiff prairie grass," and

sees "the stand of cottonwoods and the bend in the river where they had seen the pelicans" (405).

But, in these moments, he also does not encounter the wildlife that he had when he went to the

"coulees" (341-42) with his sister Little (Lilly). He wants to reconnect with the heritage of this

place and says that there "had been a moment when he thought that there might be a bond in the

blood, that he would remember the land, and the land would remember him" (405), but this

recognition never happens. Any resonance with this place has disappeared with his family and it

is merely another suburb surrounded by a now somewhat stilted and certainly changing[147] prairie

landscape. Instead, he is greeted with stereotypical responses that wonder if he might be a

"'criminal'" (407) rather than a Stanford student. These suburban intrusions that subsume vital

ecological areas adjacent to city infrastructures are thus equally as detrimental as the more

quickly-acting GreenSweep is on the British Columbia coast. Notably, in the novel, both work to

negate community bonds, for such ties are always vulnerable to manipulation and distortion.

The environmental disasters in King's *Turtle* do not only disturb the fictional site of the

Smoke River Reserve and the obvious site of the Athabasca. King plays out his narrative to

affect a larger population, demonstrating that these problems are more than just local or regional,

and drawing us once again into the communal concern that the entire continent (arguably the

whole world) is being affected by the processes of modern living, including those perpetuated by

fossil fuel energy demands. King situates parts of his narrative in Toronto and, as we have seen,

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[147] Again, see the *Climate Atlas of Canada* mapping tool for how rapidly this environment is
changing and is projected to change in the future.

Lethbridge, amongst inclusions of many other places globally. While Toronto represents a jumping-off point for the ostensible perseverance of the rule of capital through the exploits of the Domidion CEO, who is also cleverly humanized by his personal trials, the role of Lethbridge is that of a growing metropolis that is continually altered by the expansion of suburbia. But these locations are also inextricably linked by the forces that construct and sustain them in their current guise. After all, Domidion maintains "'a sizable interest in Alberta's energy sector'" (112). This is further relevant since, as Stephanie LeMenager argues, suburbia is a form of "petrotopia," which "signif[ies] petroleum-utopia, to refer to the now ordinary US landscape of highways, low-density suburbs, strip malls, fast food and gasoline service islands, and shopping centers ringed by parking lots or parking towers" (64). Lethbridge is hardly at that great of a remove from the physical site of fossil fuel extraction referenced in King's novel; both Lethbridge and Fort McMurray are located in Alberta, and thus are readily linkable to the physicality of the industry, unlike Dorian's home-base, which, though still benefitting through extracted products, holds more of an economic role in the novel.

Maybe in *Turtle*, the suburb is a further extension of the "company town" trope that has not only been an institution in the real world, but also populates representative communities in dystopian fiction from Butler's Olivar through Atwood's Compounds (Ingersoll 165-66), to the hierarchical social structuring in Bacigalupi's beachside *Ship Breaker* (2010) society. As LeMenager indicates, the suburb is the ultimate expression of the social flow from the fossil fuel economy's promises. The suburb is a distinct point of failure in this Utopian project since it offers the pretense of continuous wealth and social status combined with a supposed freedom from sites of work and labour—especially in comparison with the real-world company towns from Disney World to Facebook to Google (Hammond) that are referenced within the futuristic

iterations just mentioned. Even Domidion's desire to control and contain its errant employee

Gabriel is not far off from the company town logic, which also pervades its appropriated

Indigenous community modelling in the fortified "'Tecumseh Plaza'" complex and perverts it by

ignoring the traditional relationships between people, land, and environment. Such a

rationalization is the embodiment of late capitalism's avoidance of responsibility in

transgressions of cultural, territorial, and ecological magnitude. In addition, though company

towns do not feature more directly in King's novel, when the character Gabriel recounts his

return to Lethbridge, the former landscapes of both his one-time home and the pelican habitat are

made confusing and alien, for they have been subsumed by not only the logic of the non-

Indigenous world's expansion into and colonization of ecological spaces, but also by an

attempted rejection of his right to be in that place.

Given the novel's speculative, rogue defoliant deployed to clear a path for an oilfields

pipeline, it is not a difficult logical leap to connect its additional ecological catastrophes to our

petromodern modes of living, of which the suburb might just be the representative end-point.

While Burtynsky's photography of Fort McMurray depicts a visual landscape of devastation, his

photo essay *Oil* leads to suburbia and beyond (see "Alberta Oil Sands #2," as well as "#6," "#9,"

and "#10"). Burtynsky implies a process or spatial ordering quite similar to that critiqued by

LeMenager with her petrotopia. In referencing Lethbridge, King is implicating the expansion of

modern petrocultural[148] cities, and through his two main environmental disasters, of the trail of

oil and capital working to create a world in which someone like Gabriel can no longer find

himself at home. King's inclusion of one of the cities with fabricated external communities that

continue to spread urban population into what were once farmlands and, before that, natural

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[148] See Karina Baptista's definition of "Petrocultures" for an overview of the critical field.

habitats—also a continuing factor in Alberta for Calgary and Edmonton—highlights the

disconnection that these planned artificial spaces have with environments within which humanity

could instead live in harmony. The particular suburban mould for the major cities of, in this case,

contemporary petrostate Alberta include the invitation of wide, paved streets and sidewalks

nestled around the manufactured "natural" spaces of ponds or "lakes" created to give the

impression of access to a world beyond asphalt, slate facades, aluminum siding, and small,

fenced "yards" complete with the requisite lawn.

King's *Turtle* employs the places and spaces of Alberta as a landscape (both physical and

political) that is inextricably wrapped up in the contemporary discussions of our current and

future world, including the continuing petro-extractive industry and how it might relate to

Indigenous peoples. It is a province built on past economic strategies that have perpetuated the

petrocultural leanings of modern society. Looking forward, future adopted strategies can

definitely play an important role in not only energy futures, but also in mitigating the potential

and very real, globally-relevant, environmentally-apocalyptic set of interconnected issues that are

often highlighted for climate change and its interconnected co-conspirators, not to mention the

continued loss of biosphere integrity[149] that relates to the ongoing 6th Mass Extinction. Here I

also insert somewhat of a personal note, as I live within or at least adjacent to the spaces and

places about which I write in this last chapter; we must all start to adopt modes of caring for

those persons, flora, fauna, and even insects in our shared environment. Instead of writing off the

health of the Athabasca like the Domidion CEO Dorian, even though "'[t]he fish kill is

massive'" (383) and "'[t]here are dead … fox, raccoon, deer, moose, bear, [and] coyote … along

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[149] "Loss of biosphere integrity" is the new term for "biodiversity loss and extinctions" explained
by researchers connected to the Stockholm Resilience Centre in their paper on "planetary
boundaries" (Steffen et al., "Planetary"; "Nine").

the banks for seventy-five kilometres downstream from the breach'" (383-84), modern society must instead move toward a re-conception of its relationship with the natural world. We might even learn from the thinking behind New Zealand giving both the Whanganui river (Roy, "River"; Tanasescu) and Mount Taranaki (Roy, "Mount") the same legal rights as human beings. *Turtle* suggests that we must all be a community, as we are all involved together. We must all become one to survive—and the time is now, not 100 years in the otherwise dystopian future. Of course, this is one of the major lessons of King's novel and implies a range from close local community to the larger, continental community, to the planet.

This is, in part, King's contribution to the ecocritical dystopia, for neglect of such elements ensures a far worse future for everyone. In her historicization of oil, LeMenager focuses on how the "relentless production of space creates problems of scale that, in turn, invite the return of repressed consequences, irreversible damage" (65). As with the character Ben's retreat into the wilderness of Nova Scotia in Fotheringham's *The Rest Is Silence*, Gabriel seeks his home in the outliers, but even the neon sign of the Ocean Star Motel continues to link him back to the pre-fabricated, dystopian world of the current day in which we are all increasingly complicit in affecting the ecological landscapes we inhabit and intersect with. The present-ness and yet potential futurity of King's novel helps illustrate how some contemporary dystopian fiction brings together the supposedly disparate times of the present and the future through a focus on place.

King's Dystopianism as Indigenous Survivance

Though King employs ecocritical dystopian modes when he examines Lethbridge through Gabriel's attempted return, he also wields fictional place in his contemplations. However, unlike

with Butler or Atwood, I would hesitate to call this critical dystopian fiction, since that dystopian subgenre involves what are undoubtably future settings separate from the current day. King often uses fictional place in his narratives, and Florence Stratton notes in her reading of his novel *Medicine River* (1989) that King's work has had some slippage between realism and fictional place before. *Medicine River* is neither a critical nor an ecocritical dystopia, but Stratton points to the statement "James and me grew up in an apartment on Bentham Street in Calgary" (*Medicine* 44) as an entry-point into reading the text. As she says, "[t]here is not now, nor was there ever as far as I can discover, a Bentham Street in Calgary …. Neither a realistic nor an incidental detail, 'Bentham' can most fruitfully be read as a reference to the eighteenth-century Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham and his panopticon" (12). This is the same mode of the symbolic overlaid upon the real that is being employed when King sets Gabriel's homeland in the Smoke River Reserve, near the town of Samaritan Bay, the Beatrice Hot Springs, and the Ocean Star Motel, with the Ruin beginning along Kali Creek. Like Bentham Street, from what I can tell, none of these are real-world place names.

While there is a Kalitan Creek in near-coastal British Columbia, this runs into Kitlope Lake, then the Kitlope River, before reaching saline water. Even then, this waterway has a long route to the coast and its terminus does not fit with a shoreline that would correspond with the one described in *Turtle*. Instead, the applicable area for Kali Creek, the Smoke River (and the Smoke River Reserve), and Samaritan Bay could very well be in Nisga'a traditional territory, which also abuts the Pacific. Perhaps the "death" and "smoke" references in the respective Kali Creek and Smoke River names are meant as a subtle reference to how 2,000 Nisga'a people lost their lives when the Tseax volcanic cone erupted over 263 years ago (Nisga'a, "Auto"). In this case, King's fictional geography would correspond to the re-named Ksi Sii Aks River (formerly

the Ksi Gimwits'ax), which re-emerged to lead into the much larger Nass River and now passes

several Nisga'a communities on its way to the ocean. The geothermal activity might also connect

with the hot springs that Crisp manages. Besides the smoke generated from lava-caused fires,

there is a history of a salmon smokehouse being opened there ("Ksi Sii Aks"). But the current

"vast lava beds serve as a memorial … and as a reminder of the importance of respect—for both

the natural world and the wisdom of the elders" (Nisga'a, "Auto"). Since this is essentially part

of the message King's book promotes, there is at least a resonance there. Yet the Nass River does

not appear to flow into a body of water that could resemble Samaritan Bay, nor does a non-

Indigenous town appear nearby. It is also unclear if any of the four "reserves" associated with

Nisga'a land would correspond with the fictional Smoke River Reserve ("First Nations";

Nisga'a, "Four"). Moreover, I am uncertain if there are any formations comparable to King's

rocky, offshore Apostles, where Gabriel tries to kill himself and finds the Taiwanese (*Turtle* 433)

woman named Mei-ling and her family (7-10, 432). The West Coast locale of the Smoke River

Reserve and its site of disaster at Kali Creek and the resultant ocean-bound path through the

Smoke River are merely representative of similar places. Since "[t]he GreenSweep … was

loaded onto the plane in Terrace, British Columbia," the real-world coastal Northwest of the

province is indeed indicated, but the specific locale is unstated, and thus more accurately applies

to a variety of possible scenarios.

King is careful to not name the particular Indigenous nation in his narrative, though

Gabriel's reminiscing recalls connections with several real-world peoples. The ambiguity about

the coastal group, however, could very well be because King's main narrator-like character acts

much in the way of a dramatic Greek choric figure—full of asides, archaic language, and

references to mythological feats—and, as a voice thus descended from a European or non-

Indigenous tradition, is constantly in danger of eclipsing or marginalizing Indigenous cultural

voices despite his altruistic and reconciling desires. In fact, Crisp worries about this as he begins

the telling of the Sky Woman story at his hot springs feast (222). But I feel that, at least with the

character Gabriel, who has transgressed against the natural world and produced the

environmental destruction that scoured Kali Creek of life, King is channeling here what I would

like to call a Sherman Alexie approach to presenting Indigenous identity. With Alexie, as with

this particular instance in King's work, the naming of specific Aboriginal heritage is not always

presented as paramount. While Alexie's characters are often Coeur d'Alene or of the Spokane

Nation, he does not tend to make this information immediate and central to an understanding of

those characters. Instead, they are just people, often living in present times.[150] The protagonists

simply are. They have modern lives and contend with the hurdles of the modern world. A more

nuanced reading of this approach is definitely necessary, but perhaps in King's work this says

something important about how modernity, the spectre and heritage of colonialism, and the

undeniable labour of trying to live a contemporary life somewhat voids us all of cultural heritage,

which we must then work to reinforce. An essential and self-identifying facet of King's Gabriel,

for example, is that he does not, for a long time, consider himself as culturally or maybe even

genetically Indigenous, though obviously he knows he is. The fault of this is not his own, as he

essentially has been removed from contact with all relations through first the separation of this

parents and then the death of his father. He also does not visibly appear to be Indigenous—at

least according to the problematic politics of visual identification and imposed blood quotas that

followed the process of colonialism. As Lynn Gehl has put it from her perspective on Algonquin

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[150] This also resonates somewhat with Drew Hayden Taylor's character Angel in *alterNatives* (2000), who it seems always just wanted to write science fiction more than anything.

land claims, "Canada invented the one-quarter blood quantum requirement and then indigenous heritage was passed down the male line." Colonial governmental structures initiated and enforced these patriarchal policies that were detrimental to Indigenous cultures. What many Indigenous people have done through generations is to simply attempt surviving the machines of colonialism and so-called modernization, but this does not make them any less entitled to their heritage. How many individuals since Contact have suffered the same fate? The number is likely incalculable, and horrifying.

