UNCOMMON WORK: UTOPIA, LABOR, AND ENVIRONMENT IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

BY

BRANDON JONES

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2018

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Melissa Littlefield, Chair
Professor Stacy Alaimo
Professor Stephanie Foote
Professor Robert Markley

ABSTRACT

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, critical theorists have lamented in elegiac fashion the disappearance of any political economic system, real or imaginary, that could feasibly offer an alternative to liberal capitalism. Utopia, understood as the aesthetic expression of the desire for alternative social realities, has been declared impossible for political imagining since the late twentieth century. This obsolescence of utopia has been felt particularly acutely among the environmental movement. After its optimistic emergence in the 1960s and 1970s as a corollary of the New Left, the environmental movement became increasingly characterized by a heightened sensibility of ecological precarity and everyday crisis, which emerged in response to the frequency of natural disasters and environmental injustices appearing both in headlines and citizens' backyards. As a result, utopian narratives of sustainable and pastoral alternatives to capitalist growth registered as irresponsibly out of touch. Instead, apocalyptic stories of nature's anthropogenic decline became the predominant form of environmental rhetoric circulating in fictional and political discourse.

Unfortunately, apocalyptic environmental narratives largely registered as redundant among American publics, their mimetic approach to environmental crisis provoking nihilism and despair more than preventative action. A way out of this imaginative impasse lies, my project claims, in a select archive of late twentieth-century American fiction writers that sustained the relevance of utopia for environmental activism and political economy. Namely, I argue that Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Louise Erdrich, Alice Walker, Octavia E. Butler, and Amitav Ghosh, among others, revived an American tradition of georgic writings—that is, texts attending to issues of political economy through a focus on relations between human labor and the physical environment—and directed it toward global projects of economic and environmental justice. The

political efficacy of such fictions for environmentalism, I contend, lies in the way their georgic utopias are subject to change rather than static, unlike the majority of utopian fictions prior to the 1970s. The conditional, unfinished status of these hopeful stories encourages the participation of characters and readers in the work of composing ecologically viable futures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey of this project began during my undergraduate studies, when Professor Sharon Stockton at Dickinson College introduced me to the field of literature and science, and opened the horizon of possibilities available for continuing to explore the interdisciplinary questions that preoccupied me at the intersection of English and Physics. I am exceedingly grateful to her for pushing me to pursue graduate studies, and for introducing me to the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (SLSA), which has continued to be a sustaining and inspiring community for me throughout my graduate career at the University of Illinois. It is through this community that I first encountered Robert Markley and Lucinda Cole, who have both been incredibly supportive of me and my work since 2009. The opportunity to pursue a doctorate degree would never have been available to me if it were not for, in addition to the aforementioned individuals, the support and encouragement of Professors Jean-Michel Rabaté, Michael Gamer, and Lorenzo Valterza at the University of Pennsylvania, as well as then-graduate student Jason Zuzga.

Numerous campus events, collaborations, fellowships/assistantships, as well as external opportunities, have provided formative experiences and long-standing professional relationships that have guided my scholarship. To name a few, Melissa Littlefield's and Robert Markley's dogged pursuit of establishing truly interdisciplinary research networks both on and off campus contributed to such developments as the INTERSECT Network for Neuro-Cultures, the "Writing Another Future: Science Fiction, the Arts and Humanities" symposium, and the "Speculative Futures" IPRH series of events, in which my involvement offered inimitable experience in understanding strategies and avenues for cultivating interdisciplinary communities among the humanities, arts, and sciences. Participating in the 2013 Cornell School of Criticism and Theory,

funded by a fellowship from the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois, had a profound impact on my research trajectory, turning me in the direction of ecocriticism and new materialism, and introducing me to Angie Bennett and Ajitpaul Mangat, whose social and intellectual friendships have been indispensable to the development of this project and my studies as a whole. Other non-Illinois scholars and graduate colleagues who impacted my thought and writing in singular fashion include Eileen Joy, Clint Wilson, Alison Sperling, Shyama Rajendran, and Alan Montroso. I was also lucky enough to receive a Mullen Award Fellowship from the journal *Science Fiction Studies* to pursue archival research at the Octavia E. Butler Collection in Pasadena, California, without which the completion of chapter 4 would not have been possible.

English and other Humanities faculty at the University of Illinois have been vital contributors to the direction of this project and my academic career. Andrew Gaedtke has been extremely generous with his time, and provocative in his feedback and conversation, ever since I first met him in Philadelphia. Lori Newcomb has been an optimistic and inspiring mentor in my capacity as graduate assistant to the *Re:Search* undergraduate editorial board. Jamie Jones is the environmental humanist I hope to be some day, lucid in her explanation of the import of environmental study for humanities at large, and the most generous and encouraging of faculty role models. Samantha Frost provided critical feedback in the formative stages of this project: utopia would not have been the central focus if not for her commentary on the role of human concerns in environmental research. And Antoinette Burton has been a late-stage inspiration, pushing me to the finish line with her incisive comments and discussion points in IPRH seminar meetings, leading by example with her uplifting commitment to envisioning the future of the

humanities, and involving me in the inspirational experience that was the "Speculative Futures" event series.

My committee members and writing group members have been in the trenches with me every step of the way. Melissa Littlefield has been an incredible mentor and role model of interdisciplinary scholarship; she offered patience, advice, and support with the knowledge of exactly what I needed in each moment, even if I didn't know myself. Robert Markley has been in my corner since before I arrived in Illinois. His posthumanism course was a turning point in my graduate studies and his continued input on science fiction studies, especially, has helped me clarify my relationship to that field. Stephanie Foote is responsible for pushing me to develop a sound formal and archival methodology, helping me realize my strengths as a reader of fiction and how to employ them most strategically alongside a keen environmentalist eye. And Stacy Alaimo has shown me how to practice literary studies *as* environmental politics, how to weave new materialist and ecocritical theory into the practice of aesthetic interpretation, and how scholarship can serve as a force for environmental community building. In my writing group, Christine Hedlin and Benjamin O'Dell have been diligent readers and commenters, always keeping me on track, reminding me of audience considerations, and talking through critical decisions at the granular scale of written content and structure. And last but certainly not least, Rebecah Pulsifer has been invested in my project and research as if it were her own, seeing one step ahead in my process and pushing me to get there, interacting "in sympathy of thought" and wholehearted partnership.

This project would not have been possible without the support of friends, academic or otherwise. Michael Uhall, Andrew Gentile, Lauren Deal, and Nicholas Flores, especially, have been the most intellectually stimulating of friends anyone could ask for. And my family has been

the unwavering bedrock of this pursuit, as of all others, always believing in and thinking the world of me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION. COUNTERING APOCALYPSE

In December 2009, just before the annual United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, *USA Today* published a cartoon by artist Joel Pett depicting an exchange between a scientist speaking at an unspecified "Climate Summit" and a climate change skeptic in the audience (see fig. 1). As the speaker gestures toward a presentation slide listing the benefits of sustainable environmental policy, the skeptic questions, "What if it's a big hoax and we create a better world for nothing?" The cartoon became popular among the attendees of the Copenhagen conference, and soon became one of Pett's most circulated cartoons. It is noteworthy in that it does not echo the familiar refrain of faulting the skeptic on the grounds that climate change is real and deserves attention because it is threatening the future of our planet and species. Rather, it faults the skeptic because the unsustainable lifestyle associated with climate change denialism actively works against the improvement of the world, regardless of the reality of climate change. The cartoon suggests that even more so than the scientific consensus on climate change, what should motivate us to believe in it is that doing so could lead to a better world.

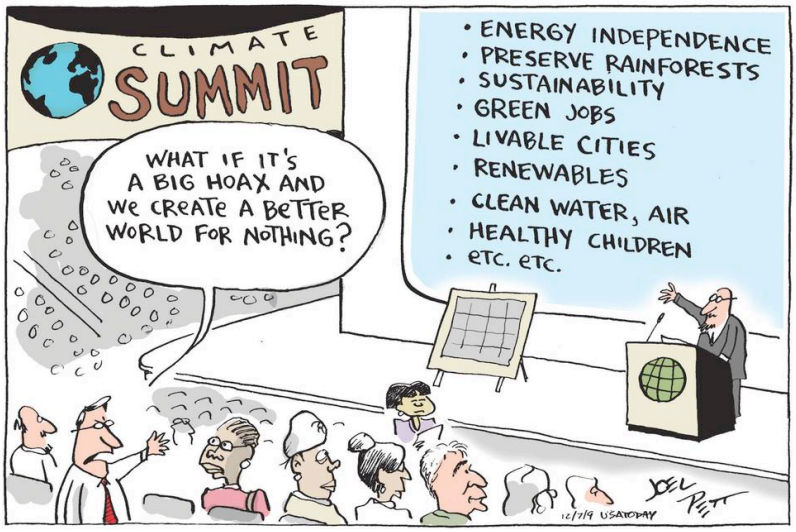

Figure 1. Joel Pett. "Climate Summit." USA Today. 7 Dec. 2009.

For the same reason that it is a critique of climate change skepticism, Pett's cartoon is a sharp indictment of the limited imaginative scope of contemporary American environmental culture, scholarship, and activism at large, which overemphasizes the ubiquity of disaster at the

expense of coherent strategies for change. On the other side of the coin from the skeptic in the cartoon is the environmentalist (whether grassroots activist, policy expert, scientist, or ecocritic) who adopts apocalyptic rhetoric to persuade herself and others that the reason one should care about the environment is because it is in such dire straits, largely as a result of humans' own doing. To take a recent example from American fiction, in the final line of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Forty Signs of Rain* (2004), after a torrential rainstorm has flooded the entirety of downtown Washington, D. C., a climate policy expert says to the senator he works for, "Are you going to do something about global warming *now*?" (393). Both the policy expert and the skeptic operate under the same logic: people will only care once they realize the extent of environmental crisis. The only difference is that the policy expert has already come to believe that things are dire enough to act on, and the skeptic does not yet think things are clearly bad enough to require sustained attention. In both cases, the impetus for action is based on whether one can imagine how bad things are and might be.

The following is an inquiry into the imaginative resources of late twentieth-century American environmental storytelling that offer alternatives to such apocalypticism, revealing the latter to be neither the only nor most effective imaginative means of politically mobilizing environmental publics in the US. Put another way, and following Donna Haraway, the question guiding this dissertation's intervention in American environmental history and literary criticism is, "How can we think in times of urgencies *without* the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse, when every fiber of our being is interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned?" (*Staying* 35). At a time when both radical disavowal of and reluctant compromising with late capitalist forces of environmental exploitation seem equally unviable in the face of eco-catastrophe, there may be no harder task

than thinking in other than apocalyptic terms. But it is also an urgent task. Environmental apocalypticism owes its persuasiveness to its ability to globalize natural disaster, creating a common enemy that humanity as a whole can work against as anathema to species survival. Its tropes of "regeneration through crisis" have not only a mimetic appeal, affirming suspicions about the extent of the problem, but also an emotional one, asserting that when humans unite over a common purpose, they can overcome material damage and biological vulnerability (Schneider-Mayerson 104). However, such appeals have the side effect of diverting calls for change away from collective social movements and electoral politics, alleging that a sense of universal humanism is all that is required to fix environmental crises. As a result, the apocalyptic environmental imagination can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, encouraging nihilistic fatalism and political quietism in the face of despairing circumstances rather than inspiring the preventionist call to arms that is the presumed goal of its cautionary tales. Apocalypticism can be just as defeatist for environmental politics as it can be generative.