King's choice to not identify Gabriel and Mara's homeland as a specific sovereign nation means that such a disaster as the Ruin could befall any coastal people in either the present day or the future. The text, therefore, often presents dystopian conditions but does not always include ecocritical dystopian registers. While a sense of place can be broadened in such a way that an area like the West Coast encompasses many locales, in some instances within *Turtle* there is an escape from real-world geography. But though King does not only adhere to the ecocritical dystopian mode, it is curious and notable how he allows slippage between real-world and representative geographies when he lists the trajectory of the communities in Gabriel's life: "Lethbridge. Minneapolis. Palo Alto. Toronto. Samaritan Bay" (472). Bud Hirsch argues that King "knows, as do traditional storytellers, that learning requires of listeners/readers an awareness of their own imaginative capacity and a willingness to engage it fully, symbiotically, with the story." Hirsch's point is that "King, through various narrative strategies, will trick us into self-scrutiny" (145). The reader fittingly becomes implicated in the problems of the story, whether King employs the ecocritical dystopia or another mode, and the final place name in the above list (also the only fictional one) suggests the necessity for a "good samaritan" in all places, with those preceding it given as tangible, geographical examples. The goal is the building of

caring and considerate community, from immediate locale to a larger scale. Importantly, King's

novel often refers to the North American continent more than to any specific locale or region,

even if he brings a few into play. While most of these locales and regions are Canadian, and

Gabriel also has some memories of Minneapolis (309-310), it is clear that King's indication of

community extends the scope of each place that informs the narrative. His title plays on an

Indigenous name for North America, Turtle Island, and connects with Indigenous worldviews

and modes of thinking as a part of its narrative, but the book cannot even be said to be strictly

concerned with its Indigeneity, as Caucasian, Asian, Indigenous, and nonhuman animal

characters occupy its pages and comprise its final community. The influence of those cultures

and others—like the clear references back to Greek and Roman mythology with Crisp's

character—suggest that the lessons of this novel are for *everyone* living on "the back of the

turtle," as it were, with the land and its ecosystems also playing a part as an "individual" affected

by events. Of course, the Indigenous influences upon the novel, the communal centerings of the

story, are both potent and paramount, but *Turtle* also emphasizes that no culture lives in a

vacuum, especially after it has been bombarded by the organizing principles of other social

systems for centuries.

Gabriel's re-integration into the world of the living is through more exposure to aspects

of his Aboriginal heritage, but it is apparent that his transgressions against both his people and

the natural world are achieved when he does not feel any particular connection to them. Before

coming to Smoke River, he tends to only *perform* living from a quite logical, scientifically-

minded approach, and does so without the benefit and guidance of community. This is not to say

that we do not benefit from the current efforts in science to understand the complex issues

surrounding ecological systems, watersheds, biotic interactions, physical resource extraction,

anthropogenic climate change, and the like. But King's novel presents technological advances as elements that are co-opted for profitable enterprise, and thus problematic as extensions of the current regime of global capitalism. Maybe it is a truth that the sciences present facts and the humanities philosophize about how those facts are then employed by various levels of stakeholders: this seems like an idea that Crisp would approve of, at least.

King's narrative ends with the renewal of the biotic lifeforms in and around the damaged creek and oceanfront to which Gabriel returns home, and thus the immediate dystopian conditions ebb. The choric character, Crisp, explains that "[t]he ocean had come back first. On the days when [he] swam out to the horizon, he found more and more signs of life. Small fish darting about the seaweed, urchins and anemones huddling together, crabs and starfish patrolling the rocks and sandy bottom, larger fish moving in from the depths" (516). This is a distinct change from how this area looked after the Ruin, and also contrasts directly with how the Domidion CEO Dorian claims he "appreciate[s] the simplicity and silence of empty water" (25) when he looks at the now-vacant company tank that used to house the turtle that escaped alongside Gabriel. In contrast, community buds again alongside the ocean's resurgence and the natural world's resilience to overcome the industrial, biochemical impact of the GreenSweep defoliant becomes intertwined with that communal healing.

The novel's reference to Turtle Island implies that we are all involved in and invited to engage in these healing practices, since this worldview suggests that all live on the back of the turtle. The title is also fitting since Gabriel is partly Anishinaabe, a people who employ such a naming for the continent. While it is unclear to which Nation his mother belongs, the "'Leech Lake [Indian Reservation]'" (110) is a real-world place, and thus has real-world cultural ties. For the Anishinaabe, at least, the history of the Turtle Island term ties into the creation story of their

people, the history of their engagement with the land, and an understanding of how the world is now, as Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair generously shared in the telling of this cultural history and worldview during his keynote address to the 2016 Under Western Skies conference on "water" ("Learning"). The turtle from these teachings bears the weight of the continent, at least, and like the living turtle escaped from Domidion's tank in King's novel, which has "a strange indentation in its shell, as though it had spent its life bearing a heavy load" (22), is an apt metaphor for the anthropogenic pressures that have been applied to not only North America, but the entire world. Healing of and by community is indeed required. Certainly, King's dramatic orator, his chorus, would have it so: Crisp strives throughout the narrative for a communal joining to surmount disaster that culminates in the group coming together to physically shove from their shores the ship the *Anguis*, which carries the remainder of GreenSweep. Together, they overcome the burden of their destroyer.

King's novel suggests that community flourishes alongside a natural world that we do not poison or ravage in our quest for resources. We sit on the back of this turtle, who swims through water that is finite, even if we cannot see that end from our perspective; if we are not careful to respect the process of renewal then perhaps we will suffer dire consequences. The failure of an Indigenous return or resurgence in a novel such as Bacigalupi's ecocritical dystopia *The Water Knife* (2015) is countered within *Turtle*, as both Gabriel and Mara, alongside the remains of their scattered community, are ultimately able to come home to a renewing ecological and communal sense of place. Dystopian or not, it is likely difficult to find a narrative with Bacigalupi's conclusions that is written by someone from any Indigenous culture. Even if the "homecoming

trope"[151] is troubled in a text like David Treuer's *The Hiawatha* (1999),[152] or elsewhere, a complete dying out of a people deemed "'all used up'" (Bacigalupi, *Water Knife* 100) is concerning, especially coming from a non-Indigenous writer. As counterexamples that include King's narrative, I am also thinking of Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart* (1978, 1990),[153] Nick DiChario's *Valley of Day-Glo* (2008), and Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018). Recent examples also include Harold Johnson's *Corvus* (2015), Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), which all contain ecocritical dystopian elements.

Indigenous ecocritical dystopias, rather than presenting a binary of the positive and the negative, can instead be taken collectively to demonstrate an opportunity to engage with human-caused environmental catastrophe from a common standpoint. As E. Richard Atleo indicates with his discussion of *tsawalk*, or a sense of oneness, the "ancient Nuu-chah-nulth assumed an interrelationship between all life forms—humans, plants, and animals. *Relationships are.* Accordingly, social, political, economic, constitutional, environmental, and philosophical issues can be addressed under the single theme of interrelationships …. [A]ll questions of existence, being, and knowing, regardless of seeming contradictions, are considered to be tsawalk—one and inseparable. They are interrelated and interconnected" (*Principles* ix). A community of human interactions with the rest of the world is highlighted, and non-Indigenous perspectives should take note, for all are affected. In the novel, this last is true for the bonds formed between

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[151] For further discussion on "homecoming," see William Bevis, Louis Owens, and Craig S. Womack's contributions.

[152] Padraig Kirwan argues that *The Hiawatha* opposes the "homecoming" trope apparent in a canonical Indigenous novel like N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968).

[153] The 1978 version is called *Darkness in St. Louis: Bearheart* and the 1990 one is called *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*.

humans and the natural world in Samaritan Bay, but also for those situated distantly, like Dorian

and Winter in Toronto. After all, the GreenSweep-laden *Anguis*, in the end of the novel,

approaches the St. Lawrence (515), and one distinct potential is that its dire problems are coming

home to Domidion to roost. This outcome is part of the travesty rooted in creating economic

hierarchies and a betrayal of the diverse cultural histories of our world; in contrast with the blind,

exclusive logic of late capitalism, we are all associated, together. *Turtle* suggests that the

resources of the land are not just there for us to hear the clink of coinage or watch the upward

tick of digital monetary values, but a part of our community as well, whether we live on the West

Coast, on the prairies, by the Great Lakes, or elsewhere.

Water, for instance—that environmental medium through which life returns to Gabriel

and Mara's homeland—belongs to and connects everyone. In an examination of extractive

resource industries (fossil fuels, minerals, water) and Indigenous efforts toward ecologically-

sound, sustainable futures, William Huggins writes that "[t]he vital spirit of water links human

cultures, stories, and families to our nonhuman animal relations" (54). This, he says, affects even

the stories we tell, and thus how we imagine and enact those better futures, for "respect moves

from literature to life" (58). Respect for the vital role of water and other elements of our

environment is not only essential now, but will always be a backbone to healthy, sustainable

communities. In King's novel, once the damage from GreenSweep starts to ebb and a communal

base starts anew, it is with the return of life like the pelicans from Gabriel's childhood (502-503)

and the hatching turtles (517) that hope is finally restored. *Turtle* reminds us that water is life;

water is community; water is the future. As Crisp says, the story "'starts as life herself starts. In

the water'" (386).

Near Future Resource Speculations

Turtle intertwines two resource-related issues that have become prominent both for how they are

currently handled and how they will be engaged with in the future: water and fossil fuels. This is

fitting, as two years after the publication of King's novel, those resources came into focus

through the vigilance of Indigenous peoples and their work to ensure hydrocarbon energy

infrastructures being built would avoid reserves of drinking water. While there are no

Indigenous-led protests in *Turtle*—instead, there are student-led ones, thus putting the role of

change partly into the hands of the youth opposing the established social order (75)[154]—

Indigenous peoples have not been silently standing by as the world is despoiled around them.

The unity and community of Water Protectors and their allies at Standing Rock demonstrate an

understanding that everyone is affected. This was the message when Madonna Thunder Hawk

came up from the South Dakota camp to talk with the 2016 Under Western Skies conference

attendees, who had gathered to weigh in on "water" from various angles. In discussing the

#NODAPL protests and other activism, Streeby also argues that this is the message offered

through every act of Indigenous resistance that works to incorporate a more integrated

relationship between society and environment. The lessons of Standing Rock are stark, and

poignant: the colonial, settler-invader nation-state and its multitudinous, bureaucratic branchings

of governance provide the possibility for violence against Indigenous peoples in the name of

expediting current systems of energy resources. Canada is not exempt from this mode of

thinking, either, since Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr invoked the military before

apologizing (Pugliese; McNeil), and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has also "said [that] Ottawa

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[154] Notably, *Turtle* was published well before the ongoing, worldwide, Greta Thunberg inspired, Extinction Rebellion connected, student-led climate breakdown and ecological crisis strikes, which began in October 2018.

doesn't recognize the unconditional right of First Nations to unilaterally block projects"

("Trudeau"). Such tensions will no doubt become more potent, as at the end of May 2018 the

Trudeau government announced the purchase of the controversial Trans Mountain pipeline from

Kinder Morgan (Harris, "Liberals") in an attempt to force doubled bitumen extraction in Alberta

toward coastal waters and foreign markets, even though Canada's oil exports to Asian markets

are unlikely to increase (Wilt). In the mounting tension, on "January 7, 2019," in support of

TransCanada's Coastal Gaslink project, "militarized police" including "RCMP and military

forcefully breached a peaceful checkpoint on unceded Wet'suwet'en territory" ("Arrests"). This

is exactly the kind of project that Crisp opposes in *Turtle*, and, referencing Lewis Carroll's

Through the Looking Glass (1871), he calls the proponents of that pipeline expansion

"Jabberwoks" (*Turtle* 83, 84). The connection with Carroll's related poem conjures two

resonances: first, that the pipeline advocates speak utter nonsense, and, second, that they are

monsters that, fittingly, "burble" through the forest (Carroll, "Jabberwocky"), which Crisp

echoes by saying "they blithered" and "blathered" (*Turtle* 84). Of course, this is the same

pipeline project for which Domidion's detrimental GreenSweep was deployed.

In the sense of prognostication through linking fossil fuel and water issues before more

mainstream attention was given to Water Protectors, *Turtle* is on the forefront of rethinking such

relationships. Here King eclipses work like Bacigalupi's *Water Knife*, which is a narrative

imagining the ongoing water resource crisis by extending the mega-drought occurring over the

past several years in the American Southwest (Meyer, "Mega-Drought"). In Bacigalupi's near-

future novel, the Colorado River and other aquifers are being overused or simply drying up

alongside the terrain surrounding the river. All interested parties, such as Las Vegas, Phoenix,

and California, want to secure the legal right to as much of the remaining water as they can, and

thus the control of water resources is a paramount social concern. However, here the solutions to

regional drought are focused within a technological shift to water-reusing mega-towers built only

for Bacigalupi's affluent—*Water Knife*'s arcologies[155]—and the self-rehydration "Clearsacs"

(*Water* 297) that make urine more consumable to those who do not have a palate like Bear

Grylls'. But these socio-technological fixes are fraught and two-dimensional compared to King's

careful consideration of an eco-communal revival that resonates with Indigenous cultural

registers. While Bacigalupi fittingly links the most "senior" water rights to a missing document

signed between the colonial government and the Pima or Akimel O'odham people, his narrative

falls short when it only imagines Indigenous people as an absence. His choice of the Pima, their

culture, and their ancestors is surely done simply as a plot device because the traditional name

for the Pima indicates a river people and that river's supply and resource have become so

threatened by the interests of regional bodies. Otherwise, Bacigalupi's dystopian narrative

displays a lack of direct knowledge about the Akimel O'odham, their real-world cultural

engagements with places and spaces, and any modes of resistance to climate change or colonial

settler-invader processes with which they have engaged historically in the real world. Bacigalupi

certainly does not speculate about how they might continue to foster relationships with their

environment in the future, which a work of Indigenous futurism would have done. Moreover,

unlike *The Water Knife*, King's novel also reminds us of facets of Indigenous history and active

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[155] The roots of Bacigalupi's arcology idea are in Arizona's experimental construct currently ongoing with Arcosanti, which "is an urban laboratory focused on innovative design, community, and environmental accountability" whose "goal is to actively pursue lean alternatives to urban sprawl based on Paolo Soleri's theory of compact city design, Arcology (architecture + ecology)" (*Arcosanti*). But Bacigalupi's more massive arcologies actively exclude those without the funds—and this is in the midst of a humanitarian crisis involving displaced citizens of the United States, which is a comment on their all-too-recent treatment of disaster victims rendered homeless.

resistance-in-place to rampant resource-extractive and environmentally damaging processes perpetuated by colonial governments and industry proponents.

As King imagines, in coastal British Columbia, Fort McMurray, and Lethbridge, the very near-future permutations of current real-world issues emerge, and water shapes the cultural and survival landscapes of local and regional communities. This issue is a galvanizing one that showcases both the cultural impacts upon and the absences of the Indigenous peoples in the modern day—peoples for whom the trauma of experiences post-Contact has been continual and multi-generational. In *Turtle*, Domidion forces its planned pipeline route from the Alberta tar sands to the British Columbia coast, and does not seem to care about impacts upon Indigenous lives and living spaces beyond the potential of negative press; moreover, it treats revelations of the failing oil industry wastewater dams as a mere annoyance. King's novel poses questions about water rights, use, and politics that are fast becoming central to North Americans as shifts in climate and industry pressures clash with the demands of modern living or threaten to set in motion mass displacements of people. But *Turtle* presents the ultimate resilience and renewability of water and its associated ecological community (including those nonhuman members subsisting in riparian or coastal zones). Even the temporary absence of Mara and Gabriel's Indigenous community survivors is featured as an inevitable return, despite the machinations of the silver-tongued, nonsensical, and duplicitous industry "Jabberwoks." The novel is also a change from the more traditionally-based manipulations of the settler-invader realities abutting the Indigenous understandings King presents in *Green Grass*. *Turtle* definitely does not work to negate Indigenous worldviews, but ultimately the crisis and its solutions are not centred within what an outsider point of view might call the fantastical or mythological. Instead, King's newer work arrives at truths and solutions located within the processes of the real world

and the role of community. It is to King's credit that his narrative is not so obviously set in the

near future, and this includes the fact that he therefore does not present his ecocritical dystopian

crisis as imminent, but rather as immanent. *Turtle* is anchored in the fragility of the present,

despite its speculative suggestions or elements.

This current-ness, this presentation of ongoing crisis includes the novel's speculative

holding pond failures "'North of Fort McMurray'" (*Turtle* 112) and not-so-speculative industry

desires to export fossil fuels. But even if King's novel advances potential catastrophes in a

demonstration of the near-future, it is less about the technological or the scientific (even if

GreenSweep also covers that angle) and more about the cultural resurgence that Gabriel and the

community experiences. Upon his arrival within his homeland, Gabriel knows much less about

interacting with living creatures such as a simple dog than he does about gene-splicing and

human-caused ecological disasters: he has an impressive list of the latter that he continually

inscribes or writes on surfaces wherever he dwells, such as with the "*SS Mont-Blanc*" and "'West

Anniston Creek'" (38).[156] His shift from an avoidance of traditional knowledge and experience to

a reconnection with the natural world outside of the lab is part of his personal toil toward

healing, from battling the encroaching surf as he attempts suicidal atonement to physically

experiencing both the skeletal remnants of Kali Creek itself (403-404, 406) and the empty

Smoke River Reserve. As Don McKay expresses in a comparable sentiment with the poem "Loss

Creek," "he went there to have it / exact" (1-2). That is, Gabriel needs to physically and

experientially engage with the place and its tangible markers of destruction, while mourning the

visible traces of life taken by GreenSweep. This is the process, though painful, that will regain

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[156] The former event is also known as the Halifax Explosion, where a munitions-laden ship
exploded in that harbour in 1917; the latter refers to a Superfund site holding PCBs produced by
Monsanto ("Anniston PCB Site"; O'Hagan, "Toxic").

for him the value of interaction with both the human and the natural worlds, thus rebuilding a full

sense of community that was lost.

While Gabriel was a scientist and had taught himself to think in the manner of

formulating the GreenSweeps, the *ice-nines*, or the JUVEs of non-Indigenous technoscientific

invention, King's presentation of Gabriel's very pointed homecoming narrative works toward a

destabilization of the now somewhat clichéd and unwieldly science-first mindset of so-called

mad-scientists in such fiction, and also of the clear hierarchical dialogue of science over culture

that had previously eclipsed all other aspects of Gabriel's life. Even Gabriel's sense of place

moves from one that catalogues disasters such as with "Quebec City" on "November 10,

1950,"[157] to one that considers how place can foster culture and relationships. Toward the end of

Turtle, after Gabriel has finally learned about his sister and walked the path of GreenSweep's

destruction, he has also confessed his role to Mara. While he once more tries to catalogue

disaster by attempting unsuccessfully to write "Church Rock" (473)[158] on the wet basalt of the

Apostles (the offshore sea-rocks where he intends to kill himself), he is about to transition from

lamenting to fostering a sense of place that is lived in by "'mooring'" (509) himself in Smoke

River near Mara, as Crisp puts it. No longer will he be the nomadic "'turtle'" that his sister Lilly

named him when they parted ways, since her conception is that "'[t]urtles carry their houses on

their back'" (259); instead, he will become rooted in place, in community, and in culture. This

will indeed be a homecoming that brings together a variety of factors associated with the region,

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[157] The Quebec City event is one where "radioactive dust … settled on the water and the shoreline" after "an American bomber" with "engine trouble over the St. Lawrence River" detonated "a Mark 4 nuclear bomb" without activating "[t]he plutonium core," and no one knew how to handle it, "since not asking was deemed to be better than knowing" (*Turtle* 60).

[158] Church Rock was "nuclear waste spill" in "the Puerco River" in "1979" that affected the "Navajo reservation" (473).

highlighting an importance of lives lived in combination with both land and water—a point

driving home, what with the industrial disaster of GreenSweep, the fragility of ecosystems that

sustain humans, plants, and animals from the terrestrial to the aquatic to the airborne. *Turtle*

suggests that all are interrelated not only in times of disaster, but also on a regular basis.

Another major conclusion of the novel is that human and other ecological communities

are entangled in a larger sense, since they straddle and are carried upon the back of the

continental turtle, as it were: that is, events and influences in one area have the potential to

interconnect with those in others. Westward from the oil industry's destructive path carved by

GreenSweep, moving the focus of *Turtle*'s plot back across the continental divide, King

demonstrates a distinct understanding of the near-future complexities that may very well plague

water as both a consumable resource and a tool and victim of the vast resource extraction

business. The novel indicates that the end-point of fossil fuel extraction is ecological and cultural

genocide. In the related Athabascan impacts of this system we get a further petromodern impact

on water and environment, which does not include the magnitude of contamination seen with

Kali Creek, the Smoke River, and Samaritan Bay, but which still results in a "'higher than

expected mortality rate'" (*Turtle* 437). Domidion's Public Relations head Victoria Lustig,

however, seems relieved that the deaths are "'[f]ortunately'" mostly in riverside "'Native

communities'" (437). In such places, water is life, but the attitude of industry is reflected by

Domidion's lack of genuine caring for mortality or well-being. The CEO Dorian's response also

reflects a lack of concern for either lives or ecological damage: he comforts himself with the

opinion that there is "[n]othing to be done about the spills. Shit happens. It would happen again.

The Athabasca would shove the toxins into the Mackenzie, and the Mackenzie would dump

everything into the Arctic. The river wasn't that pristine to begin with. For much of the last

century, sawmills and farms along the way had been dumping furans, chlorinated dioxins, and phosphorus into the watershed. The river would eventually clean itself" (303).[159] Though he is hardly absolved, Dorian is trying to assuage his own sense of guilt, of course. He even argues that "'the occasional spill is the price we pay for cheap energy'" (305), which is perhaps one of the more poignant satirical statements in the narrative, given modern society's petrocultural predilections. Before the catastrophic failure of the settling pond dams, as levels drop and the containment ponds leak heavy metal toxins, the company even pumps clean water in to keep the height constant and keep up the pretense that all is well (114, 192-93). As Cort Gallup, Office Manager for the Fort McKay Métis Nation, says in Neil McArthur and Warren Cariou's documentary *Land of Oil and Water* (2010), "water is very, very important in the process of processing the bitumen, and that's the biggest concern. If we're ever in a meeting … with industry, and we say the word 'water,' everyone just stops, in fear, all the industry representatives, right, 'cause that is the biggest issue. How much water are you gonna use?" (20:53-21:12).[160] But both the documentary and *Turtle* indicate that the danger is more than just about water overuse, as our society's energy futures are currently at a vital crossroads.

The issues of ecological damage and public attention further compound the problems of industrial error in the novel. Once the failed settling pond walls have sent contaminated water into the river, media attention, for one thing, eventually wanes, and toward the end of the

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[159] An 1998 environmental report on the Slave River indicates an increase in "industrial activity," including "pulp and paper operations" "in British Columbia," and "oil sands plants" and the "agricultural sector in Alberta"—and raises "serious concerns … about the potential for … problems on the Slave River … as well as Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River which it feeds" (Sanderson et al. 2).

[160] From another angle, as John Pomeroy explained in his keynote to the 2016 Under Western Skies conference on "water," "mountains provide water for over half of humanity." This has repercussions that resonate with the pipeline linkage of Albertan fossil fuels to coastal waters in both King's novel and the real-world.

narrative, the Athabasca is said to be "months in the public's rear-view mirror …, and, while there [is] the occasional outcry over new studies that documented the continuing damage to the Mackenzie and the Arctic, the newspapers had consigned such revelations to the back pages of the 'Life and Arts' section" (512). Dorian's opinion is that

> North American Norm [does not] give a damn about the environment. Cancel a favourite television show. Slap another tax on cigarettes. Stop serving beer at baseball and hockey games. That was serious.
>
> Spoil a river somewhere in Humdrum, Alberta? Good luck getting Norm off the sofa. (422)

But, interestingly, King only presents an overt consideration of oilsands operations and pipelines through Dorian and snippets from the media, and briefly through Crisp's concentrated invective. For the protagonist Gabriel, the ecological and cultural absences at Smoke River and near Lethbridge represent a voiding of the heritage and homes he knew earlier in life, yet this also does not separate him or that community from the impacts of the oilsands; the GreenSweep defoliant was, after all, applied to clear the path for a pipeline extracting material from Alberta. Rather, King is representing how Indigenous community voices are not given the same heft in terms of resource extraction. Moreover, perhaps King's point is that it should not be solely up to Indigenous communities to bear the brunt of fossil fuel extraction fallout. Scaling back what is petroculturally enmeshed within our lives will not happen overnight, it seems, but consultation is a vital beginning to planning forward with fresh energy and resource-seeking practices. This will, however, come hand-in-hand with a re-evaluation of end-goals. If a perpetuation of systems of capital still underlies resource use, whichever kind that may be, then an environmental unity

will never fully occur. One role of *Turtle* is to help us consider what we might instead value in the future instead of ingrained energy systems.