A way out of this imaginative impasse lies, I claim, in a select archive of late twentieth-century American fiction writers that sustained the relevance of utopia for environmental activism and political economy in the US. Namely, these authors revived an American tradition of georgic writings—that is, texts attending to issues of political economy through a focus on relations between human labor and the physical environment—and directed it toward contemporary issues of environmental degradation and injustice. Rather than finding commonality in universal humanism or shared enemies of natural disaster, the fictions in my archive advocate, either directly or indirectly, for establishing a commons—understood as a deprivatized space of equitably distributed land and labor—"without obscuring real differences in livelihood and survivability, power, and environmental consequences" (Di Chiro 207).

Examples include Marge Piercy's representation of the Chicana daughter of a migrant farm laborer criticizing the idyllic erasure of economic hardship in a future sustainable society in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and Alice Walker's juxtaposition of critical transnational histories of plantation slave labor with characters' contentions that imagining the planet's end may very well be a self-fulfilling prophecy in *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989). The political efficacy of such fictions for environmentalism, I contend, lies in the way their georgic utopian visions are subject to change rather than static, as opposed to utopian fiction prior to the 1970s. The conditional status of these hopeful stories encourages the coalitional participation of characters and readers in the political work of composing ecologically viable futures. This introduction will set the stage for the interrogation of these fictions' eco-political affordances by elaborating on the stakes of the terms at the center of the project: apocalypse, utopia, and georgic.

Apocalypse, Utopia, and Their Discontents

The apocalyptic imagination in the US has literary roots in American jeremiads—public exhortations reprimanding and disciplining communities for their social and moral depravity, with the aim not to discourage but to reform and embolden people to change. The environmentalist variation on this form, or "geo-jeremiad," that emerged in the mid-to-late twentieth century became a powerful resource for galvanizing people around environmental issues (Tichi 2). During a historical moment when the global environmental costs of capitalism's extractive economies and our inescapable but uneven complicity in them have increasingly occupied the foreground of our experience in both real and imagined terms, turning to apocalyptic narrative has become an effective recourse for making sense of environmental contemporaneity. From the fallout of military nuclear testing programs and the nuclear

meltdowns at places like Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, to famine and overpopulation, to oil spills at the *Exxon Valdez* and Deepwater Horizon, to the racist and classist decisions leading to toxic waste disasters in Bhopal, Love Canal, and Warren County, to deforestation, to depletion of the ozone layer, to climate-induced drought, rising seas, ocean acidification, glacial ice melt, biodiversity loss, and migration, the environmental now since the second World War has been overwhelmingly defined by the negative, global-scale side effects of capitalist growth, industrial expansion, and technoscientific innovation. As Ursula K. Heise has recently argued, narratives of natural decline—"declensionist" stories in which "the awareness of nature's beauty and value is intimately linked to a foreboding sense of its looming destruction"—have provided the most reliable story templates for getting people to care about the environment (*Imagining* 7). Richard White has gone so far as to say that since the mid-twentieth century, the declensionist story of nature's human-driven fall from pastoral grace is the "single narrative" with which "popular environmental literature in the United States has responded to environmental crises ranging from pesticides to global warming" ("Play It Again" 239). And Lawrence Buell's now famous pronouncement that "Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" seems to have never been truer than in the twenty-first century when the terminology of the Anthropocene has come to consolidate the global scale of humanity's detrimental and irreversible impact on the planet (*Imagination* 285).

Despite this "chorus of Jeremiahs," however, there seems to be a consensus that environmentalism began to lose steam as a political movement by the end of the twentieth century (Scranton).[1] Its overwhelmingly apocalyptic rhetoric began to hold as little purchase

[1] See Dowie.

with the public as the pastoral counterpart it criticized as irresponsibly fantasizing about a pristine natural landscape that no longer existed. Most environmental historians of late twentieth-century America describe its affective priorities in terms of a heightened sensibility of ecological "precarity" or "everyday crisis," which emerged in response to the frequency of natural disasters and environmental injustices appearing both in headlines and citizens' backyards, as listed above. The increasing omnipresence of eco-catastrophe meant that not only did narratives of sustainable progress and pastoral return begin to seem out of touch, but also that the once galvanizing influence of declensionist narratives registered as redundant and disheartening rather than incisive and elucidating. Frederick Buell's *From Apocalypse to Way of Life* (2003) may be the most comprehensive account of how the political purchase of apocalyptic and pastoral narratives alike waned by the end of the twentieth century. He writes that

> a sense of unresolved, perhaps unresolvable, environmental crisis has become part of people's normality today. Faith in effective action has diminished at the same time that the concern about the gravity of the crisis has sharpened. Debate about environmental crisis has suffused itself more widely than before throughout American culture and society and become entangled in the routines of more and more daily social and cultural controversies. No longer an apocalypse ahead, critical environmental problems and constraints help construct society's sense of daily normality. Far from going away, environmental crisis has become a regular part of the uncertainty in which people nowadays dwell. (xvii-xviii)

Ecocritics and environmental theorists such as Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Ulrich Beck, and Rob Nixon corroborate Buell's account of everyday environmental precarity in the late twentieth century, according to which violence is slow and risks, while still unevenly distributed, are experienced even by those accustomed to infrastructural protection, such that "many of us, north and south, confront the condition of trouble without end" (Tsing 2).[2]

[2] See Beck; Haraway, *Staying*; Nixon; Tsing.

Following Pett, the question before environmentalists, given such conditions, becomes, what would the work of creating a better ecological reality actually look like? Without dismissing or ignoring the environmental crises with which we are faced, how might we go about envisioning and producing an alternative? Utopia, understood as the imaginary expression of the desire for alternative social realities, would appear to be the most likely candidate around which to structure a literary-archival counter to environmentalism's apocalypse problem. Unfortunately, utopia is particularly uncommon in the late twentieth century through today. With Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History?" (1989) proving to be the most prominent instance, since the end of the 1980s critical theorists have been alternately mourning and celebrating the loss of utopia. From Russell Jacoby's *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (1999), to James Berger's *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (1999), to Susan Buck-Morss's *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (2000), critics have proclaimed utopia to be an impossibility for late twentieth-century political imagining.[3] With the exception of recounting the brief revival of utopian novels in the 1970s—a phenomenon I will discuss further in chapter 2—utopian studies and science fiction studies scholars have corroborated and historically extended these claims in their assessment of late twentieth-century fiction and philosophy, finding that since the end of World War II,

> several anti-utopian authors have declared that utopia is on the verge of disappearing—if it is not already dead. These authors have grounded their claims on the idea that we are now witnessing a moment of cultural retreat, as well as of a vanishing of real political convictions, and envisage the fact that contemporary writers seem capable of writing dystopias only as a very clear sign of man's incapacity to put forward positive images of the future. (Vieira 19)[4]

[3] See Berger; Buck-Morss; Fukuyama; Jacoby.
[4] See also Baccolini and Moylan; Jameson, *Archaeologies*; Marcuse; Popper; Walsh.

It is my contention that such elegies are not so much a reflection of the reality of utopia's disappearance, but rather a reflection of literary and cultural critics' oversight in not considering the formal transformations utopia underwent in late twentieth-century fiction. Namely, I argue that beginning with the so-called "critical utopias" of the 1970s—not so much a fleeting outlier in the trend toward dystopia but an inauguration of a new utopian tradition—utopia shifted from a genre defined by the representation of a spatially estranged and temporally static social locus to a more diffuse, trans-genre style characterized by a dynamically narrated and collectively revisable future. This shift was instigated by a fervent self-consciousness among utopian writers regarding the politically regressive and counterproductive elements of the genre. Deeply entrenched in the strategies of allegory and satire, modern utopian fictions beginning with Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) create space and critical distance from reality in order to defamiliarize and denaturalize the world we live in, shock us out of engrained habits of thought, and encourage us to see things anew. They thus lend themselves to a radical politics of change, demanding oppositional alternatives that challenge, in a homogenous and wholesale manner, the current status quo as a totality. The issue, however, is that in doing so the utopian genre inadvertently props up the very structures of modernity—empire, the nation-state, Enlightenment humanism, mind-body dualism, capitalism, industrialization, etc.—it seeks to subvert; there is nothing more powerful than binary oppositional thinking for sustaining a rivalry. As Phillip E. Wegner writes, the imaginary societies of utopian fiction "are 'nowhere,' as the etymological root of the term *utopia* bears out, precisely to the degree that they make *somewhere* possible" (xvi). Utopian fiction, much to its chagrin, can be said to actually be the condition of possibility for perpetuating the aspects of modernity it defines itself as strictly against.

At a time when economic, political, and environmental crisis alike began more and more to register not as spectacle but as routine, utopian fiction's imagining of wholesale alternatives to the status quo became more suspect and less desirable in the late twentieth century. But less homogenous and prescriptive utopian imaginaries, fictional writing that "tries to see just a little way ahead, behind, and to the sides, conceiving even of its field in partial and provisional terms that will neither impede, nor yet shatter upon, the arrival of the unforeseen" future, did become exceedingly appealing in such unheroic times (Saint-Amour 40). Such "conditional" utopian writing, as I will refer to it, based neither on the assumption of catastrophe nor the promise of redemption but on the pragmatism and endurance of moving forward with uncertainty and possibility, expresses an open experimental appeal, a provisional attempt at hope. This kind of utopianism does not oppositionally set itself against a certain worldview or social structure with any sort of finality; it does not function on behalf of the impulse to dismantle a way of life that has been deemed destructive. It is instead an invitation to participate in the piecemeal process of creating a better world whose parameters remain subject to change. And it is precisely this provisional capacity that makes for a powerful resource for mobilizing collective publics against political quietism. That is, by virtue of its status as subject to future confirmation or change, each fictional instance of conditional utopianism involves an appeal to someone other than its author(s) to become involved and have a say if the world it imagines is to endure.

The Georgic and Twentieth-Century American Ecocriticism

I suggest that this conditional format of utopian imagining is at its most beneficial to environmental politics when expressed in late twentieth-century fictions that revive and revise historical narratives of American georgic writing. As a work ethic and form of environmental aesthetics, the georgic lies between the leisure and natural harmony of the pastoral and the

imperial dominion and resource extraction of the industrial.[5] Literally meaning "earth-work" (deriving from the Greek "geo" and "ergon"), "georgic" can be used to refer to labor performed both by and on the land; the ambiguity of the term can be operationalized to suggest that the earth is both itself agential (a working earth) as well as a medium through which humans exercise their agency (Sayre 106).[6] The term has typically been associated with rural life, agricultural practice, and agrarian ideology, but more important than the term's designation of a particular space of environmental practice is its designation of a certain type of ecological relation. Namely, it emphasizes the lived experience of labor relations between humans and their physical environment, neither upholding the illusion of a pristine wilderness untouched by humankind, buying into an economic ideology of unrestrained growth and technological progress at the expense of the land, nor chastising the latter through apocalyptic narratives of natural decline. The georgic's conditional utopian promise lies in the power of its land ethic to imagine a commonwealth whose persistence depends on the ongoing and revisable process of negotiating human-nonhuman labor relations. It ecologizes conditional utopianism's experimental appeal for hope, constituting "nondeterministic, unfinished, ongoing practices of living in the ruins" of the environmental present. The georgic is not "a longing for salvation or some other sort of optimistic politics; neither is it a cynical quietism in the face of the depth of the trouble." Rather, it is a land- and labor-based commitment to "cultivating conditions for ongoingness" (Haraway, *Staying* 37-38).