Eggertson's review of King's novel calls it "eerily prophetic." A "lucky" coincidence for the prognosticator, to be sure, but one that, more importantly, demonstrates the devastating likelihood of such a disaster. King has created a scenario that resonates with many of the historical-to-recent, colonially-driven environmental catastrophes continentally, and is thus tangible for a variety of Indigenous communities and cultures. Even though the Smoke River Reserve does not exist under that name in the real world, the novel's "other" catastrophe of bursting waste-water settling ponds that release chemicals into the Athabasca River echoes the slightly earlier, real-world Mount Polley tailings pond wall failure. In a discussion of the local and regional aftermath, Norah Bowman comments that "[t]his is Canada's, and one of the world's, largest and most impactful mining disasters of its kind," and it happened "on unceded Secwepemc territory, in colonial British Columbia" (26). Ours is a heavily resource-extractive society and there have long been fears of similar issues with settling ponds in the Alberta oilsands. Around the "tar sands," such a potential failure is a topic of concern for both the health of the river water and the immediate safety of the residents near mainly Indigenous communities within the heart of the area. As Cort Gallup says in *Land of Oil and Water*, "'in the creation of [holding ponds], what they have done is they've … built gigantic, gigantic … walls, gigantic dams …. They say if one of those dams breaks, we'd have 10 minutes to get out of here. I don't know where we'd go …. I guess head for the hills, which there aren't many hills here, as you notice, but I guess we'd just head downstream from wherever it's coming from'" (23:17-23:46). King's novel imagines both the misuse of such holding tanks, which in the narrative were only

intended "'to be evaporation ponds'" (*Turtle* 288), and a far worse scenario where they affect lives and living environments.

The basic human rights of all North American people are caught up in the future availability of resources, but this needs to include the impacts to those living in resource-rich areas. Gillian Steward argues that "[t]he most direct and long-term effects of carving up the land, withdrawing immense amounts of water from rivers, discharging air- and water-borne waste, and the influx of thousands of construction workers—all part of the furious pace of oilsands development—have fallen on aboriginal people and the once-remote places that have been their homes for generations." We have seen disturbing social responses to changes in climate with the creation of social disparity, civil disputes, and mass dispersal of populations from affected areas; the summers of 2017, 2018, and 2019, for instance, saw emergency evacuation orders from wildfires in British Columbia, Alberta, and down into the United States, as well as for hurricane-impacted and flooding areas such as Texas. Candis Callison intervenes here with an apt reading of the real-world situation for Indigenous peoples:

> Indigenous experiences with climate change have become increasingly visible in media, climate research, activism, and policy negotiations. Many indigenous people live outside major urban centers and are deeply and disproportionately impacted by a broad range of climate-related changes from shifting conditions for marine and land-based subsistence food gathering to sea level rise and coastal erosion. Global and national English-speaking media have paid limited bursts of attention to indigenous experiences at particular junctures when novelty or conflict narratives are deemed timely. Examples include the potential of climate

refugees due to sea level rise in the South Pacific or catastrophic damage to Arctic

villages due to climate disruption. (2)

Questions about human rights and diverse cultural concerns are troubled in all future scenarios as

growing populations require food, energy, and water resources. But Indigenous communities

linked to the Athabasca River featured in King's novel also place great value on the waterway as

a traditionally cultural resource (see *Land of Oil and Water*), and the seepage and then collapse

of oilfields waste water ponds into the river threaten that ongoing engagement and way of life.

Turtle's compromised Athabascan "'Native communities'" (437) are, moreover, part of King's

argument that fossil fuel resource extraction damages are not merely confined to a particular

locale, but are facets of a larger system of environmental disturbances that affect whole

watersheds, trans-provincial regions, and even the larger Turtle Island and beyond. Again,

perhaps the Domidion prodigal son GreenSweep is en route at the end of *Turtle* to affect the

major water networks in which the company's home base of operations is placed. Dorian's

dismissal of the importance of Domidion's effect on the Athabasca therefore underscores how

little he worries about the company's adverse influence on not only Indigenous peoples, but on

the web of life, within which he is also, ironically, entangled.

Despite some reviews that find the outcome of the novel "disappointing" (Reid) or

"curiously slack" (Bourne), what a critic like Robert Reid does not seem to take into account is

that the true victory in the novel is a resurgence of community (human and natural) against the

terrible destruction wrought by the Euroamerican technoscientific and hypercapitalist economic

machine and its biotechnological output. While Reid complains that the novel offers up no

"justice" to those responsible for the ecological damage, of course the torch of carrying forward

the successes of communal intervention is being passed beyond the text, to the reader. As Rowe

says of the novel, "[o]ne book can often inspire a world of conversation well beyond the pages

inside" ("Book"). The outcomes of the narrative are not about being punitive and slapping the

wrists of the corporate evildoers, they are centred on bringing together humanity and other

environmental elements to coexist. Mara corroborates this interpretation toward the end as she

sets out with Gabriel and others to attempt to move the GreenSweep-laden *Anguis* from their

beach: "'It's not about moving …. It's about community'" (498). As the (albeit clichéd) adage

goes, "it takes a village." In King's novel, at least, the only saviour of crisis, the only recourse is,

in the end, community, for no single individual can successfully push back against the pressures

of modernity's sweep.

     Indigenous ecocritical dystopias and other Indigenous fictions like King's novel, to

borrow from Jon Gordon, "call on readers to move from a passive acceptance of the current

system of [fossil fuel] extraction to an active questioning of that system" (163). In *Turtle*, water

is community, and thus a replenishing of water and of community represents the acts of

resistance to fossil capital's demands on people and environments. *Turtle* does not bring

Domidion to justice, but it does demonstrate that neither the corporation nor its CEO Dorian feel

they belong to any community, which is ultimately untrue, since all live on the back of the

proverbial turtle, within planetary ecosystems. Even the *Anguis* is afforded some measure of

connectivity to the web of life when it beaches itself in Samaritan Bay, almost as if it is a

cetacean or other leviathan of the sea in anguish from anthropogenic actions and in need of

recognition and assistance: Crisp carefully "stroke[s] the metal flank of the monster, as though

he thought it was in need of affection" (497). The GreenSweep contained inside is, after all, a

genetic adaptation of *Klebsiella planticola*, which still means that it is a unicellular

microorganism and thus alive, even if Domidion would only use it as a destructive tool of

defoliation meant to access greater profits. Such denial of both life and involvement is the personal crux of Dorian and his company's duplicity. Though Dorian is personally also in anguish because of the potential illness he refuses to have diagnosed or treated (452-53, 468-69) as well as his marital troubles (365, 369, 371, 383, 384), the novel uses him and his assistant Winter like very human symbols of hypercapitalistic production uncaring about life and ecosystems. By the carefully nuanced end of *Turtle*, petromodern corporations are also called upon to pay heed to the lessons encountered therein. King, in this guise, is the storyteller who puts the onus of his teachings on those listening, on those who are asked to carry the community-making into the real-world, in opposition to its Domidions.

Today, non-Indigenous nations are petrocultures—and such systemic pressures have trickled over to the economies, energy use, and infrastructures of many sovereign Indigenous nations to affect the experiences of both individuals and communities. The catastrophe of the Ruin on the Smoke River reserve and the subsequent government-mandated dispersal of the remaining Indigenous survivors away from the West Coast seemingly creates an absence fillable by resource-extraction related projects. The "Jabberwoks" that Crisp resists wish to take advantage of this departure, but are also the face of the pressures that continually return: they have been there before (*Turtle* 84), pitching their "oil pipeline and deep-water terminus" (83) proposal. But, according to Crisp, they only offer "'[p]ale promises'" about "the benefits that such a project would bring to the area and to every person in the Bay" (84). As Sara Dorow says of fossil fuel energy's influence, "the co-naturalization of oil and community has served to distract from the very forms of inequality and violence it entails …. This sleight of hand is enabled by a range of sliding geographical and temporal scales of community" (91). *Turtle* echoes how, in the real world, the petrocultural system has worked for a normalization of its

conditions that extends deeply into multiple facets of modern living for all those connected, including many Indigenous communities that have not yet achieved energy independence. While Crisp's "Jabberwoks" offer "Wealth," "Prosperity," "Economic security," and "Cuban vacations" (*Turtle* 84), these things are clearly not accessible to those from the Smoke River reserve—or to the affected flora and fauna like the eponymous turtle character Sonny later dubs "Big Red" (429-431, 487). Topically, King's use of "Jabberwoks" also references the distant "marine turtle nesting on several of Antigua's beaches, including Jabberwock" (Bräutigam and Eckert 71): these turtles have been negatively affected by "oil spills" (Fuller et al.) alongside other anthropogenic fallout, and King's multifaceted "Jabberwok" reference thus further suggests that the proverbial back of the turtle is not only local or continental, but also about the global world we all live in. As the turtles on Jabberwock Beach, Antigua, have been affected by our petromodern living, so have those in King's fictional West Coast breeding ground. *Turtle*'s built-in connection between the two indicates that both are tangible markers for environmental disturbances that also touch human members of the ecological community. Oxana Timofeeva's discussion of *oikos* and the contemporary etymological meanings embedded in "ecology" and "economy" is also worth recalling here, what with the fact that "beyond ecology[,] there is always economy, and vice versa: this is our earthly home, here we keep slaves and exchange oil for money." We might actually go so far as to say that the slaves kept are ourselves, though both Dorow and Timofeeva are referring to the social hierarchies created by economies of oil dependence. After all, "oil's extractive logic redraws lines of familial, ethnic, and national identification" (Dorow 91; Watts), and such a drawing of lines is, by nature, divisive. This separation is the work of Crisp's "Jabberwok" antagonists, for their pressures work to fracture

communal unity that opposes hypercapitalistic resource extraction projects and infrastructures, even as they "[encourage] everyone to look to the future and not dwell on the past" (*Turtle* 84).

Turtle suggests that we can never go back—not really. The future is not actually equipped with time travel devices, and once something of enough import is done, we do not get second chances.[161] We cannot (yet, or simply all) leave for distant stars and the idea of pristine planets with new resources. As Kim Stanley Robinson argues, Elon Musk's plan for Mars colonization "'is sort of the 1920s science-fiction cliché of the boy who builds a rocket to the moon in his back yard'" (qtd. in Doctorow). But it is fitting that *Turtle* does not base itself in that type of escapist speculation about the future, for Indigenous ecocritical dystopianism is heavily engaged with the land and the flora and fauna therein. We also cannot hope to only wipe part of the slate clean and still flourish, as Broadway Danny Rose and his kin discover in DiChario's *Valley of Day-Glo*; nor can we ever hope to rebuild what is lost or partition a portion of the past in strange homage to ecological and cultural disappearances (DiChario). How much ecological damage has been caused by perpetuating the various spectacles of "civilizations" like that of the ongoing colonial settler-invader world—its Americana bursting from the seams and unavoidably inflecting the globalized world? No wonder Vizenor's *Bearheart* and Stephen Graham Jones' *The Fast Red Road: A Plainsong* (2000) are such wild rides.

Yet, while *Turtle* suggests we cannot time-travel backward, it also offers wisdom for moving forward: some changes are irreversible and, once they are made, we can only adapt to what is new as a matter of survivance. This is true no matter how terrible the alterations, as in Vizenor's *Bearheart* or Van Camp's "On the Wings of This Prayer," but also for the speculative

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[161] An important, productive counter-argument and tool of resistance to this includes Indigenous writers' uses of the speculative slipstream subgenre, which allows for alterations to past events (Dillon, Introduction, "Custer"; "Miindiwag"; Introduction, "Terminal").

yet realistic changes in King's novel. Naturally, some fictional elements celebrate the potential

of survivance to extreme situations as with how Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*

(1991) presents "prophecies [that] said gradually all traces of Europeans in America would

disappear and, at last, the people would retake the land" (631-32). These prophecies offer an end

to the ongoing impacts of colonialism, but also warn "that Mother Earth would punish those who

defiled and despoiled her. Fierce, hot winds would drive away the rain clouds; irrigation wells

would go dry; all the plants and animals would disappear. Only a few humans would survive"

(632). Even in these prophecies, the damage wrought by human activities is drastic and

potentially difficult to return from: "survivance" is clearly not a guarantee, and the scenario

extended from Silko's novel, where DiChario's fiction presents a narrative of Indigenous peoples

eking out an existence within the red sands amidst remnants of North American convenience like

7-Eleven, Kmart, or Sears (DiChario 24), is obviously critical in nature. But *Turtle* suggests that

a world can be built anew, and thus a cultural return can occur. Vizenor teaches us that "Native

survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is

the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent" ("Aesthetics"1). King's

characters in the present of *Turtle*, like Gabriel trying to confront the catastrophe of the Ruin and

move forward, offer the perspective of cultural resilience, much like with the traditional

knowledge discovered in *Solar Storms*. It is this sense of survivance that drives characters like

Gabriel and Mara, no matter their fraught pasts and lingering feelings of guilt, to consider the

place of the Ruin, their ancestral Smoke River reserve, as a future home.

Coming Home to Ourselves through Indigenous Futurisms

In King's novel, Crisp says to Mara, "'Everyone comes home …. Trust an old traveller on that.

In the end, we all comes home'" (108).[162] Grace Dillon, the scholar of Indigenous speculative and science fictions who coined the term "Indigenous futurisms,"[163] argues that "[i]t might go without saying that all forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of *biskaabiiyang*, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of 'returning to ourselves'" (Introduction, *Walking* 10). For Gabriel, this indicates, in part, a cultural return, but also a re-balancing of all aspects affecting community existence, including environmental ones. Such a move is ostensibly Crisp's larger project as he attempts to guide and predict events from the start, though in his eccentric way, he credits his companion "'Master Dog'" (*Turtle* 2), saying, "'There he be, as ye predicted'" when Gabriel first "emerge[s] from the trees and [begins] the final descent to the beach" (1) to sacrifice himself for his part in the Ruin. It is not just the homecoming trope that is indicated with Gabriel's or Mara's arrival, but a return alongside reintegration and upwelling of cultural and ecological elements intertwined, since Big Red reappears as well. Moreover, in this larger reinstatement of communal factors, the potential of family bonds, of kin-making (Haraway) is a heightened factor. Even Sonny and Crisp are reunited (485-88), though Sonny's "Dad ha[d] warned [him] about Mr. Crisp" (485). This is perhaps the most heart-warming of reunions, since, despite Sonny's reticence, Crisp had still secretly been stocking the food "dispensers with provisions" (485) to feed his nephew after the father's departure.[164] There is also hope for Gabriel and Mara: their "prospects for … relationship" (517) show "no particular

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[162] Given Crisp's often archaic speech patterns, I do not read the last "comes" as a typo: he also says "you knows that" (495) at another juncture.

[163] As Dillon corroborated, "yes, I did coin the word Indigenous Futurisms back in 2003 after Alondra Nelson's wonderful intro and editing of the special edition on Afrofuturism. In the much later *Walking the Clouds*, I try to give some credit for following in these footsteps" (Message).

[164] Sonny's dad's fate is somewhat unclear: despite the Crisp-like figure Dorian encounters in Toronto, Mara incorrectly guesses that Sonny's father succumbed to "'the Ruin,'" but Crisp says that his brother "'was gone long before that black day'" (239).

promise" and Crisp sees "nothing bright enough to kindle combustion," yet there is "[k]indness

perhaps" and "[e]ven affection" (518). Moreover, Crisp indicates that the dog, Soldier, "had been

more optimistic" because "dogs were known to favour happy endings" (518). Whatever the

eventual outcome, however, one of the main hurdles for Gabriel and Mara is, of course, the fact

that it was Gabriel's sister Lilly who "had brought them together" (518), and Gabriel's actions

with GreenSweep were partly the cause of Lilly and his nephew Riel's death. As Mara "coax[es]

the story out of Gabriel piece by piece" at the end of *Turtle*, Crisp observes that "he had heard

little in the telling to recommend the man" (517). Gabriel can build family and community bonds

with Mara and others only through an ongoing, continually-engaged process of fully confronting

his actions. Yet, as contradictory as it sounds, perhaps there is hope in the fact that, as Crisp puts

it, "'Tragedy has a trick of bringing folks together'" (226).

Gabriel is one of two scientists who worked on GreenSweep for Domidion, and despite

his recommendation that the company "'terminate the project" because of its destructive

potential, his "'assessment was considered excessive'" since "[i]t was felt that if [Domidion]

could find a way to control life cycle and horizontal transfer, [they] would have a potent and

commercially valuable defoliant" (409). While Gabriel gave his professional opinion about

shutting GreenSweep down, the product was still unleashed because of its profit potential, and

the Ruin still occurred. Gabriel cannot help but feel guilty for not having done enough to stop it,

but for also having contributed to its creation in the first place. This is partly due to his former

faith in Euro-Western science.[165] The critique of scientific "progress"—and, specifically, its

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[165] While "Western" is fairly ambiguous and thus problematic, even though it is often used to
imply culture and traditions descended from Grecian, Roman, European, and non-Indigenous
traditions (with other notable contributions), the term "Western science" is already widely in use
by prominent thinkers, including Grace Dillon (*Walking* 7), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson
(Harris, "Indigenous"), Kyle Powys Whyte (Hatfield et. Al 1), George Nicholas, and others

applications toward the advance of capital—is a core conflict of *Turtle*, in which a corporate reaping of profits has unsettled ecological systems and temporarily disrupted cultural practices in the devastated area. The former company-man and biologist, Gabriel, reveals that he once had faith in his profession and what he thought it stood for: "Science was supposed to have been the answer. World hunger. Disease. Energy. Security. Commerce. Biology would save the world. Geology would fuel the future. Physics would make sense of the universe. At one time, science had been Gabriel's answer to everything" (446). But, too late, in the present of the novel, he finally has answers to his previously-blind questioning:

> What was the proper goal of research?
>
> Profit.
>
> What was the proper goal of knowledge?
>
> Power. (446)

This ethical conflict is compounded by corporate convenience and ineptitude as the defoliant he helped create is improperly handled: "GreenSweep hadn't gone through any of the testing protocols. It wasn't supposed to have left the storage facilities. The first mistake. The recommended dilution ratio for GreenSweep was 1000:1. The GreenSweep that was loaded onto the plane in Terrace, British Columbia, was only diluted 10:1" (322). Moreover, while Domidion works to mitigate public relations damage by instead potentially implicating an "'[i]ndependent

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(Goodall; Pynn; Gies), who argue that traditional knowledge is scientific in a way not historically understood by colonial or outside observers, and that "western science" is still "catching up" (Nicholas). Gregory A. Cajete's discussion of "high-context" and "low-context" is also invaluable to comparing both systems of knowledge, since "the knowledge that comprises Indigenous science is derived using the same methods as modern Western science" but "perceives and reasons from a" different "relational worldview" (137). Since *Turtle*'s specific critique is about capitalism's role, as an attempted compromise, I use "Euro-Western science" instead.

contractor out of Prince George'" (439), the devastating result is only but one in many industrial mishaps propagated by the company. As Dorian thinks to himself, "Athabasca. Kali Creek. The other large and small misfortunes that Domidion had been party to over the years. Taken as a whole, they could be seen as the environmental wreckage left behind by a callous corporation that valued expediency over morality, profits over ethics" (449; 439-440). The company itself is a stand-in for the contemporary co-opting of science by systems of capital. The future extended from the force of colonial settler-invader economics is therefore one in which knowledge acquisition is carefully catered by those monetized forces. This extends into the ecocritical dystopianism in King's novel because the history of the ongoing crisis of Indigenous experience from the moment of Contact onwards is folded into how permutations of places are organized for capital's benefit, but also how Indigenous people are restricted by that system of profit-driven science and culture in their engagements with the land in present and near-future times.

Turtle is a novel of finding, or, better yet, of building one's place in the world. Jovana Petrović reminds us that King's writing navigates between the complex, interrelated elements bridging and separating Indigenous and colonial settler-invader cultures. In discussing the earlier *Green Grass*, she comments that King "opens up a window into Native American cultures that still firmly hold to their ethnic background, but are nevertheless vital and productive in their confrontation with the dominant discourse. [He] carefully weaves the stories of his characters, who constantly go back and forth between the reservation lands and the outside world, having to find their position in both, and usually not belonging to either" (148). This liminal separation is clear in *Turtle* when, in the midst of surveying the destruction GreenSweep wrought in the Kali Creek canyon (401-407), Gabriel also flashes back to the other great guilt of having participated in the fragmentation of his family when he and his father went to Minnesota and left Lilly and

their mother behind. Notably, these flashbacks punctuate his physical exploration of the Ruin, demonstrating that his previous decision stays with him always, and informs his sense of the world. Eventually, though not until "his second year at Stanford," he explains that "He had come home. Once he had come home" (404). Yet despite the fact that "[h]e wanted to see his sister, wanted to surprise her, wanted to tell her that she had not been forgotten" and the notion that "she would be thrilled to see him, too" (404), by this point his mother and sister had long since departed for Smoke River. What Gabriel finds instead in his suburban childhood neighbourhood on the "west side" (404) of Lethbridge is both a lack of connection with "the land" (405) and the mistrust of those now living on his street, who call the police (406-407). Upon this return, his idealized, even stereotypically-weighted expectations of an Indigenous person's connection with the place they grew up in are quashed by the stilted interpersonal dynamics of suburbia, a construct that Crisp later rather fittingly characterizes in terms of the expulsion from "'the Garden of Eden'" (236).

But it is also true that, even when Gabriel was growing up, he resisted going out on the land, which is a choice that seems to haunt him until he comes to Smoke River and Samaritan Bay—and especially to the ecological devastation in the Kali Creek canyon. This earlier resistance to being on the land is displayed most prominently in the novel when his sister wants him to go with her to see the "'pelicans'" in "the river bottom" (341). He would prefer to stay in "his room in the basement" where he feels "safe" and to focus on his future by doing his "'homework'" (339), and tries to get her to "'go back'" (341) to the house instead. He even lies to his sister by claiming the pelicans are "'[j]ust big pigeons'" or "'herons,'" prompting his mother to later chastise him about not putting his "'heart'" (342) into his relationship with his sister. Fittingly, Gabriel says that, after leaving with his father, he "hadn't cared for

Minneapolis," and "missed the open sky of the prairies" and even "the wind" (310) he had earlier

had an issue with (338).

This move is part of the crux of his formative years, when Gabriel is unfortunately stuck

in a position where he feels robbed of identity. Especially in Minneapolis, but also beyond to his

work as a scientist, he feels that he is not allowed to access his heritage. Though he is

"'Anishinabe'" (110) on his father's side and descended from his mother's indeterminate coastal

Nation, he feels out of place because he "was never comfortable. He knew that, when other

people saw him at the drum, they didn't see an Indian. His skin was pale" (120). This must have

been a common occurrence in his work life as well, since, according to Dorian, Gabriel "doesn't

look Indian" (110). A divide from heritage surely troubles many Indigenous people who have

been separated from their cultural roots by various colonially-driven means—a factor also

increasingly potent as Gabriel grows up and enters adult life—but this visible aspect becomes a

mental barrier for him. Neither Minneapolis, Lethbridge, Tecumseh Plaza, nor his rented

bungalow in Toronto (despite being places he lived or worked in for many years) was ever really

home because he chose not to connect with those environments and communities at the time.

The erasure of a sense of place in the return-to-Lethbridge episode of the novel is potent,

even if it is of course more subtle than the viscerally violent record of erasure Gabriel sees as he

descends through the death and emptiness of the Kali Creek canyon, witnessing the

"[un]expected … bones" laid prone "on the ground where the creatures had died, one minute

alive, the next minute dead" (404), so that, "[i]f there was a memory of an animal hidden in the

skeletons, Gabriel couldn't find it" (404). In this place from which GreenSweep had scoured life,

"[t]he only sounds [are] the creek and the silence of the land" that keep pace with him as he

moves "through the desolation" (406). This overwriting of place and all its ecological members

presents an important and tangible divide created by the practices of Euro-Western science in its conflicts with traditional ways of living. This is not to say that Gabriel's lack of connection to his childhood home in Lethbridge is insignificant, but the extended sense of place around the Smoke River reserve, though he had never physically visited it before, is prominent within the cultural teachings that his mother passed down to him. This is also true despite his mother's insistence that "'Smoke River's got nothing to do with'" either of them: she even claims, "'We've got nothing there …. That place doesn't exist'" (315). But while she was perhaps forced to return to her childhood home after Gabriel and his father went to Minneapolis, she still ingrained Gabriel with the cultural songs and narratives important to her, which tell the story of Sky Woman and which she presumably learned from elders in her Smoke River community. Specifically, since Mara also heard Lilly and Gabriel's mother Rose "tell the story any number of times" (231), her memories reveal that "Rose … had heard the story from her mother" (232). This is a cultural, family narrative passed down through generations, even if Gabriel is reluctant to admit he even knows the story of "'The Woman Who Fell from the Sky'" as Crisp, Mara, and him are in the hot springs many years later, saying "'I don't think I do'" after he has also just mentally recalled that his "mother had told the story any number of times" (222). He denies knowledge of it perhaps just as much as his mother wished to deny the existence of the Smoke River reserve, but as Gabriel inadvertently adds "'Maybe a turtle?'" (226) to Crisp's question about which animal will save Sky Woman, his denial becomes more suspicious. Mara is the one who finally accuses him, in a playful whisper, of having "'heard [the] story before'" (236), which is notable because this scene of storytelling and singing in the hot springs is where Gabriel and Mara begin to draw together to potentially become not only a couple, but also members of Crisp's created

community of survivors made up of the "'ones who survived, the ones who stayed'" (226) after the Ruin.