---

[5] Paradoxically, it could be said that ideologies of industrial progress, as much as those of pastoral return, value non-labor: the techno-imperial dream of industry is to replace human labor with machine work. As Cohen writes of modern industrial agriculture, it is a form of agrarianism that "reduces the field to a laboratory and prioritizes the minimization of work" (18).

[6] In this way, as Michael Ziser argues, much of the recent new materialist and science studies scholarship emphasizing the political role of nonhuman agency in the formation of human culture and society can be said to be operating in the georgic tradition. See Ziser, 1-22, 159-181.

In addition to reanimating utopianism, late twentieth-century georgic writing foregrounds questions of labor that are often neglected in environmental discourse. In his influential essay "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," Richard White calls environmentalism to task for its assumption that human labor is always detrimental to ecosystem health. Operating under a strict divide between artificial and natural, most calls for environmental stewardship involve keeping working humans and their machines away from nonhuman life: "Nature seems safest when shielded from human labor" (White, "Work and Nature" 172). Leisure, not labor, mainstream environmentalism tells us, should characterize our engagement with nature. As a result, labor movements and environmental movements that share similar grievances against capitalist exploitation and extraction end up denouncing one another's causes rather than building coalitional connections. Environmentalists accuse logging, farming, fishing, mining, drilling, and fracking laborers, for instance, of destroying the environment while the workers decry environmental regulations as costing them financial autonomy. Rather than turning their ire against the corporate practices of capital privatization, centralization, dispossession, and accumulation that tasked the laborers with both inequitable and unsustainable work practices in the first place, the two groups end up on opposite sides of a political issue despite common interests.

Since the publication of White's essay in 1996, environmental and labor historians, especially, have been actively researching periods and cultures that model a more coalitional political relation between labor concerns and environmental concerns.[7] A 2014 special issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History* on environment and labor, for example, notes that "Most recently, a number of works have attempted to break down the barriers that have

[7] See, especially, Peck.

separated environmental and labor history by tracing key moments in which environmental conditions played a role in producing militant labor movements, including, at times, forms of working-class environmentalism" (Brown and Klubock 4). Literary ecocriticism, however, is another story, as georgic writing that foregrounds connections between human labor and the environment has received little attention within the field—especially in twentieth-century American literary studies.

The consensus among American ecocritics seems to be that since the mid-nineteenth century, and especially by the turn of the twentieth century, with the rise of industrial agricultural practices, the conservation and preservation movements, and, later, the discourses of environmentalism and sustainability, georgic writing was rendered largely obsolete. As Michael Ziser writes, after the Civil War, "America witnessed no genuine literary renaissance of the georgic sensibility [….] If one were to choose a date when the georgic (as a representational stance toward the more-than-human world) disappeared from the spectrum of American literary possibility, it would be around midcentury" (161). While not overtly pronouncing the death of the georgic as Ziser does, ecocritics recently assessing the georgic in America such as Benjamin Cohen, Brian Donahue, Mark Sturges, and Timothy Sweet nevertheless reinforce this claim by focusing solely on the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.[8] With the exception of William Conlogue's *Working the Garden: American Writers and the Industrialization of Agriculture* (2001), the only scholarly work on the georgic in the twentieth century has been on Wendell Berry.[9]

[8] See Cohen; Donahue; Sturges; Sweet.
[9] See Carruth; K. Smith; Fiskio, "Unsettling." Carruth and Fiskio further point to the rise of the food justice movement as a recent revival of georgic sensibilities and politics.

In terms of the American literary history of the georgic, then, my argument in the following chapters will be that instead of disappearing the georgic saw a revival in the late twentieth century as women and people of color began reclaiming the georgic as a means of criticizing agrarian national-building rhetoric. The authors I discuss in the chapters that follow express a new georgic vision, appealing to readers to become participants in an ongoing, uncertain process of building a commons at a time when there appears to be no alternative environmental-economic relation than that of nation-state sanctioned eco-catastrophe and capitalist growth. Crucial to this endeavor is a reworking of the georgic's labor focus as an alternative to the leisure bias of mainstream environmentalism. For the authors in my archive, this reworking of "labor" meant that the term obtained a broad economic meaning in a post-industrial context, referring less to the actions associated with a particular class of employment than to the human agency exercised at the intersection of personal livelihood and global market systems. Under the aegis of the georgic, this reworked understanding of labor became a means of highlighting and prioritizing human survivability and intervention when making political economic decisions regarding environmental change and degradation.

Considering the fictions in the chapters that follow as extending American georgic writing through the end of the twentieth century is to acknowledge that theories of environmental politics today do not emerge ex nihilo from the minds of contemporary scholars, but are produced in concert with historical precedents in American literature and culture. Acknowledging these precedents is crucial for expanding what sources we consider as partners in thinking otherwise, and for determining how effectively they model viable responses to contemporary environmental precarity. In chapter 1, I trace a genealogy of literary historical precedents for the conditional utopianism of late twentieth-century American georgics. While the

authors I analyze in the following chapters embrace the capacity of georgic imaginaries to envision uncertain and changeable environmental futures in ways that the fatalism of apocalyptic, utopian, and pastoral genres cannot, they also make a few key revisions to the narrative templates of their georgic predecessors—particularly concerning issues of gender, race, and empire. Given the ways in which the industrialization of agriculture over the course of the twentieth century shed new light on intersectional power gradients that favored businesses, male land rights, and national sovereignty, georgic alternatives became conducive to critical perspectives on corporate wealth, patriarchal property ownership, environmental racism, and native dispossession. As a result, women and people of color transformed the project of georgic writing from one of nation building to one of economic and environmental justice.

Chapters 2 and 3 consider the formative stages of conditional utopianism and the new georgic within the historical context of the US environmental movement in the 1970s and its rift between mainstream environmentalism and environmental justice in the 1980s. Chapter 2 examines the formal and ecological methods of critique in the "critical utopias" of the 1970s, particularly Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). Formally, these utopias have been considered "critical" insofar as they interrupt the characteristic descriptive stasis of utopian fiction to introduce dynamic historical movement into a setting assumed to no longer be in need of change or improvement. Both novels, in other words, moderate the totalizing gesture of their utopian societies, incorporating mid twentieth-century critiques of utopia, such as Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), which deride utopian thinking for its tacit totalitarianism, while at the same time upholding their potential for inspiring the movement toward social alternatives. Moreover, the object of each novel's critique is decidedly ecological—namely, the environmental stasis of the

pastoral and its contemporaneous manifestation in the language of sustainability, stability, and limits characteristic of the early environmental movement. In *The Dispossessed*, the protagonist works to undo a stabilizing social conscience of anarchism that keeps his society ideologically uniform and performs a pastoralization of the otherwise georgic, decentralized agrarian political economy of the desert planet Anarres. And in *The Woman on the Edge of Time*, the protagonist points out to pastoral utopians the labor of the poor that goes into producing sustainable conditions in the 1970s US, thus using a spatial and temporal contrast to dispel the pastoral myth with georgic realities of earth-work, and forcing the utopians to revise their society as a result.

While Le Guin and Piercy use georgic critiques of the environmental movement's renewed pastoralism under the guise of sustainability to weaken the totalizing gestures of utopian form, they nevertheless still operate within utopia's spatial logic of estrangement, and thus inadvertently reinforce an imaginary of national unity and sovereignty. Chapter 3 argues that conditional utopianism came into its own in the 1980s, as the utopian impulse, rather than simply ceding to the strong dystopian sentiment of the decade, expanded beyond the confines of utopian fiction proper, and the georgic reclaimed narratives of resistance to plantation slave labor and native dispossession to undermine national sovereignty. I specifically analyze Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) as developing conditional utopianism through techniques of magical realism that express the everyday sense of crisis in the late twentieth century through forms that treat the mundane and the fantastic with an equivalent sense of familiarity. At a time when advanced practices of toxic waste disposal were igniting the emergent environmental justice movement, Walker's and Erdrich's novels revise histories of slavery, migrant labor, and land dispossession, replacing the economic exploitation of land and labor in the name of the nation-state with magical and transnational visions of

planetary citizenship. In doing so, they shed light on the centuries-old power gradients along which international toxic waste dumping inequitably distributes environmental burdens to vulnerable populations at home and abroad. Namely, by explicitly replacing visions of pastoral return with images of the earth seeking retribution against white people and industry—e.g., a black character in *The Temple of My Familiar* imagining the earth being able to breath again once all white people have slipped off the planet, a Chippewa character in *Tracks* raising trees that come crashing down upon lumber company workers and machinery—Walker and Erdrich reveal transnational and intersectional connections between the grievances of historically exploited lands and labor communities contemporaneously experiencing new toxic exposures.

Chapter 4 takes the georgic to the air to reassess the terminology of the commons and enclosure in relation to emergent economic and environmental anxieties in the late 1980s and 1990s pertaining to neoliberalism and the atmospheric phenomena of ozone depletion, acid rain, and the greenhouse effect. Referred to as the "new enclosures" in direct reference to the old enclosures of early modern mercantilism, the neoliberalism of the Reagan and Thatcher regimes initiated a global-reaching series of privatization measures. Figuratively speaking, neoliberalism was experienced as a global economic atmosphere that pervaded any remaining environments held in common—including the literal atmosphere. I argue that Octavia E. Butler's *Parable* series (1993, 1998, 2001) represents and responds to this particular historical connection between economic and environmental atmospheres by figuring the protagonist's "Earthseed" religion as a georgic alternative to endless privatization that calls for the reopening of air and space as utopian commons. As dystopias shot through with utopia, Butler's trilogy of "critical dystopias" offer Earthseed's destiny for humanity—"to take root among the stars"—as a provisional call for a collective human effort to regain a co-working relationship with the land through space flight

and the cultivation of extraterrestrial ecologies. By imagining a sky uncertainly open to new possibilities of commonwealth and freedom amidst the backdrop of a United States ravaged by debt slavery, global warming, air pollution, drought, and wildfires—an extrapolation of the effects of the new enclosures—Butler keeps us from falsely convincing ourselves that our atmospheric fates are already sealed.

With the turn of the twenty-first century, the atmospheric uncertainties of the 80s and 90s become more certain, as new legislation drastically curbed emissions contributing to ozone depletion and acid rain, while consolidating a neoliberal world order reliant on fossil fuels and carbon emissions that ensured and exacerbated the continued reality of anthropogenic climate change. This clearer picture of how the economic and industrial projects of modernity have led to overwhelming and quantifiable environmental consequences became captured in the terminology of the "Anthropocene." My concluding chapter investigates the novelistic response to and intervention in the emergent discourse on the Anthropocene, focusing on Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) as a model for georgic critiques of the neocolonial and scientistic attitudes that American environmentalism has taken toward the issue of climate change. Through a transcultural history of indigenous migrants in West Bengal whose georgic sense of land and labor provides a template for revising benevolent Western approaches to the climate refugee crisis, *The Hungry Tide* unhinges the simple polarization of climate activism and skepticism in US climate change discourse. In doing so, it demonstrates how those most reticent to adopt an environmentalist stance toward the Anthropocene and global warming may also be those most affected by the consequences of these phenomena. Ghosh does not conclude that such populations just need to get on board, but that advocates of climate change policy and activism

need to revise their pastoral imaginaries to make room for the lived experience of those continuing to work the earth in the wake of the Anthropocene.