But this cultural story that Gabriel denies knowledge of has more significance even than just as a generational narrative passed down. Not only is it the story in which Sky Woman is placed by "'Water birds'" (225) "'On the back of a turtle'" (227), but it has become an incredibly relevant focal point for Gabriel, who, before arriving in Smoke River, began in secret to look into the GreenSweep disaster before leaving Domidion. He attempts to disguise his findings by writing "'The Woman Who Fell from the Sky'" "across the face of the file in large block letters," though Domidion security eventually discovers it in his old house (398). Inside this folder are "'[i]nternal Domidion documents … from [their] archives,'" "'[c]opies of site reports, risk assessments, confidential memos, [and] requisition records. All of them classified'" (393). These are accompanied by "'a series of newspaper articles'" of the "'[l]ocal coverage of the Kali Creek mishap,'" with "'[p]hotographs, eyewitness accounts, [and] obituaries'" (398). Gabriel, with his creator's guilt, has clearly spent quite a bit of time researching the fallout of GreenSweep before starting to "'[w]rite on the walls of [his] rented bungalow'" (399) with the many sites and instances of science-enabled atrocities throughout history—for example, "'Chernobyl. Idaho Falls. Chalk River'" (23)—cataloguing historical, human-made catastrophes, and then disappearing on his quest for atonement. But even if the GreenSweep file that Gabriel compiled and Dorian eventually reads has the title "'THE WOMAN WHO FELL FROM THE SKY'" (408), and though GreenSweep is of course the epitome of an apocalyptic force since it creates the Ruin in Kali Creek and beyond, it is important to recall that the Sky Woman narrative is a creation story. Dorian's assistant Winter is therefore dead wrong when she suggests that this "[e]vidently … was the name that [Gabriel] originally gave the GreenSweep project'" (399): he

is instead latching on to the only roots of himself that still make sense after having taken part in such a tragedy.

In naming the folder this way, Gabriel is acknowledging the parallel between his situation and Sky Woman's: just as she goes "'digging for tubers'" "'[u]nder old trees'" until "'[s]he digs a hole into the sky'" (223) and then "'falls in'" (224), so does Gabriel, with his "'[e]xceptional biotech mind'" (399), "dig" deep into the microbiology of bacteria, increasing GreenSweep's "'environmental range by splicing in genetic material from thermophiles and psychrophiles'" (409). The former, notably, and in further parallel with the Sky Woman narrative, are connected to the earliest bacteria on the planet, which parallels the act of digging down around the oldest root systems. But, despite the possibility that the falling woman will cause "'trouble,'" or, in Gabriel's scientific mind, falling "'at thirty-two feet per second, per second, … destroy most of the planet'" (225), she ends up building a new world with the community she encounters. This is the ultimate, underlying hope that perhaps even Gabriel does not yet comprehend until the end of *Turtle*: he can build a new life as well. That is, in discovering what GreenSweep has done, he is not only unmaking his corporate, Euro-Western scientific self, but making himself anew into the person he starts to become once he reaches Smoke River and Samaritan Bay. Having fallen, there is no going back for either the woman or Gabriel, and the cultural story of Sky Woman and "the back of the turtle" is, for Gabriel, thus both a story of renewal and of homecoming.

A return to one's hometown will always be a discovery of new territory anchored within the familiar; a reintegration within community must always somehow account for the experiences encountered on both sides during the interval of separation. Both Gabriel and Mara have to learn to engage with the disparate and unknown communal elements they find, even as they reconceptualize their ideas of what home place might be. Gabriel, of course, is, as Mara tells

him while they struggle not to die in the surf by the Apostles, "'not the only one who didn't come home'" (*Turtle* 490). Though Gabriel cannot hear the words shouted over the tidal crash, this is Mara's verbal admission that they are alike in this respect, that both feel their own measure of guilt. Both are in need of healing and community comforts as they struggle with the past. Earlier, Gabriel admits to himself that he had abandoned "most forms of intimacy long ago, had replaced them with research. Even before his father had been killed, Gabriel had been at one remove from his family, one remove from the world." He concludes self-critically that his "world was a world of facts, of equations, of numbers. His family's world was made up of connections and emotions" (*Turtle* 184). It is not until his family is gone that Gabriel starts to really come into a mode of living where "connections and emotions" gain relevance; this is, fittingly, when he comes to Smoke River to witness the devastating toll that his Euro-Western scientific teachings have wrought, with their potential for catering to contracts and profit under a system of capital, instead of adhering to ethics (171-72) and care for others. Still, Gabriel must deal with the trauma of the personal and ecological trauma he had a part in, and the struggle in the surf toward the end of *Turtle* is Gabriel's latest attempt at suicidal atonement, even if he has already admitted to himself that "[h]e liked being alive" (251) as he held Mara in her bed. It is fitting, however, that with the potential of community, as well as Mara's life involved, Gabriel rallies, but, importantly, the outcome is a reversal, since "it had been Mara who had kept [Gabriel] from being swept away" (490).

Gabriel's ingrained cultural teachings belie his claim that the Smoke River reserve "wasn't his home," though "[i]t had been his mother's, and, in the end, it had been his sister's" (340). Yet even if he had never seen the place before, except on a map after searching "the Internet" when he received an envelope with a Samaritan Bay "postmark" (314) from Crisp

(402), in the creation of community with which he engages at the climax of the novel, when they collectively shove away the *Anguis*, he has begun to invest himself in home-place making, at the very least. This is true to his nature, as determined by his sister when they parted ways as he moved away to Minneapolis and she gave him "a laminated picture of a turtle" to represent his supposed ability to carry his home with him (259). Just as much as the sea turtle Big Red or the continental, world-bearing Turtle Island entity have carried a load, so has Gabriel; but, importantly, he is not the only one in the story who has had to do so. Smoke River and Samaritan Bay comprise the place where Gabriel and Mara, "Crisp and Sonny, along with the Chins, the Huangs, and a number of people Gabriel [doesn't] recognize" (494) come together—and, more comfortingly, even to eat food together—to take action against a threat to their very lives when the *Anguis* arrives with its GreenSweep burden. This place of the Smoke River reserve, Samaritan Bay, nonhuman animal residents, and even the nearby town is in the process of becoming one where Gabriel can, finally, connect to the land and those who live on and with it. The formation of community, here, is one of active place-making.

     Turtle, however, features a catastrophe before communal relations and rebuilding can commence, and this move is a key component in the novel's connection to both Indigenous futurisms and ecocritical dystopianism. King's dystopian registers do not play with the absolute changes of climate or of a world-wide extinction event, even if those are extremes that may indeed extend from the dilemmas of the contemporary world. Rather, the very-near-future aspects of *Turtle* present change that is already so close to happening. Past, present, and future are wrapped up in how Gabriel encounters the spectre of his mother and sister's community. Through a torturous formative experience that is part of his past dystopian living conditions while separated from his mother and sister, he had never seen the Smoke River Reserve territory

as it was before GreenSweep's devastating passage, and even if the redemptive aspects of the novel foster how he can still grow to be a part of his hereditary culture, his narrative arc also demonstrates how the future will always necessarily be a palimpsest. A return to the urtext of previous conditions will never quite be possible, despite the remnants he dredges from his memories.[166] While some (albeit extremely valuable) Indigenous speculative fiction, with its apocalyptic stone snakes (Silko, *Almanac*) and red dust (DiChario), celebrates a return to where the non-Indigenous element is removed from the continent, the genre is also divided. Sherman Alexie's "Distances" (1993) is a strong example that indicates a resurrection of older cultural elements from which no one really benefits—as does Richard Van Camp's expanding "Wheetago War" narrative,[167] if we read the overarching antagonist simply as the environmental return of a punitive, elder god aspect. But *Turtle*'s proximity to the real-world is noteworthy because that suggests a sense of urgency not only in relation to the environmental catastrophes that occur, but in terms of the healing necessary.

Turtle tends to primarily be a reaction to fossil fuel extraction, transport, and resource use, but it also connects peripherally to topics like climate change, that stand-in for the dystopian now.[168] Petrocultural systems and climate change are inextricable from each other. The one

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[166] The suggestion of mud or silt here is entirely appropriate, given the world-making within the Sky Woman story that Crisp tells with Gabriel and Mara's help, fittingly while in the hot springs (*Turtle* 222-27, 231-37).

[167] This at the very least includes "Mermaids" (2002), "On the Wings of This Prayer" (2013), "The Fleshing" (2013), "Wheetago War" (2015), "I Double Dogrib Dare You" (2015), "Crow" (2015), and "Lying in Bed Together" (2017)—as well as the "Wheetago War" stories in *Moccasin Square Gardens* (2019).

[168] Climate change is pressing for Indigenous peoples, and Rosalyn R. LaPier questions how sacred sites, knowledge, and ceremony will be affected. But it is also vital that there is proactive work being done to mitigate related effects: across the United States, "24 tribes have responded to climate change with plans for adaptation and mitigation" that "are providing roadmaps for

possible indication of climate change related issues in the novel comes with an attempt "to explain why the turtles had decided to nest so far north in the first place," since "they normally frequented nesting beaches in places like Florida, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, and Mexico. A number of the scientists who had studied the phenomenon of the Samaritan Bay turtles had concluded that the unusually warm currents, the temperature of the sand" (159), and other aspects of the setting provided prime aspects for their needs. While this is not specifically articulated as a climate-driven warming of ocean waters, it could very well be—and likely is since the topic of warming waters is a flashpoint in the larger conversation of climate change. But the known ecological crises in *Turtle* are directly caused by the processes and infrastructures of our continued hydrocarbon-extractive society. Climate change itself is an *implied* concern in the novel, and is thus connected in disrupting Indigenous experience even in a narrative that does not name it as a culprit. But it is also indicative of other direct discourses relevant to cultural preservation and renewal, which are tropes in Indigenous ecocritical dystopian texts despite the latter part of that terminology. Indigenous writers of the genre are engaged in finding healing solutions from and for terrible scenarios, and Indigenous literature, with its homecoming trope or sometimes refusal of this, has long recognized the transformative nature of change. King's *Turtle*, fittingly, still presents the possibility of healing even if an absolute return is impossible.

In fiction both including and beyond sf, as well as in the real world, Indigenous cultural relationships with the landscape present numerous examples where the practice of living in harmony with the environment has been passed down between generations as communal knowledge for as long as a given people can remember. Such a history, however, is presented as

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other communities across the country" (Hansen, "Hurricanes"; Whyte; and Whyte, Caldwell, and Schaefer).

lost and regained in *Turtle*. As Crisp counters in protest when Gabriel suggests a story "'[s]ort of

like the Garden of Eden,'" the Christian tale of Adam and Eve's banishment is "'[n]othing like'"

the one they tell and all know in the hot springs (236). Instead, Crisp insists that the Sky Woman

narrative is one of creation enacted by a community (237) rather than an Edenic eviction caused

when "'we preferred knowledge to ignorance'" (236). He adds, though, that "'the sadness of the

thing'" is that the "'complete and perfect world'" (236) built "'[o]n the back of a turtle'" (227) is

a "'paradise … pissed away'" (236-37). Of course, Crisp is referring to the real-world events

after Contact, which depopulated the continent to such a great degree that the planetary climate

"cooled" (Milman; Koch et al.). Despite a long presence of First peoples in North America that

have mostly lived in concert with the land,[169] the force of colonial settler-invader processes and

related ways of living are deeply interconnected with a consumption of goods and resources that

damages local and regional environments through the extractive culture involved. This is the

heart of the crisis within King's novel. The impact of modernity is one of the aspects driving the

intervention of the ecocritical dystopia in *Turtle*, which suggests that this development in genre

is arguably even more applicable to Indigenous perspectives in both a real and a speculative,

future-forward sense, since the modern world has, without question, already altered relevant

cultural places and spaces from their previous iterations. A Euro-Western prioritization of its

own systems and knowledge bases over others in North American society has also, in many

cases, resulted in further ecological problems, which have become too abundant for even Gabriel

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[169] This is not to say that there are no historical examples of Indigenous civilizations failing to work with their environment. Ronald Wright argues for two such instances in his discussions of on Rapa Nui (58-61), which is known to the Western world as Easter Island—though recent counter-evidence to this understanding is compelling (DiNapoli et al.)—and for the Maya (82-84, 97-98, 99-102). Wright suggests both are doomed by their progression (102-103), and argues, of course, is that it will be the same for our North American society.

to fully list. This is evident in the hierarchization of non-Indigenous technoscientific understandings over what Grace Dillon calls "Indigenous scientific literacies," which "represent practices used by Indigenous peoples over thousands of years to reenergize that natural environment while improving the interconnected relationships among all persons (animal, human, spirit, and even machine)" (Introduction, *Walking* 7).[170] Such a hierarchy, which is often employed to enable further resource extraction and enable modes of modern convenience, contrasts how Gregory A. Cajete argues that "the low-context approach of Western science has given rise to a mindset that acts blind to our interrelatedness"—by which Cajete means a "Western" science co-opted by technocapitalism that produces "[p]olicies and patterns of actions … that threaten virtually all species and the biosphere" (138). The Indigenous ecocritical dystopia, with *Turtle* as one example of this mode of writing, challenges the presumption that Euro-Western science performed merely for monetary advancement is the preferable answer to the crises of the time, and reminds us that the Indigenous Futurism narratives of "'returning'" must become prominent if ecological systems are to be renewed. King's novel suggests that this environmental burgeoning, in fact, affects all members of the created communities now inhabiting Turtle Island, as well as those still to come.

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[170] Cajete also contributes useful definitions of "Indigenous science," including "A body of traditional knowledge unique to a group of people that has served to sustain that People through generations of living within a distinct bioregion" (136).

Conclusion

The ecocritical dystopia resonates with aspects of the real world and other modes of artistic production that imagine the future. Like the *Natural History Museum*'s diorama of the David H. Koch Dinosaur Wing of the American Museum of Natural History, ecocritical dystopianism produces a warning about the consequences of present actions in our future. By providing a setting in a real-world location, writers of this dystopian subgenre invoke the human collective that might engage with that space and place—and do so in an even stronger manner than the *Natural History Museum* piece. While the diorama does not say that the Museum of Natural History in New York will be underwater in *x* number of years if the average temperature of global climate changes to exceed *y* degrees Celsius (or imply that something equally as catastrophic as an asteroid will affect our continued existence in the future), both the diorama and contributions to ecocritical dystopianism appeal to the North American world's sense of vulnerability in working to preserve its history. The diorama and the ecocritical dystopia add an element of precarity to our sense of accomplishment as a modern civilization. Yet the form of the diorama renders it more abstract, as a medium, than that of the ecocritical dystopia in its function as fiction; the diorama works more in the mode of the critical dystopia, for example. Ecocritical dystopianism, however, captures our attention through details we find relevant to future survival, and its use of narrative makes these elements seem more meaningful than simply representing the idea that we might be driving ourselves toward extinction or even listing the related data points of scientifically-centered work.

With future analysis of the ecocritical dystopia, a valuable approach that keeps in mind the effects of anthropogenic climate change driven sea-level rise will be to consider elements like topographical elevations of coastal and near-coastal living spaces as they change within the logic

of the speculative narratives. Abby Halperin and Peter Walton indicate that scientific "[r]esearch suggests one reason individual behaviors have been insufficient to mitigate and adapt to climate change, particularly in countries like the United States, is that climate change is perceived as distant in time and space" (291). While their solutions rely on the "attribution of extreme weather events" (292), and thus on reacting to what has already come to pass in an attempt to convince members of the public who have doubts about current environmental phenomena, ecocritical dystopian writing works towards connecting imaginations with potential future iterations of these problems. A prominent recent contribution that links catastrophe and sea-level rise with various versions of public action towards mitigating problems is Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017), for which the particular landscape of current day infrastructures as well as cartographic contour lines shifts until un-supported buildings in an intertidal zone become structurally-fraught, and contours become isobaths. Such a sea-level based approach is also relevant in returning to and understanding other media imagining the future, like the *Natural History Museum* diorama. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS)[171] hosted at the National Geospatial Technical Operations Center (NGTOC), the ground-floor of the Museum of Natural History is at nearly 28 metres above sea level.[172] With this elevation and its relative oceanside location in a Manhattan surrounded by ascending waters, a sea-level rise of around 30 metres could be enough to start drowning its halls, barring human intervention in the form of enacted policies and practices, or even a potential stopgap of dykes impeding ocean

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[171] Readings made using USGS in this project were taken before the Trump administration began their erasure of online climate-related data. I do not know if or how the current application works with previous records, but Joe Romm indicates a problem.

[172] For elevation accuracy this measurement, I used the USGS Elevation Point Query Service from the "USGS 3DEP 1/3 arc-second layer hosted at the NGTOC" (United States Geological Survey). For an explantion of "3DEP 1/3 arc-seconds," see the USGS's "About 3DEP Products and Services."

waters from engulfing the land—which is actually something that is being considered by threatened coastal metropolises and sovereign territories. As Matthew Schneider-Mayerson points out about "Singapore, the sole industrialized small island nation in the world" (166), while

> certain North American nations have denied and debated the reality of
> anthropogenic climate change, Singapore has been quietly preparing for sea level
> rise for over two decades. Since the early 1990s, new reclamation and
> construction projects have been required to double the expected sea level rise
> (based on the IPCC's latest estimates), and vulnerable highways are being
> elevated …. Already, 70 to 80 percent of Singapore's coast is lined with hard
> walls or gradated stone embankments. (169)

Schneider-Mayerson, for the most part, frames Singapore's terraforming and other like efforts toward sustaining and reclaiming usable land as a positivism—and perhaps it is in many ways, especially in the face of what are essentially unabated climate change inducing choices by the majority of the industrialized world. But it is also possible that different futures can be imagined than ones that require holding back ocean waters through the use of physical barriers. The ecocritical dystopia and its permutations and presumed heirs are invested in this work.

The logic of needing to adhere to elevations and topographies and to have to react to fluctuations in global ice reserves and potential oceanic changes is, arguably, the logic of numbers taken on their own. This is a logic that suggests that seawalls and similar public infrastructures are the only way forward for preserving distinctly sea-side areas and human living spaces. But this practice of walling-off established cityscapes from rising tides is seen as disastrous in ecocritical dystopian narratives such as *New York 2140* or Adam Lewis Schroeder's "This Is Not the End My Friend" (2010), and thus such examples in this subgenre of speculative

fiction provide a different angle of thought than mere scientific data allows. The ecocritical

dystopia says that even though we may not see the complete effects of these environmental

changes in our lifetimes, these processes will nonetheless shape the future. But ecocritical

dystopianism also cautions against the reliability of what are, ultimately, just temporary

provisions. It warns further against the logic of vast, technoscience-backed geoengineering plans

that might have an array of unforeseen, negative consequences; these are desperate approaches

arguably taken because systems of capital and fossil fuel energy refuse to change (Streeby 1-3).

The ecocritical dystopia philosophizes about our potential social choices moving forward and

humanizes the projections made from the logic of the scientific mindset. Ecocritical

dystopianism does the job of thinking forward in a contemplative manner and reminds us that

once we have settled into perpetuating our current modes of living (the very means by which we

are altering the environment and places and spaces with which we are familiar), the time for

sandbags will have long evaporated alongside vital freshwater reserves and, in many cases, the

planning of dykes, walls, and reservoirs. The ecocritical dystopia even increasingly argues

against the organizational and reactionary assumptions of attempting to hold back vast quantities

of water with hard barriers rather than with more natural breakwaters that modern coastal

infrastructures have worked to phase out.

 Despite the numerical exactness of elevation represented by my specific examination of a

New York landmark or by others' similar measurements—such as the processes from research to

imagining undertaken by Octavia E. Butler, Margaret Atwood, and Thomas King—with constant

sea-level rise, such "accuracy" is obviously in flux. That is, though the American Museum of

Natural History may have been (an average of) 27 metres above sea-level in April of 2016,[173] its

elevation a year, five years, twenty years, or even fifty years later will undoubtedly lessen, and

become even more fraught in the face of other phenomena such as king, storm, or 100-year tides

("Extreme") and the thermal expansion of seawater. To climate change denying proponents, a

sea-level rise of 30 metres or more seems impossibly high, but it is important to bear in mind that

the estimated maximum increase in (general) oceanic levels globally is around 80 metres (Poore,

Williams, and Tracey), should the polar ice caps, sea ice, glaciers, and other such sources all

succumb to rising temperatures and contribute to the ingress and heightening of shorelines

everywhere.[174] While the National Geographic Society's "What the World Would Look Like if

All the Ice Melted" suggests a 216 foot or 65 metre sea-level rise, more properly that

approximate 65 metres represents the sea-level rise if just the East Antarctic ice sheet melts.[175]

With the currently trending exacerbation of global, regional, and local temperatures, such as with

the July 2015 "suffocating heat index" of about 74 degrees Celsius (including humidity) in

Bandar Mahshahr, Iran (Samenow), or heat able to melt plastics, related substances in trashcans,

and random pieces of infrastructure in Phoenix in late June 2017 (Pous), at least certain specific

localities will start to understand the time-sensitive and extreme nature of how our global

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[173] The indicated elevation was 27.135693 metres according to the USGS Elevation Point Query Service (United States Geological Survey, "Elevation Query").

[174] This extreme elevation is not always found in current speculative fiction (even if some stories only posit what seem like "water worlds"), but I was puzzled to see a new Idahoan coastline in Lindsay Redifer's "Standing Still" (189). This is a unique claim, given that "[t]he lowest point in Idaho is in Nez Perce County, at the Snake River, on the state's western border," which "is 710 feet above sea level" ("Idaho"). Even assuming further expansion of oceanic water volumes with global warming, Idaho is still likely to be higher than sea-level.

[175] The "citizen" character in Robinson's *New York 2140* has a more correct amount in mind with 270 feet in possible sea-level rise (141, 142), though Winkelmann et al. postulate slightly more conservative numbers when they argue that, in a warming world, "the Antarctic Ice Sheet would lose most of its mass, raising global sea level by more than 50 m" (2).

changes might continue to affect them, even if these are astonishing outcomes only for them in the current moment. The ecocritical dystopia, however, suggests that even if particular developments of environmental changes irrupt into the public eye in a locale or region, these occurrences are not one-time, and especially not disconnected. That is, we should all invest ourselves in changing our effect on environmental issues, even if we suspect the impact will not be local, but half a world away.

The evidence that we are exacerbating climate change processes and that they are in turn producing disasters comes with, for example, how an increased threat of wildfires is but a normal expectation in this time of the ever-warming Anthropocene. Beyond incidents of sea-level rise flooding, William Sanders' "When This World Is All on Fire" (2001) also suggests that the future will be fraught with arid conditions and indicates several of the American states in a speculative vein that is fast becoming less speculative, and more realistic. Moreover, as Adam Young, Philip E. Higuera, Paul A. Duffy, and Feng Sheng Hu argue, "by the end of this century the probability of burning in many high-latitude ecosystems in Alaska will be up to four times higher than seen in recent decades" ("Risk"; Young et al.). Real-world examples of current patterns of human activity affecting the planet abound, and continue to complicate already complex natural systems. Work like the *Natural History Museum* diorama certainly underlines the severity of such anthropogenic changes and links with the 6th Mass Extinction as an example of the loss of biosphere integrity to not only the rest of the world, but also ourselves. But, as Jodi Dean indicates, the crux of our current crisis is in how we are unable to fully apprehend its materiality, as its complex processes fundamentally change how we are able to perceive and experience the world:

the Anthropocene is a matter of perspective: we can't look at climate change

directly. Relying on multiple disparate measurements, we look for patterns and

estimate probabilities. We see in parts: the melting ice caps, glaciers, and

permafrost; the advancing deserts and diminishing coral reefs; the disappearing

coastlines and the migrating species. Evidence becomes a matter of extremes as

extremes themselves become the evidence for an encroaching catastrophe that has

already happened: the highest recorded temperatures; the hockey stick of

predicted warming, sea-level rise, and extinction. Once we see it—the "it" of

climate change encapsulated into a data point or disastrous image—it's already

too late. (Dean)

We need the imagination encapsulated by a mode such as fiction, which enables society at a

larger scale than that of the scientific to see and hopefully understand problems before it is too

late, or at least to consider them from a more invested standpoint. Dean suggests that things like

climate change or the Anthropocene are anamorphic, such as the distorted skull in Hans Holbein

the Younger's oil painting *The Ambassadors* (1533). In comparison, Timothy Morton would call

these "hyperobjects" (*Hyperobjects*) and comments elsewhere that "[t]he fact of the

Anthropocene makes it impossible even for the most recalcitrant metaphysician of presence to

get a grip on ecological reality" ("Ecology" 229). Simply put, it is difficult for an individual to

picture how current alterations to the world will play out in correspondence with all of the other

anthropogenic effects from the near to far future. The system is much too vast and complex. But

the work of the ecocritical dystopia is to imagine these many factors crystalized into distinct

permutations of the future, and to connect them to readers through distinct references to the real

world altered into the future.