Together, these chapters make the case that in the late twentieth-century US, environmental stewardship has rested its laurels on more than imaginaries of apocalypse, and utopianism has not disappeared and given way to the self-fulfilling prophecies of dystopia, but has subtly infiltrated other literary forms beyond its traditional home of utopian fiction. What this account offers is evidence that imaginaries capable of inspiring collective action and hope in a time of progressive crisis have not become obsolete, but have found effectiveness in conditionally utopian expressions we would not instinctively look to for inspiration because of our inclination to assume that "*the staged anticipation of disasters and catastrophes obliges us to take preventative action*" (Beck 11). But what if the opposite is true, that instead of inspiring preventative action, fictional stagings of apocalypse function as a way of "making confident predictions" that "only encourages passivity" (Frase 33)? What if "forewarned is not always forearmed" but instead is a prompt to "Despair more" (Lepore)? What follows is an attempt to verify these claims, and to present a provisional alternative.

CHAPTER 1. TOWARD A NEW AMERICAN GEORGIC

The Ecological Fault Lines of American Pastoral

The apocalyptic strategy of inciting care, concern, and action by shedding light on crisis has been a central feature of American national imaginaries since their nascent inception among European colonists in the seventeenth century.[10] Particularly noteworthy and foundational is the "jeremiad" tradition in Puritan discourse. First brought from the Old World to the New in the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, epitomized in the early sermons of John Winthrop and John Cotton, and refined in the 1660s and 1670s by Michael Wigglesworth, Increase Mather, and Samuel Danforth, the jeremiad was perhaps "America's first distinctive literary genre" (Bercovitch 6). The literary history of the nation, in other words, could be said to be founded on an apocalyptic imaginary. But it was an imaginary inextricably tied to a utopian opposite, as the jeremiad fueled the colonial and religious errand of establishing a society that would serve as a model for the (not-yet) reformed Church of England. Such an errand required conquering and transforming the American wilderness, perceived under a pastoral rubric as uncharted, uncivilized, and uninhabited—a blank slate of nature.[11]

This section will unpack the relations of apocalyptic, utopian, and pastoral forms embedded in early American jeremiad rhetorics, identifying the cracks and fault lines of these relations as the conditions of possibility for the georgic to emerge as an alternative narrative template. This formal genealogy grounds my critique of apocalyptic as well as traditional utopian narratives as ineffective instruments for inciting environmental activism and change in the US,

---

[10] Indeed, the term "apocalypse" first and foremost refers to disclosure, revelation, uncovering, or unveiling. It is distinct from eschatology, or the study of the end times, but has become related to it in terms of revealing signs of the end times. See Johns 396-98; D. Robinson xii-xiii.

[11] See Fiskio, "Apocalypse and Ecotopia" for a broader conversation on the "mutually constituting relationship between apocalyptic and pastoral genres" (12).

focusing on the cultural operation and function of such imaginaries since the beginning of European settlement in America. Namely, I contend that seventeenth-century jeremiads—and their eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century legacies as manifest in frontier myths of westward expansion, transcendental nature writing, wilderness preservation, and the environmental movement—whether they tend toward the apocalyptic or utopian, ultimately draw on a pastoral conception of American environments as pristine natural spaces whose appeal for future imaginaries depends precisely on their capacity to be transformed through industrial and colonial progress. The idea of unspoiled nature and harmonious living with it, in other words, has never been an end in itself, the future to be achieved or past returned to. Instead, it has only been appealing to the extent that it further engenders techno-imperial visions of how those conditions of environmental purity can be made into something else. Whether through apocalyptic, declensionist narratives about how Americans have ruined the opportunity their nation's natural bounty has provided—which tends to result either from their over-industriousness or moral decay—or through utopian narratives of both direct technocratic progress and indirect pastoral return, predominant stories of America's environmental futurity betray the very kind of better ecological living they intend to support by refusing to fully relinquish the ideal of untouched wilderness that can only ever lead to its opposite.

The rhetoric of the seventeenth-century American jeremiad is particularly interesting and complex—and informative for my purposes here—in that it compresses together in one narrative template what would become divergent American literary histories of apocalypse, utopia, and pastoral. According to Perry Miller's and Sacvan Bercovitch's foundational accounts of the American jeremiad, this type of seventeenth-century sermon derived from but altered the traditional European jeremiad form, which was first and foremost a lament and castigation of the

sins of a people, which have caused the sinners to fall out of favor with God, with little hope of redemption and harsh punishment a guarantee. In Bercovitch's account,

> The traditional mode, the European jeremiad, was a lament over the ways of the world. It decried the sins of 'the people'—a community, a nation, a civilization, mankind in general—and warned of God's wrath to follow. Generation after generation, from the medieval era through the Renaissance, Catholic and then Protestant audiences heard the familiar refrain. The Lord required them to walk in righteousness, not to glory in the self; to follow His commandments, not the temptations of the flesh. […] The preachers used [Biblical] texts in their jeremiads as moral lessons, but the texts themselves held out little hope, if any. (7)

The Puritan mission in the New World, however, introduced a complex element of hope to the jeremiad form, as it became not a discouragement of the colonial enterprise, but its fodder. This mission was two-fold: to serve as a model of reformed Christianity that could then be adopted in the Old World, and, in the millennial tradition of Christian eschatology, to pave the way for the New Jerusalem and the second coming of Christ after the apocalypse.[12] The chastising rhetoric of the jeremiad was put to both uses, in the first instance calling on the settlers to forego and abrogate their sinful ways so as to ensure the success of establishing a "Citty upon a Hill" that the rest of the Christian world would look upon for guidance, and in the second instance figuring increasingly fervent punishment of sin as a sure sign that the Christian Millennium was near (Winthrop 93).

In this way, the jeremiad encompassed both utopian and apocalyptic narratives, at once encouraging settlers with utopian appeals to work hard to establish the ideal "Citty upon a Hill" and apocalyptic appeals to see their punishments as signs of the coming end as well as

---

[12] Tichi sums up Christian millennial eschatology: "After a period of upheaval and persecution God would decree the suppression of evil on earth, the chaining up of Satan, and the onset of the New Heavens and New Earth of the Millennium. During that epoch of one thousand years Christ would dwell and reign among the chosen people before loosing Satan for the terrible final battle of the triumphantly righteous against the ultrademonic peoples of Gog and Magog" (16). See also Killingsworth and Palmer.

opportunities to repent and wind up on the right side of history when the Millennium arrives. In Bercovitch's words, the Puritans' "church-state was to be at once a model to the world of Reformed Christianity and a prefiguration of New Jerusalem to come. To this end, they revised the message of the jeremiad. […] In their case, they believed, God's punishments were *corrective*, not destructive. […] In short, their punishments confirmed their promise" (8). By different means, the utopian and apocalyptic faces of the jeremiad led to the same end of Puritan celebration and triumph in the New World.

Critical in this history of the jeremiad for understanding the impact of American utopian and apocalyptic traditions on ecological thinking is the way in which the political economy of colonization undergirding the Puritan errand in the New World relied on a pastoral conception of the American wilderness. Typically identified as originating as a distinct literary form in the *Idylls* of Theocritus (c. 316-260 BCE) and Virgil's *Eclogues* (37 BCE), the pastoral is perhaps best known as the expression of a return or retreat to a bucolic countryside—a natural and refreshing sanctuary, both physically and spiritually, from industrialized urban space.[13] But the pastoral does not only contrast country from city, but also leisure from labor. Life in the pastoral countryside is epitomized in the figure of the herdsman or shepherd, who, as Wolfgang Iser makes a particular point of, stands in contrast to other forms of rural labor and economy in that the herdsman sustains a harmonious and leisurely relation to nonhuman landscapes and animals. "Unlike huntsmen," Iser writes, "shepherds do not kill to live. Instead, they domesticate their animals and tend their piece of Nature. Unlike husbandmen, they do not settle on the land in order to wrest their living from the soil. Rather, they roam the countryside with their flocks and have leisure time. Here, then, we have a varied 'economy of tropes'" (33). The pastoral thus not

[13] Lawrence Buell's definition is perhaps the most encompassing in this respect: "the idea of (re)turn to a less urbanized, more 'natural' state of existence" (*Imagination* 31).

only signifies a spatial remove to natural landscapes uncorrupted by industrial labor, but also certain expectations of leisurely activity that resist labor and economy altogether.

Given this understanding of pastoral, to say that the Puritan errand encoded in American jeremiads expressed a colonial economic venture based on pastoral ideology may sound contradictory. How could the anti-labor attitude of the pastoral match the Puritan utopian mission of building a "Citty upon a Hill," which figuratively imposes the urban and industrial on the rural and leisurely? The Puritan relationship to America as wilderness gives us a hint. The colonists saw the New World as wilderness insofar as they believed it to be uninhabited and uncultivated by humans—a space only of animals and beasts. In addition to driving the national myth of the frontier and settler colonial violence against Native Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this wilderness concept also defined the seventeenth-century Puritan mission as, according to the title of Samuel Danforth's 1670 election sermon, an "errand into the wilderness."[14] The Puritan errand to be achieved through either the jeremiad's utopian or apocalyptic strategies was one that would take place in the wilderness, which through its connotations of forested and uncultivated land embodies both the spatial and leisure features of the pastoral. The effect here is not the erasure of the pastoral, but rather the establishment of the pastoral as the very condition of possibility for utopia and apocalypse alike. In other words, in order to envision their errand through the jeremiad form, the Puritans first had to posit a pastoral landscape they could transform into its opposite; the uncultivated wilderness was there for them to cultivate. This suggests that even before the inception of the nation proper, America foreclosed the possibility of orienting itself to pastoral as an end in itself—it was only ever a means to antagonize two opponents: utopian techno-imperial progress and apocalyptic decline.

[14] See Miller.

As Roderick Nash succinctly puts it, "While the Puritans and their predecessors in perfectionism often fled to the wilderness from a corrupt civilization, they never regarded the wilderness itself as their goal. […] The Puritans […] went to the wilderness in order to begin the task of redeeming the world from its 'wilderness' state. Paradoxically, their sanctuary and their enemy were one and the same" (35). Despite repeated calls from naturalists, preservationists, and environmentalists throughout America's history to return to a more harmonious, pastoral relationship with nature, the national imagination was predisposed from the start to consider such calls not as ends in themselves, but as restarts for industrial progress at times when it seemed to be headed down the wrong track.

This is an exceedingly troubling state of affairs for environmental thought. Beyond the ideology critique and environmental justice challenges to environmentalism—the latter of which I explore further in Chapter 3—that find imaginaries of pastoral retreat as dangerous in their erasure of human labor and their neglect of social structures of inequity that make such a retreat less possible and beneficial for women and people of color, the relationship of jeremiad to wilderness in American history suggests that pastoral ideology cannot even succeed in its primary initiative of inspiring greater environmental stewardship.[15] It is not the antidote to industrial ills, as traditions of American nature writing, wilderness preservation, and environmentalism since Henry David Thoreau and George Perkins Marsh have proclaimed, but is rather their *raison d'être*. Contra Leo Marx, the machine is not the counterforce to the garden, but rather the garden is there precisely to be intruded by the machine.[16]

---

[15] For ideology critiques of the pastoral, see Gifford; Williams, *Country*. For environmental justice critiques of the pastoral, See Buell, *Endangered*; Cronon.
[16] See Marx.