Since Not An Alternative's diorama displays a human skeleton linked to the 6th Mass

Extinction, it also suggests that humanity has gone the way of the proverbial dodo bird and

hunted itself to extinction through its activities in the Anthropocene epoch. Though perhaps the

future world of the diorama still contains some remnant of humanity, there is a question of who,

exactly, the observer of the human skeleton is; perhaps the implied observer is not merely the

"us" of the current human collective, but some future, post-human entities involved in examining

their own permutation of the deteriorating world while also contemplating the long-dead

humans, just as the human skeleton depicted contemplates the allosaurus skull. Perhaps the

geologic remnants of humans are, to these future beings, the fossil fuels comparable to what we

currently rely on, which are implicated in the diorama's telescopic end-focus on the dinosaur

cranium. Whatever the perspective implied, and whether we label it dystopian or post-

apocalyptic, the diorama clearly suggests a "bad" future for humanity, should our activities

continue to be so drastic as to produce the stratigraphic traces (Waters et al.) that have driven the

scientific community to debate whether we are now in a new geological epoch (Zalasiewicz et

al., "When"), a new subdivision of the Holocene, or even something deserving of its own

moniker, like the "Little Ice Age" of 1300-1850 CE (Rafferty; Walker, Gibbard, and Lowe 206).

As Will Steffen, Paul Crutzen, and John McNeill have famously argued, the terminology of the

"Anthropocene suggests that the Earth has now left its natural geological epoch, the present

interglacial state called the Holocene. Human activities have become so pervasive and profound

that they rival the great forces of Nature and are pushing the Earth into planetary *terra incognita*.

The Earth is rapidly moving into a less biologically diverse, less forested, much warmer, and

probably wetter and stormier state" ("The Anthropocene" 614). The Anthropocene term is

dystopian all on its own, according to that definition.

Even the thinker and writer about the future struggles with modes of representing the multitude of issues that keep appearing, or at least growing worse. As Paolo Bacigalupi, with his several dystopias (including ecocritical ones), commented on social media at the end of January 2017,

> In all my books and short stories, I have tried to see the important trends around me, and tried to guess where those trends are leading us. I have tried to provide warning signs, to say, in effect, "This looks dangerous, maybe we should try a different path."
>
> But now, looking back, I realize how wrong I was when I wrote those stories. I realize now that I was overly optimistic. I thought these trends might lead us to disaster in fifty years, or a hundred years—sometime further away than right now, at least. Sometime safely comfortably far away.
>
> I didn't understand that those trends were right upon us.
>
> ("Wrote")

Though Bacigalupi might be chastising himself too strongly here, he is correct to say that these issues are already happening; it is impossible for even a writer of speculative fiction, who presumably has done the research and has the necessary imaginative experience and ability, to be entirely prescient about the future, despite many accurate or self-fulfilling attempts. But such speculative fiction often allows us to adopt a different perspective than the one(s) we currently have—and while this might be especially true of those polyvocal narratives like *New York 2140*, even narratives from a singular point of view permit a different angle than our own. Such fiction allows us to rethink our positions. Writers of ecocritical dystopias ask, "this is what will likely happen, so how might we change?" Such a function is important, because we often fail to see our

reality from a perspective that matters, from a perspective that incites change. The ecocritical dystopia allows us to reconceive our relationship with future events, because it makes us suddenly clear about the fact that we are inextricably linked to the forthcoming outcomes of our actions.

At the end of the first week of Donald Trump's time in the Oval Office, Bacigalupi said, "I'm having a hard time imagining the future turning out well for us" ("having"). But (even if this time is perhaps surprisingly ongoing) these are the prognostications of a more straightforward dystopian vision, for the ecocritical dystopia is also involved in a process of genre and society becoming desirous of better futures. It resonates with what B.A. Mahrab suggests when she describes how the emerging "solarpunk" subgenre is a more utopian reflection that embraces scientific realities. She outlines a fiction that "identifies with a new ecologically positive, futuristic speculative movement that stresses a vision of a positive future with positive outcomes. This is a future that sits beyond scarcity and need. It is a visionary existence where hierarchy is shunned for a collective good. It is a future where our species is reintroduced to the natural world, while technology is remanded to purposes which further humankind's needs on a whole, while continuing to remain ecologically green." The ecocritical dystopia, though rooted in the examination of current-to-future places deemed "bad place," also carries the kernels of hope Mahrab wants to see flourish. Comparably, because Claire L. Evans is weary of "dour dystopias and escapist fantasies," she argues for an "Anthropocene fiction" that she says represents a mode that "isn't just science fiction; nor is it just climate fiction. It's both those things and more. It is all the stories we should tell our children: near-future tales of ecological systems, collapse, responsibility and possibility along with visions of long-term cohabitation with our own environment." But these are already the goals of the ecocritical

dystopia and its narrative outcomes. The ecocritical dystopias *are* the "Anthropocene fiction"

Evans deems necessary. There is a reason, after all, why the narratives of all three focal authors

in "Here, at the End" finish with a focus on the communal. Butler's Earthseed followers;

Atwood's various human, Craker, and pigoon members; and King's Indigenous, Asian,

Caucasian, nonhuman animal, and environmental contributors all present the success of

community in battling desperate times. Even if it is perhaps more closely in the latter two that

humanity becomes reintegrated with the natural world, all three authors demonstrate that the

ecocritical dystopian mode necessarily involves that natural component for successful

community and survivance when overcoming the dire and the untenable.

The goal of the ecocritical dystopia is not to counter specific utopian or dystopian

thinking *per se*, or even to move in a distinct direction along one of those binary divisions.

Rather, the ecocritical dystopia as a genre fosters a rethinking of the terrible positions presented

by previous dystopias; it anchors the conflict within the present and fosters the potential for

thinking that leads toward environmental and communal renewal. By this I do not mean that it

leads toward utopia or Utopian dreaming, which is often unrealistic or unlikely. Rather, by

centering itself within the real world, the ecocritical dystopia demands that we then take up the

call of dreaming better yet *realistic* ways of living as we move forward, speculative though these

might be in the present day. Even my three focal authors—Butler, Atwood, and King—offer the

opportunity to imagine beyond boundaries, as their characters and scenarios aim past the ideas of

borders both national (or sometimes even planetary) and cultural to push for an amelioration in

living conditions. Their characters ultimately attempt to adapt and to thrive no matter how much

the world has changed. As a natural generic progression, this process has already begun, and it is

quite necessary that we separate this body of work from that of ultimately fallible and destructive

utopian desires, such as the kind embodied within ludicrous geoengineering projects like

Jonathon Keats' suggestion that we manipulate the globe's tectonic plates so as to reposition

continents into adjacent and thus mutually-affected arrangements (Peters).[176] Instead, we should

look to writing that, albeit speculative, is grounded in realism.[177]

I do not think that the tangible solutions for our myriad problems, whether one wants to

source them to environmental issues or not, are utopian-rooted ones. Utopia is a promise, but

also only a mirage; we should not forget the etymological lessons of Utopian thought. This, in all

actuality, is how the now-clichéd saying that one person's utopia is another's dystopia gains

functionality and stride in the world. Dreams, hopes, and promises are so easily brushed aside by

realities. But this does not mean that we cannot speculate about better, real futures. Instead of

rooting ourselves in the *topos* of negation, in the unknown and unknowable, we must build from

that which has resonance with our goals. Does anyone actually *want* to contribute to a geological

epoch that might potentially be defined by stratigraphic deposits of chicken bones (Carrington,

"How")? If we want to live in closer proximity with the natural world and veer away from

human-caused social processes that alter global systems irreparably, then we need to adopt

imagined iterations of known strategies and worldviews that encapsulate a productive

relationship with natural systems. If "Western" society wants to survive its moment on not only

Turtle Island but the planet itself, then it needs stories that are more environmentally anchored in

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[176] This has an aesthetic role in reconceptualizing geopolitical relationships in the Anthropocene epoch, but not a practical role of imagining futures as per the ecocritical dystopia.

[177] Some examples in fiction include Clara Hume's ecocritical dystopia *Back to the Garden* (2013), the *Hieroglyph* anthology (2014), and elements of *mitêwâcimowina: Indigenous Science Fiction and Speculative Storytelling* (2016). Other processes and bodies are also toiling toward such goals, which is evidenced by the University of Pennsylvania's April 2017 conference, "An Ecotopian Toolkit for the Anthropocene."

places, for, as J. Edward Chamberlin recalls a Tsimshian elder's question during a meeting with government officials, "'If this is your land, … where are your stories?'" (1). The modern migration and local identity need narratives that are invested in living in concert with the environment; we need to imagine ourselves into modes of healing once more.

While many a commentator has indicated that the future looks bad, that "the good news is we have all the technologies we need to save civilization from climate collapse" (Parenti), or that we will develop future technologies that will ultimately save us, these are but repetitions of earlier arguments that only made the issues at hand worse. As Jon Gordon asserts,

> The narrative of technological modernity—of change, progress, sustainability—
> *depends* on continued oil extraction and the burning of fossil fuels, *depends* on
> continued growth: this premise must remain unquestioned for the narrative to be
> true. The logic works this way: if we take money we get from using up this
> resource and destroying this ecosystem and endangering this watershed and these
> species, and we put that money into new technologies, renewable energy, and
> reclamation, then we can achieve "sustainability." This is a very powerful
> narrative, but *it is the same narrative that has led to the current situation*.
> (xxiv-xxv)

Continued, blind faith in the deity of technology is unsustainable, and while nascent technology may still triumph over nature—either to our benefit or our detriment—in this Age of Self-Realisation, in this moment of so poignantly coming to understand just how significantly we have altered the world, how is it ethically sound to turn from those cultural technologies that have sustained whole peoples through the worst of times known in human history? The current scourge of Indigenous peoples worldwide is not a facet of the natural world from time

immemorial, but what the contemporary, petromodern, techno-savvy, resource-hungry culture of

excess has made of that natural world as an extention of imperialistic roots and continued

policies. In a very quintessential way, its processes have been upset and we have created a

backlash where the natural systems are now intensified in ways that are detrimental to not only

those who still rely directly on the natural world, but also those who ostensibly believe that they

do not. Essentially, the Anthropocenic, colonial settler-invader world has set the natural world

against itself.

Now is the time to re-organize; now is the time to re-imagine; now is the time to come

together in communal ways. It is the time to set aside our risen demagogues and their

exacerbation of racial tensions—the time to stop perpetuating the social order, the

infrastructures, the energy resource usage, and the techno-dependent mindsets that have forced

us to live in a world of "'threat multiplier[s],' as the Pentagon calls global warming" (Brannen,

"This"; Brannen, *Ends*). If even a portion of us is to survive and if even a fraction of the

ecological life we cherish is also to survive, then a massive re-structuring is necessary. This does

not call for the authoritarian arm of control to partition social hierarchies. Such would be but a

fulfillment of many a dystopian fear, and counterproductive. Rather, governance, economics, and

social order as we know them cannot take precedence, for we must rethink how we not only

interact with each other and the other communal groups globally, but with living environments.

As Peter Brannen argues, "life has thrived in hotter climates than even the most catastrophic

projections for anthropogenic global warming. This is one reason to suspect that the collapse of

civilisation might come long before we reach a proper biological mass extinction. Life has

endured conditions that would be unthinkable for a highly networked global society partitioned

by political borders" (Brannen, "This"; Brannen, *Ends*). The ecocritical dystopia teaches us that

the only goals that might ensure success are those of a community that embraces its environment, for they are the only goals that ensure sustainability, adaptation, and longevity. Here, at the end of this acceleration, at this end point to which the modern age has brought us speeding, we must together reimagine our place in the ecological communities of the world, and once more start to live in harmony with our environment. Here, at the end, I would like to offer a different interpretation of an "end," which one might otherwise take to imply a destructive apocalyptic sense. Rather, in this final movement, I want to reframe this end as a beginning—as a drive toward the abolishment of fossil capitalism, of colonialism, of class divide, and of ecologically-destructive practices. Such a redefinition of an end is one of hope, and of positive registers amidst the dystopian overtones that affect our current-day modes of living. It is only in this manner that we will survive to move beyond an End (Skrimshire, "Eternal") that will without a doubt be catastrophic for a mind-boggling percentage of all the biological inhabitants of the world. Only through a re-imagining of the future like the ecocritical dystopia can we hope to remain honest about our errors and still move toward communal survivance.

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