In his influential *Nature's Economy*, Donald Worster identifies two types of ecological thinking that emerged in early modern Europe and formed into robust antagonists by the eighteenth century: "arcadian" or pastoral ecology and imperial ecology. The former, exemplified by Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser's revival of the Virgilian pastoral, contrasted with the latter through figures such as Francis Bacon, who espoused a view of progress based on exploiting natural resources through "science and human management," such that rather than "the arcadian naturalist" who "exemplified a life of quiet reverence before the natural world, Bacon's hero was a man of 'Active Science,' busy studying how he might remake nature and improve the human estate" (30). These two contrasting European economic perspectives on nature collapsed into one another in an American context, as the prospect of a New World arcadian pastoral—increasingly absent especially from British imaginaries due to the series of land enclosures for husbandry from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries—became appealing precisely to the extent that it could activate a new imperial economy that could correct the mistakes of European economy. The colonial errand, then, as expressed through the jeremiad, tied together moral and economic reform, both of which entailed imagining the pastoral only to overcome it. This legacy of the jeremiad became most clear, according to Perry Miller, by the nineteenth century when the frontier mindset and allure of westward expansion were at their height, revealing the "errand into the wilderness" to consist of developing a model of reformed Christianity as well as being "dispatched into the forests […] to commence the gigantic industrial expansion […] launched upon a limitless prospect" (236). This is all to say that the figuration of American pastoral as ground for spiritual and economic progress became so central to the national imagination that even ostensible retreats to or recoveries of less corrupted nature as an end in itself—from Thoreau to Marsh to Muir to Carson—inevitably dovetailed with utopian or

apocalyptic jeremiads that could only ever figure better living with nonhuman environments as a means not an end. America's most prominent environmentalist traditions have assured their own political inefficacy by failing to account for the way in which their pastoral appeals get figured in the national imagination as ideals subservient to other modes of futurity.

An early and exemplary instance of America's ironic pastoral (non)return, and one which will lead us to an understanding of the georgic as an alternative to utopia, apocalypse, and pastoral, is the founding text of utopian fiction: More's *Utopia*. A principle impetus for More's text was the social upheaval in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century England due to new "enclosures" of common land. The term "enclosures" in the context of land property refers to "the abolition of common rights over land," occurring "on wastes and commons or in the village fields, where arable strips of land could be exchanged and consolidated in the hands of individual landholders" (McRae 16). At the time of More's *Utopia*, large pastures of land were becoming newly enclosed in England to meet the demands of the nation's burgeoning industry of wool exports. Grazing lands were being depopulated of people to make room for more sheep, as aristocratic landowners engendered early processes of capital accumulation by dispossession. As a result, "local inhabitants lost an important source of food and income; many families became homeless and were reduced to begging" and thievery (de Geus 60). The social, economic, and environmental realities these new enclosures brought about are More's object of criticism in Book I of *Utopia*.

Whereas Book II contains the description of the island of Utopia that became More's greatest legacy, Book I is a satire of contemporaneous English society, and can be read as a kind of secular jeremiad in apocalyptic form, condemning the social ills of a nation governed by principles of capital accumulation and private property, as opposed to one functioning as a

commonwealth. The majority of the first book's grievances are leveled against the enclosures and how they have resulted in an increase in thievery. The fictional traveler returning from Utopia, Raphael Hythlodaeus, criticizes methods of capital punishment to fictionalizations of More and his (real) friend Peter Giles. Hythlodaeus shows capital punishment to be a poor deterrent of crime and, more importantly, to completely overlook the reason so many have resorted to thievery: they have been dispossessed of land and labor. Such dispossession and consequent thievery is the inevitable result of the new enclosures. To support his claim, Hythlodaeus uses a powerful metonymy in which sheep stand in for greedy landowners:

> Your sheep […] which are usually so tame and so cheaply fed, begin now, according to report, to be so greedy and wild that they devour human beings themselves and devastate and depopulate fields, houses, and towns. In all those parts of the realm where the finest and therefore costliest wool is produced, there are noblemen, gentlemen, and even some abbots, though otherwise holy men, who are not satisfied with the annual revenues and profits which their predecessors used to derive from their estates. […]
>
> Consequently, in order that one insatiable glutton and accursed plague of his native land may join field to field and surround many thousand acres with one fence, tenants are evicted. (More 65-67)

The transformation of animal husbandry from an agrarian to a mercantilist, proto-industrial capitalist, economy has not only driven farm laborers off their land and into lives of crime, but has also made beasts of otherwise timid sheep and plagued natural spaces, turning "all cultivated land into a wilderness" (67). According to Hythlodaeus's critique, wilderness qua over-cultivated wasteland results from the imperial ecological framework of the enclosures, and thus is a conception of nature entangled with the dispossession of vulnerable and marginalized populations.

This is a very different understanding of wilderness from that represented in American pastoralism. Rather than making imperial ecology possible—providing a blank slate devoid and in need of cultivation and industrialization—wilderness here is a product of it. By making this

point, Hythlodaeus unmasks the ideological smokescreen of "wilderness," revealing it to be not a space of non-labor, but a space produced by highly calculated imperial rhetoric.[17] From this perspective, one would think once More turns in Book II to the description of Utopia, as representing the opposite of the political economy of the English enclosures, he would work against perpetuating the myth of the New World as uncultivated wilderness. And yet, that is precisely what he does, albeit subtly—an inconsistency owing precisely to the strong pastoral appeal of the recently discovered Americas.

While scholarly consensus as to the precise nature of the influence of the European discovery of the Americas on More and *Utopia* is varied, it is clear that the influence was significant enough that More represented Hythlodaeus as having visited Utopia while journeying with Amerigo Vespucci on his famous four voyages to the New World.[18] Vespucci's account of his voyages was well known to More and the rest of England, and the prospect of a New World most certainly played a role in how he structured the text of *Utopia* into two books. Namely, the New World provided the spatial, critical distance to comment in jeremiad-like, apocalyptic fashion upon the social ills of the Old World—but only if that New World was supposed as a blank slate of nature upon which civilization could start anew. Once the discovery of the Americas entered into More's political conversations with his friend Peter Giles, "the conversational trot took a new path. What if one could really start building a society from scratch? What kind of commonwealth could one then erect […]?" (Hexter xxxi). The imagination of a utopian society, one that strove to encapsulate an ideal world that corrected for the mistakes made in historical reality, was thus inaugurated by the erasure of any form of

[17] For a comprehensive critique of "wilderness," see Cronon.
[18] For an overview of the debate about the influence of discovery of the Americas on *Utopia*, see Cave.

society in America. A society could only be built from scratch if there was no society preceding it. The New World thus had to be envisioned as pastoral wilderness for the prospect of utopia to come into being. Once More turns from the satire of England to the description of Utopia, the notion of wilderness as product of industry and empire loses its critical purchase and once more becomes raw material under the aegis of pastoral ideology.

As a result of this inauguration of utopia through pastoral, the land of Utopia ends up recreating the very conditions of imperial ecology it ostensibly set out to prevent. While More takes Vespucci's account of how the indigenous people he encountered held everything in common as inspiration for describing a commonwealth opposed to his native England's developing fixation on private property, the Utopians end up relying on continued colonization, slavery, and the accumulation of surplus capital. In the early stages of the account of Utopia, Hythlodaeus emphasizes how neither rural nor urban living has a concept of private property. In the case of the latter, cities consist of houses in which "folding doors, easily opened by hand and then closing of themselves, give admission to anyone. As a result, nothing is private property anywhere. Every ten years they actually exchange their very homes by lot" (121). However, when it comes to conditions of overpopulation, the citizens of Utopia are encouraged to take over indigenous lands, under the assumption not that doing so will turn the lands into a wasteland wilderness, but that they already are wilderness and are in need of cultivation in order to make them otherwise. As Hythlodaeus explains,

> And if the population throughout the island should happen to swell above the fixed quotas, they enroll citizens out of every city and, on the mainland nearest them, wherever the natives have much unoccupied and uncultivated land, they found a colony under their own laws. […] By their procedures they make the land sufficient for both, which previously seemed poor and barren to the natives. The inhabitants who refuse to live according to their laws, they drive from the territory which they carve out for themselves. If they resist, they wage war against them. They consider it a most just cause for war when a people which does not

> use its soil but keeps it idle and waste nevertheless forbids the use and possession of it to others who by the rule of nature ought to be maintained by it. (137)

Moreover, even though Hythlodaeus claims the Utopians rank the use value of iron above the exchange value of gold and silver—in opposition to a mercantilist political economy—they nevertheless hoard gold and silver imports in case they need leverage in foreign affairs. They also use this same cache of precious metals "to make the chains and solid fetters which they put on their slaves" (153). Thus, as Timothy Sweet observes, "while More advances the Utopian theory of colonization in the name of agrarianism—here an ideology of pure use value in which iron is valuable but gold and silver are not—the Utopians' import of precious metals hints, if only by way of prohibition, at an ideology in which trade is the primary source of wealth" (16). By mistakenly reaffirming wilderness as pastoral input in Book II rather than carrying over the Book I understanding of it as imperial output, More consolidates the utopian imagination of American colonialism as replicating the dispossession of the European enclosures among indigenous populations and creating the conditions for a plantation economy built on slavery. Pastoral ecology ends up working against itself, ensuring that the very imperial ecology of enclosure it set out to prevent becomes a reality in the New World.

We thus find at the moment of the birth of utopian fiction what would become the template for the American jeremiad in the following century and beyond: apocalyptically denounce the ills of one world in order to create or prepare for the arrival of a new utopian one that will impose itself on a pastoral wilderness. Fortunately, More, in his false opposition to the enclosures, does provide a glimpse of a potential way out. For if More's goal was to revive an agrarian political economy to oppose the mercantilist one that emerged with the new enclosures—that is, to promote a land ethic of labor—drawing on the leisure of the pastoral return seems a roundabout choice. Why not represent the land as always-already working and

worked, rather than either under worked or over worked? Why not be concerned with nature as the space of "our cultural engagement with the whole environment" instead of as the space of retreat from culture to environment (Sweet 5)? Such questions mark the emergence of the georgic along the fault lines of the pastoral.

The Georgic in American Literary History

Like the pastoral, the georgic as literary form and ethic becomes firmly established with Virgil, whose *Georgics* "occupies a position midway between the heroic ideals of Virgil's martial *Aeneid* and the happy leisure of his pastoral *Eclogues*" (Conlogue 7). The georgic in Virgil is, however, less spatially oriented than the pastoral, concerning not "the separation of the country from the city" but rather "a mode of thought necessary to sustain human life: hard work is inevitable and creative (Book I, lines 121-36), variety should rule (Book 2, lines 84-109), human life is communal (Book I, lines 300-305), humans ought to heed nature's patterns (Book I, lines 50-53)" (Sweet 5; Conlogue 7-8). The georgic suggests a style of environmental thought and practice that strives for a better world through "the performance of equitable labor for the common welfare," where the community whose welfare is of concern includes a "diversity—of plants, animals, and humans" (Low 18; Conlogue 8). The earth-work of the georgic is labor performed in the service of creating a world-in-common, and it is this language of the "common" associated with the georgic, along with its counterintuitively minimal concern for locality and place, that I argue are responsible for its appeal to late twentieth-century American authors confronting environmental precarity with conditional utopian attitudes.

While in many respects the georgic can connote a local, bioregionalist discourse focusing on the connections between individual humans and the land-based ecosystems with which they immediately work, much recent scholarship on the georgic highlights, sometimes inadvertently,

the term's global and collective valences. In addition to the above quotations by Conlogue and Low emphasizing the georgic's preference for communal life and biodiversity, Laura Sayre has stressed the ways in which Virgil's "*Georgics* draws larger connections, pointing out the many ways in which the farmer's world is linked through trade, politics, and history to the farthest corners of the globe" (106). Timothy Sweet elucidates the importance of the georgic for the formation of public life, arguing that the American georgic tradition since the sixteenth century strove "to articulate a relationship between economy and environment that would foster the public good" (7). And, most emphatically and significantly for my conception of conditional utopianism, Michael Ziser describes the georgic as often appearing "in the form of an open-ended almanac or manual whose instructions are meant to be followed year in and year out without the appearance of any final product. The georgic is essentially half a meaning. Acknowledging that its end lies somewhere outside of itself, it relies on its readers or community of users to complete it" (170). Georgic writing here presents as a provisional appeal to ecological collectivity, calling communities together by virtue of their shared earth-work. Moreover, rather than the pastoral's "nostalgic orientation to a lost moment in the past," the georgic's appeal to communal participation as an ongoing environmental practice suggests an uncertain utopian movement "from the present into the future, a goal that implies a sense of time as duration" (Ziser 169).

What Sayre, Sweet, and Ziser have recently been pointing to in georgic writings is the way in which their land-labor ethic composes imagined communities in other-than-nationalist frames.[19] In an American context, the georgic's emphasis on social organizing based on shared labor commonwealths of humans and nonhumans relates transversally to the nationalization

[19] I have in mind here Benedict Anderson's assessment of the nation as the predominant form of modern imagined communities. See Anderson.

work of apocalyptic, utopian, and pastoral forms circulating prior to and during the time of the early Republic. Particularly in the US, then, the georgic can be considered the literary enactment of what Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers have been calling "cosmopolitics," or the ongoing, "progressive composition of the common world" through a process of "'collecting' the multiplicity of associations of humans and nonhumans, without resorting to the brutal segregation between" pastoralizing and industrializing, naturalizing and modernizing (Latour, *Nature* 55).[20] If the forms of jeremiad and utopia, as in the characteristic instances of the Puritan sermons and More's *Utopia*, respectively, used the moral, economic, and geographical separation of the New World from the Old to, in Latour's words, "establish a partition between a natural world that has always been there" and "a society with predictable and stable interests and stakes," then they contributed to creating the conditions for the emergence of, in Wegner's words, "a radically new and deeply spatialized kind of political, social, and cultural formation—that of the modern nation-state" (*Modern* 11; 49). By confounding these separations, the georgic thereby interrupts the foundation of the work of US nation building, and instead imagines a commonwealth built from the ground up—that is, from the lived experience of human and nonhuman earth-work. In this way, the georgic performs the cultural work of charting alternatives to the nation as the primary organizer of community relations in America.

Early American georgic writing on the colony of Virginia serves as a particularly helpful example for elucidating the complicated relationship the form has to processes of US nation building. Timothy Sweet considers John Smith as one of the founders of the American georgic, whose *Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624) expresses the idea that "no matter how naturally productive an environment, there is a point at which human

[20] See also Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I* and *Cosmopolitics II*.

labor and technology must interact with it in order to sustain life and create wealth" (Sweet 34). Neither promoting the pastoral vision of America as an endlessly bountiful landscape, nor the imperial ecological stance of unrestrained resource extraction, Smith emphasized a realistic and measured assessment of land cultivation that would enable colonists to engage in subsistence farming practices rather than move from one settlement to another upon using up a store of resources. In doing so, Smith "dismantle[d] the sixteenth-century promoters' hopes of finding replacement commodity environments for all of the Old World. Virginia, he says, will not produce all things" (Sweet 36). By employing the georgic to temper Old World expectations of the New, Smith imagines a form of ecological citizenship that does not rely on the spatial separation of America and Europe, thus holding out the possibility that the nation might not be the inevitable endpoint of the colonial endeavor. Between 1611 and 1616, this vision of an agrarian commonwealth in Virginia seemed promising, as land was apportioned among many different groups of workers, and yields were shared among the community of laborers. With the introduction of the tobacco industry, however, Virginia started to follow the path set out by the English enclosures, marking "the point at which entrepreneurial individualism conflicts with the order of the commonwealth and becomes the primary force in shaping colonists' relation to the land," thereby enabling "the pursuit of private 'gaine' to the detriment of social organization" (Sweet 37). From tobacco forward and westward, then, America began embracing processes of nation building through the abrogation of the georgic in favor of the complex imaginative condensation of apocalyptic, utopian, and pastoral. As a result, less so than charting out possibilities for composing a commonwealth, the georgic became relegated to a marginalized agrarian imaginary that never quite fit with the oscillation from apocalypse to utopia, from pastoral to imperial ecology, that become the cornerstone of US nation building.

The classic instance of the uncomfortable position the georgic came to occupy in relation to the consolidated US nation-state and growth of the tobacco industry, slavery, and plantation economy during the early Republic is Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785). With his famous pronouncement that "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God," Jefferson expressed the uneasy combination of georgic, jeremiad-pastoral, and American exceptionalism in the early Republic (217). On the one hand, farm work became idealized in pastoral and nationalist language, associating the nation with the country as opposed to the city, such that, "Working hard within the compass of the natural world and feeling a spiritual as well as physical kinship with nature, the yeoman held dear those virtues that the new nation would rely on for its prosperity: frugalness, hard work, charity toward others, and love of God and country" (Conlogue 11-12). Or, as Sweet pithily puts it, "the assessment of economic-environmental engagement that had preoccupied American georgic writers in various local contexts through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries coalesced in a discourse of national scope. America thought of itself as a nation of farmers" (9). On the other hand, Jefferson's principles of agrarian reform extended the georgic in that he "challenged the mercantile system that exploited both the countryside and the colonies, favoring instead a decentralized economic order that located wealth and power in the land itself," as well as "lamented the enclosure movement in England and France, which violated the common right of local peasants" (Sturges 685). Even as he contributed to the consolidation of a pastoral agrarian ideal at the heart of American nationalism and economic growth, Jefferson opposed emergent capitalist practices of privatization via georgic principles of collectively holding land, labor, and wealth in common. This ideological dissonance led to discrepancies between agrarian writing and practice in the early Republic, as figures like Jefferson at once "voiced anxiety about tobacco

culture, soil exhaustion, and the curse of slavery" and maintained "unsustainable plantations, grew soil-exhausting crops, and forced slaves to labor on their farms" (Sturges 682; 684). Such a tension increasingly came to define agrarian writing and ideals through the Civil War.

Even in the case of small farmers at a remove from unsustainable plantation agriculture and "the curse of slavery," the georgic still embodied tensions regarding, especially, gender, race, and nation. The type of farmer and farm work Jeffersonian agrarianism endorsed are best described as, respectively, the yeoman and subsistence farming. What characterized these cornerstones of American agrarianism was a small family farm, producing only as many goods and crops as the family needed to live comfortably—with perhaps a small amount left over for modest and local commercial trading. But the larger forces of urban industry, commoditization, consumerism, and international markets and trade were to be kept far away from the yeoman and his land. As Conlogue writes, "Jefferson's yeoman, a self-sufficient man free from 'the casualties and caprice of customers,' owned a small piece of land that he and his family farmed to provide for themselves the essentials of life—food, clothing, shelter […]. This ideal farmer […] was a man interested mainly in preserving his family's presence on the land through several generations" (11). In the early nineteenth century, even though he positioned himself against the global scale economy of the plantation and the Atlantic slave trade, the yeoman was a patriarch, whose local georgic ethic depended very much upon his maleness and whiteness. And even though he stood as the foundation of the agrarian myth of American nationalism, he was ever at odds with the nation's growth on the world stage of industrialization and capitalism. We might think of the early nineteenth-century novels of James Fenimore Cooper here, for although his subject matter does not deal directly with farming or yeoman figures, his reservations about frontier settlement fall under the rubric of the subsistence farmer's concerns. In Sweet's words,

"Cooper fears that expansion will force the economy up against its environmental limits in America" (154). The yeoman sought to preserve a way of life that at once coincided with patriarchal and racist values of antebellum America, and, like Cooper's characters, contested its environmentally exploitative practices that served the kind of industrial development that threatened the survivability of the small subsistence farm.

Up until the Civil War, it seemed like fate of the yeoman—and that of the georgic ethic he embodied—could have gone in a number of directions. But afterwards, it was clear that he would be in dire straits. According to Allan Carlson, "It is undeniable that after 1865, there would be no holding back on the rapid, heavily subsidized spread of the railroads, on the quick settlement of the Plains states and the West, and on the expansion of industry and commercial agriculture to every corner of the nation" (2). Conlogue corroborates: "By 1870 at least, many farmers understood themselves to be businessmen rather than Jeffersonian yeoman" (12). In the late nineteenth-century, the antagonisms between yeoman farmer, plantation owner, and slave laborer transformed as industrial commercial farming increasingly defined agricultural practice nationwide. This change was not always obvious. The Homestead Act of 1862 had opened a new age of frontier development, as yeoman farm families began to populate land west of the Mississippi in larger numbers. By 1900 and the declared closing of the American frontier, census records show that the rural population continued to rise (Carlson 2). However, it was not rising as fast as urban populations—farmers were on a trajectory to being a census minority. Moreover, individual farms were being marked by larger acreage and commoditized monocultures, connected to national and international agriculture markets thanks to the spread of railroads. Urban businesses were buying up farmland, which they then parceled among sharecroppers and tenant farmers, thereby creating a sharp divide between agricultural management and labor. Not

only characterized by the use of new machinery and technology, then, industrial farming's "basic precepts include division of labor, […] systematic business management and book farming, heavy participation in a cash market that leads to specialization, emphasis on change and experimentation, and reliance on experts outside the community for reliable advice" (Conlogue 16).[21] Agricultural practice, in other words, was being stripped of its georgic ethic in that farm labor was being estranged from its connection to the needs of the land and to a sense of community. Industrialized farms did not "provide space for a concentrated community because they do not wed families to the land" (Conlogue 35).

There is plenty of evidence in the early twentieth century that these developments led to the twilight of the georgic in American literary history—even in those works that seemed to challenge or lament the advancement of industrial farming. Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) is a prime example. Set in the San Joaquin Valley in California, the novel pits a league of wheat farmers against the railroad company that owns their land by legal title. The railroad company increases freight rates on the farmers, threatening eviction if they do not comply. The farmers resist relinquishing the land on the grounds that the freight rates were supposed to be fixed, not subject to increase based on their growing crop yields and international market demands, and claim ownership of the land by right of labor. In classic naturalist fashion, Norris depicts the railroad businessmen and farmers alike as trapped by two tentacular forces of capitalism: the railroad as symbol of machinery and industry and the wheat as symbol of monoculture commoditization through international markets. But while it would seem the farmer characters do represent georgic opposition to these forces, they are in fact less interested in maintaining a collective relationship with the land than they are in being the beneficiaries of market changes

[21] See, also, Fitzgerald.

rather than the victims. As Conlogue notes, "Norris's ranchers live and die by their improvements, by their efforts to order and control nature"; they "have no emotional ties to their farms" and "conceive of land only as a physical site for getting rich" (47; 42). Much more akin to the imperial ecology of Bacon than the georgic ecology of Jefferson, these farmers' attitude toward their land matches that of the railroad capitalists more than it differs. The later *Grapes of Wrath* (1939)—in many ways a successor to *The Octopus* in terms of its naturalist treatment of class on the modern farm—may seem to offer a corrective here through its more trenchant critique of industrial agriculture driven by a sharper contrast between the georgic and imperial ecological values of its characters. However, it falls short of presenting any positive image of what a different relation to the land might look like in the twentieth century, for "with the Joads safe in their newfound community, industrial agriculture emerges from the novel triumphant, leading readers to understand that the Joads' 'progress' from farmers to sharecroppers to migrants is inevitable" (Conlogue 100). In other words, in canonical early twentieth-century novels on agrarian class relations, there seems to be little hope that any alternative to industrial agriculture might succeed.

Visions of alternatives to industrial agriculture were hard to come by not only in responses to new instances of class conflict between management and manual labor, but also in responses to transformed gender and racial conflicts as well. In the early twentieth-century, American farm women experienced many of the same tensions as farm men between the modern impulse of industrialization and the georgic ethic of subsistence family farming, but in much more complicated and less recognizable ways. Namely, while they too had to decide to either buy into or contend with new forces of commoditization, marketization, and division of labor, they had to orient their labor to these forces not only according to the geographical and

ideological divides between country and city, working and middle class, but also the divide between domestic and public spheres. As Casey argues, "Farm women not only were enmeshed in the struggle for American identity that was prominently imagined in terms of the dichotomy between agrarian and industrial orders; they also were implicated in the ideologies of gender that redefined notions of domestic work as well as relations between re/production and consumption" (23). The farm woman might, for instance, adopt the same kind of management principles in housework and child care that her husband employs in the field and marketplace, but the status of her work as performing the economics of industrial agriculture is less recognizable than in her husband's case because it still adheres to the gendered division of labor between domestic and public space that is consistent with the family values of preindustrial farming. It is less clear, in other words, on which side of the subsistence and industrial farming divide her labor falls. Cultural representations of the American farm tended to grapple with this tension by either omitting women completely, or reconciling their complex position through one-dimensional characters—often ones that fell squarely on the side of industrialization. As Conlogue observes, in order to work farms in the same manner as men, "the central characters of Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* (1913) and Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground* (1925) [….] employ the techniques and assent to the preconceptions of the new farming—hierarchies of work, trust of experts' advice, use of the latest technologies, and domination of nature" (65). Neither revising subsistence farming's reliance on normative values of family and gender that find wives in the home and men in the field, nor the imperial ecology of industrial agriculture, such representations of farm women contributed to the interment of the American georgic.

The industrialization of agriculture in the South was especially hard on black tenant farmers. Under Reconstruction and Jim Crow, black farmers experienced disproportionate

environmental and economic hardships as a result of the same forces plaguing the white yeoman farmer, "including the blight of the boll weevil on cotton farming and a monocultural farm system, the backbreaking labor of sharecropping on another's land, the repeated flooding of the Mississippi, and the expanding dust bowl" (Schuster 78). Many of the tenant and sharecropping farm laborers in the South forced to migrate north and to cities as a result of these consequences of industrial agriculture, plus the increased use of machinery such as tractors and mechanical harvesters, were black. Beyond the economic loss experienced by displaced black farmers was the symbolic loss—the shattered promise of freedom in the form of land ownership that became possible after the end of slavery (Conlogue 145). Early twentieth-century blues music and poetry provides a rich archive of the aesthetic mediation of such economic and symbolic loss. In songs like Charley Patton's "High Water Everywhere" (1929) and "Mississippi Boweavil Blues" (1929), and Josh White's "Low Cotton" (1933), blues musicians parodied the agrarian myth of the romantic yeoman, highlighting the vulnerability of black farmers to flooding due to their being sold land along Mississippi flood plains, and their solidarity with the plight of crops afflicted under a monoculture system. And in poetry by the likes of Jean Toomer and Langston Hughes, blues forms connected the country to the city, using patters of movement to trace the ubiquitous racial injustice of the Jim Crow era, relating the troubles of black people under modern systems of urban economy and industry in Northern cities with the problems of those remaining on farms in the South (Schuster 90-102). Through such sonic and poetic expressions, the blues, then, did begin to point toward new directions for the georgic, as "The refusal of the blues to pastoralize coincides with a more subtle, realist attunement to the effects of race and modernity upon the land" (Schuster 102). However, this engagement with and revision of the georgic toward the ends of racial justice was only half-formed, as it would take the Civil Rights

and environmental justice movements to fully mobilize a new georgic in a politically self-conscious manner.

Literary and artistic production through the mid twentieth century commenting on farm culture from a variety of social perspectives thus appears to provide evidence that the georgic ethic associated with preindustrial, subsistence farming no longer held substantial purchase in the US. Agrarian space and culture, the traditional home of the American georgic, became marked by loss and nostalgia—no longer indicative of the hopeful and forward-looking vision it once was in the hands of Jefferson. With the introduction of pesticides and GMOs, and the growth of agribusiness on a global scale, the figure of the farm provoked an altogether dystopian trend in American literature, traceable from the declensionist fable of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) to the agri-punk style of Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009).[22] And although a movement toward a "New Agrarianism" has been attributed to the work of Wendell Berry and his followers, Berry hardly offers an update to the Jeffersonian georgic, holding fast to the figure of the yeoman farmer and his family farm, along with the gendered and racist values that accompany him.[23] Moreover, according to Richard White's scathing critique, Berry does little justice to the georgic effort of holding human labor and the environment together because he represents a privileged position of being able to work the land without the pressure of it being one's primary source of income ("Work and Nature" 179-80). If the georgic can be said to endure in the writing of Berry and the New Agrarians, then it only does so counterintuitively divorced from real conditions of livelihood and economy.

---

[22] The term "agribusiness" refers to the global corporatization of agriculture in the postindustrial late twentieth century, as contrasted with late nineteenth- and early-to-mid twentieth-century industrial agriculture. The transition to the agribusiness model is marked by farming becoming "just one among many 'enterprises' constituting the human food chain" (Carruth 1).

[23] For more on Wendell Berry and New Agrarianism, see Carlson; Freyfogle; Major; K. Smith; Thompson.

The key, I claim, for understanding the novels in the chapters that follow as late twentieth-century inheritors of the American georgic capable of inspiring utopian rather than apocalyptic imaginaries while revising the politically conservative elements of Jeffersonian agrarianism is attending to the ways they shift a focus on labor and environment away from its traditional focal point—agriculture. In doing so, they are able to invest in visions of labor communities that are not based in normative values of gender, race, and nation. Writing in a post-industrial period during which the contest between subsistence and industrial farming was deemed already won by the latter, a post-Civil Rights era in which the racism and sexism of any counter-narrative was all too apparent, and an environmental-historical period in which the affluence and elitism of the environmental movement was under newly emergent scrutiny, they saw the opportunity to invest the georgic with a renewed utopian purpose by moving it off of the farm and into the ecological contexts in which Americans actually staked their livelihoods in the late twentieth century. Although many more examples can be found, I explore fictional texts that offer conditional alternatives to four such contexts, which each demonstrates significant intersections between environmental and economic concerns: sustainability discourse, toxic waste disposal, neoliberal privatization, and climate-induced migration.

CHAPTER 2. GREENPRINTS FOR SURVIVAL: THE CONDITIONAL PROMISE OF ECOTOPIA

By 1970, the state of the environment had become an urgent, national concern of the American public. In January 1971, *Time* magazine declared that "the environment issue cannot be dismissed as a fad" (30) for what had at first only "concerned lonely crusaders like Rachel Carson became a national issue" (27) in 1970. Contemporary events supporting *Time*'s declaration included the founding of Earth Day and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Congress's passing of major amendments to the Clean Air Act and defunding of supersonic transport (SST), the banning in several states of detergents containing phosphate pollutants, and the protesting of industrial pollution and nuclear power plants. Such events incited a heightened ecological consciousness, which science fiction mediated by teaching readers what and how to think about planetary futurity in light of new developments in environmental history and culture. One of the most prominent ways the genre accomplished this task was by producing imaginaries of ecological utopia or ecotopia.[24] Ecotopian science fiction is the subject of this chapter, which focuses, in particular, on how the subgenre supported yet restrained hope for a sustainable future in the American public during the formative years of the environmental movement. The key was that it proposed a conditional georgic optimism as an alternative to dystopian despair about, and technotopian dismissal of, environmental degradation.

The conditional nature of ecotopian futurity is best introduced by contrasting it with the confidence of its technotopian cousin. One of the most prominent science fiction voices of the

[24] All of the twentieth century utopian and dystopian texts discussed in this chapter are considered science fiction. While the literary utopia and science fiction can be considered distinct genres, most scholars agree that by the twentieth century, most if not all texts that are considered literary utopias also fall under the category of science fiction. The generic specificities of the literary utopia versus science fiction are not crucial to the argument of this chapter, as both express a subjunctive rather than indicative grammatical mood, but I will comment on their stylistic differences below in the section, "*Ecotopia* and the Critical Utopia."

early 1970s defending technological progress against environmentalist critique was John Campbell Jr. As editor of one of the most popular science fiction magazines, *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact*, formerly *Astounding Stories*, for the past 33 years, Campbell had firmly established his influential status within the science fiction community by 1970. He had a large audience of devoted readers listening to him denounce popular environmentalist fervor as misguided. In the last six months of 1971 alone he penned three editorials on the subject.[25] Each editorial conveyed virtually the same vituperative message: environmental activists were uninformed in the science of ecology and were getting the nation worked up over nothing. The format was exactly the same in each editorial: identify a hot environmental issue—SST, DDT, nuclear power, phosphates in detergents, etc.—characterize ecologically conscious activists as fanatics and "Instant Experts," and then relay the hard scientific facts that prove why noise from SST does not actually disturb animal behavior and habitats, why it was worth it to take a risk on DDT, why nuclear power is actually safe, and why phosphate-alternatives in detergents are actually worse. Presenting himself as a concerned member of the science fiction community and public at large who did in fact care about environmental issues—but the "real" issues, like population control, not the fabricated ones like pollution that are merely symptoms of the

[25] See Campbell Jr., "Anitpollution Device," "Balance and Ecology," and "Ecological Notes." Campbell actually died on July 11, 1971, but had produced enough editorial material and accepted enough stories for publication that his assistant, Kay Tarrant, and art director, Herbert Stoltz, could continue to assemble issues through the end of the year (Ashley, *Gateways* 6). Since the mid 1950s, all of the major American and British science fiction and fantasy magazines had switched from the pulp to the digest format, as the latter's more economical size gave it an edge in a print culture market that would soon see a rise in the popularity of the paperback. *Astounding Stories* switched over to the digest format rather early, in 1943, and, by the time the rest of the science fiction magazines had followed suit, it changed its name to *Analog* in 1960. Campbell was its editor from 1937 until his death in 1971. It is still printed today. For more on the transition of the science fiction magazines from the pulp to the digest format, see Ashley, *Transformations*; Clute, Langford, Nichols, and Sleight, "Digest" and "Pulp." For more on the history of *Astounding Stories* and *Analog*, see Ashley, *Transformations* and *Gateways*; Clute, Langford, Nichols, and Sleight, "Astounding Science-Fiction" and "Analog."

former—Campbell came across as a sober-minded polymath who took the time to understand the science behind the issues.

However, as most authors, readers, and critics in the science fiction community knew at this point, Campbell's hidden motivation for taking on the environmental movement was his unwavering support of technological progress.[26] Campbell came to prominence among the technocratic idealism of the Pulp Era and Golden Age of science fiction. As his time waned and he saw science fiction's commitment to technological progress and scientific verisimilitude give way to the technological skepticism and subjective renderings of the New Wave and dystopian fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, he did all he could to maintain a sense of hope for a future society made better by scientific and technological advancement.[27] And the environmental movement, with its criticism of the harmful impact that industrial and technological byproducts

[26] Near the end of his life and career, Campbell's editorials became more combative—and this was not lost on his readership. Even if they disagreed with his views, readers kept coming back for the atmosphere of heated debate. As Ashley notes, "In his later years, Campbell's editorials became more provocative than ever. He would make alarming statements in order to force the reader into thinking through or countering his argument. Campbell did not always agree with these statements, and if anyone followed his argument they would see why he made them, but not everyone could get into Campbell's mindset and, as a consequence, he frequently angered readers. Of course, that was what he wanted to do. He loved it" (*Gateways* 7-8). Of Campbell's technophilia, Ashley writes, "A technocrat, he was of the view that military superiority and technological progress were both necessary for the advancement of civilization and that no matter what consequent problems arose, science would find an answer" (*Gateways* 10).

[27] The "New Wave" of science fiction refers to the mid-to-late 1960s transition of science fiction away from the technically advanced "hard" science themes and stories of interstellar travel and wonder that dominated the Golden Age of the 1940s and 1950s and toward more experimental, stylistic, and psychological themes and forms that constituted a more "soft" take on the genre. It was initiated and championed mostly by British authors, such as Brian Aldiss and J. G. Ballard. Ashley summarizes Campbell's conservative reaction to this development when he says, "At a time when the New Wave was battering at the ramparts of sf, Campbell held firm and did not swerve from the course he had maintained for three decades. Indeed, it was as much against the traditional Campbell outlook as anything else in sf that the rebels were fighting. Far from being in the vanguard of science fiction, *Analog* was part of the 'old school'" (*Gateways* 12).

and waste can have on ecosystem health, was a primary culprit of the de-popularization of Campbell's technocratic vision.

Campbell was not alone. Many science fiction authors and readers shared his Golden Age nostalgia and anti-ecologism, as *Analog* remained one of the top-selling science fiction magazines throughout his tenure. Jerry Pournelle, one of the more popular science fiction authors at the time and regularly featured in *Analog*, often channeled Campbell's editorials in his stories. Campbell's strong influence on Pournelle (and on most of his regular *Analog* authors) was not a secret. "I had been reading Campbell editorials since high school," Pournelle wrote in a letter to renowned science fiction magazine historian, Mike Ashley, "and I was pretty well in agreement with most of them, so it's not astonishing that much of that came through in my stories" (qtd. in Ashley, *Gateways* 11). One such story, "Ecology Now!", takes its title and premise directly from a Campbell editorial that appeared in *Analog* only a few months prior.[28]

The story pits a trained ecologist against environmental activists. Protestors try to shut down the nuclear power plant the ecologist runs, but they are ignorant of the fact that the health and stability of a nearby lagoon ecosystem depend on the heat that the plant generates. With some help from a corporate troubleshooter and a republican congressman, the ecologist prevails, saving the lagoon habitat from the dangerous environmentalists. The story's overt message is that the uninformed "Instant Ecology Experts" should leave environmental safety to the scientists. But the argument of the republican congressman betrays the story's more covert motive. He says, "Without the best technology we can develop, though, we won't live in danger. We just won't live at all" (Curtis 96). According to Pournelle and Campbell, society will always

[28] "Ecology Now!" was published in *Analog* in December 1971 under Pournelle's early alias, Wade Curtis. The referenced Campbell editorial is "Ecological Notes," published in September 1971.

stand to gain more by prioritizing technological progress over concern for the environment. What they want readers to take away is an understanding that environmental health is a trivial matter compared to the promise of scientific innovations, such as nuclear energy.

Not everyone in the science fiction community bought into this conservative, technocratic dismissal of environmentalism. Dystopian fiction critiqued the trivialization of environmental issues by anticipating the disastrous consequences of over-pollution, overpopulation, and nuclear devastation. Examples include Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1962), Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966) (source of the 1973 film *Soylent Green*), and, in Britain, John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968) and *The Sheep Look Up* (1972). By the mid-1970s, however, a surprising resurgence of the utopian impulse in science fiction altered the literary strategies for critiquing technotopia. Rather than drawing on well-worn apocalyptic tropes to tell cautionary tales holding out hope for pastoral renewal, this new "ecotopian" impulse mobilized ecological discourse to articulate hope for a sustainable, georgic society with more pragmatic aims of correcting the exploitation of nature wrought by capitalist abundance, industrial expansion, and technological progress.

James Baen, editor of *Galaxy*, one of *Analog*'s major rivals,[29] articulated the new ecotopian sentiment best in his March 1975 editorial entitled "If this Goes On (and On, and On…)." He declared that while science fiction had done honorable work in bringing "the Big Problems of ecological contamination, overpopulation, dwindling resources, genetic and personal peril arising from drugs and food additives" to public consciousness, he, and the community of science fiction readers, had become "bored" with authors creating worlds "steeped

[29] During the digest era of science fiction magazines, there were six major American publications: *Amazing Stories*, *Analog*, *Fantastic*, *Galaxy*, *If*, and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Among these, *Analog*, *Galaxy*, and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* were the "big three" (Ashley, *Gateways* 34).

in misery and horror resulting from 20th Century stupidity" (6). Eco-apocalypse was already generating quiescence. Instead, Baen suggested,

> Maybe it's time to begin the Next Phase—one which the world sorely needs—that of instilling an awareness in our rapidly despairing populace that while man and his planet may be in for Hard Times, these Hard Times are by no means inevitable, that, given the will, we have the means and the knowledge to do something about our problems. […] So perhaps we should mute our cries of doom, and speak if not in tones of triumph, then at least hope—and courage. (6)

Fed up not only with the technotopian vision of the likes of Campbell and Pournelle, but also with the dystopian visions of despair that had dominated the genre since World War II,[30] the new utopian impulse Baen articulated represented the imagination of many who still had faith that planetary demise was not inevitable. *If* action was taken swiftly and effectively, *if* an agenda of change was embraced, then the damage that humans had done to the environment could still be undone. With its subjunctive mood, conveying worlds that might some day come to be, science fiction was the ideal genre to express such a conditional utopianism.

This chapter analyzes the narrative temporality of literary ecotopias responding to Baen's call for visions of a sustainable future. As opposed to their predecessors' representations of static utopian blueprints, as well as the overemphasis on stability in 1960s and 1970s sustainability discourse, the utopian "greenprints" in novels such as Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) (*WET*) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974) (*TD*) make the process of social and ecological transformation, not just its end result, visible. They aim not only to present a sustainable future that provides a critical contrast to the wasteful

[30] Throughout the mid twentieth century, dystopian literature overshadowed utopian in terms of its force of social critique, as exemplified in "Yevgeny Zamayatin's critique of the Soviet state in *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's critique of consumer capitalism in *Brave New World* (1932), and…the cautionary despair of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)" (Moylan, *Demand* 111). The New Wave's subjective distortions of the future also tended toward the dystopian, as exemplified in the work of J. G. Ballard. For more on the shift towards dystopia in the twentieth century, see Amis; Baccolini and Moylan; Kumar; Moylan, *Scraps*; Walsh.

present, but also to envision the transformational steps that humans need to take in order to bring that future into existence and never stop working for it. For *WET* and *TD*, the transformation to ecotopia manifests formally as the balance between the synchronic narrative registers of the present and future with the diachronic register that represents the movement from one to the other. I argue that this temporal negotiation in the narrative form of Piercy and Le Guin's ecotopias characterizes a conditional utopianism that puts necessary checks on the optimism of American environmentalism in the 1970s. It affirms the belief that human-driven change, on its own, and despite the overwhelming environmental destruction it has wrought in the form of industrialization, can, but might not, save the planet from ecological collapse.

Arguing for the cultural and political work of ecotopian imaginaries among 1970s American environmentalist discourse not only offers an alternative to historical narratives emphasizing the influence of the period's pessimistic "prophets of doom," such as Paul Ehrlich, Barry Commoner, Kenneth Watt, and Garrett Hardin, but also makes a case for ecotopia's status as a subgenre of the literary utopia.[31] The narrative "ecological utopia" or "ecotopia" has generally received short shrift in the field of utopian studies compared to its subgenre contemporary, the "critical utopia." It receives merely a footnote in such field defining works as

[31] Gerry Canavan has been especially insistent on finding only ecological pessimism in the environmental imagination of the 1970s. "Science fiction's happy promise of a post-oil, post-scarcity future," he writes, "has since […] the 1970s been largely replaced instead with the creeping terror that technological modernity, and its consumer lifestyle, may in fact have no future at all" (333). Assuming that this state of affairs necessarily means abandoning the search for future alternatives rather than revising its progress-dependent parameters, Canavan dismisses the ecotopias of *The Dispossessed* and *Ecotopia*, claiming that they "attempt to register [ecological and energy] crisis and imagine possible solutions to it, but frequently stumble both on the scientific details and on the pessimistic intuition that there simply is no viable solution" (342). This rather unpersuasive reading appears to turn any attempt to envision systemic change against itself, much like Fredric Jameson's symptomatic reading of utopia that completely spurns any analysis—such as mine in this chapter—that tries to take the genre seriously. See Canavan; Jameson, *Archaeologies*.

Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), Ruth Levitas's *The Concept of Utopia* (1990), and Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986) and *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (2000). The term is usually only associated with Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), and the few books and articles on ecological utopias fail to capture the subgenre's historical specificity or its innovations in narrative temporality.[32] Part of my effort, then, is to historicize 1970s ecotopian texts as inaugurating a distinct narrative template. The ecotopian impulse influenced 1970s environmentalism as much as technocratic critiques of, and dystopian doubts about, the environmental movement. Affirming its formal status amidst these negative discourses highlights how the literary ecotopia inaugurated the process of coupling utopia with the georgic through a shared conditional sensibility that corrected the static, pastoral pitfalls of sustainability discourse.

I begin with an overview of the plot, characters, and worlds of *WET* and *TD*, emphasizing the conditional nature of their ecotopian promises. I will then situate ecotopian fiction within the context of the American environmental movement, historicizing the ecotopian impulse as an outgrowth of the New Environmentalism and a reaction against the technotopianism and post-scarcity dreams of twentieth-century consumerism. Ecotopian fiction also incorporates elements of the critical utopia, a product of the 1960s and 1970s New Left. The next section offers a critical appraisal of Callenbach's *Ecotopia* in relation to that development in the history of

---

[32] See Garforth; Mathisen; Nadir. Eric C. Otto appears to be the only other scholar analyzing *Woman on the Edge of Time* as ecotopian in his monograph, *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism* (2012). There are also a few prominent political theory studies on ecological utopias, such as Murray Boochkin's *The Ecology of Freedom* (1991), Marius de Geus's *Ecological Utopias: Envisioning the Sustainable Society* (1999), and Kenn Kassman's *Envisioning Ecotopia: The U.S. Green Movement and the Politics of Radical Social Change* (1997).

utopian fiction in order to establish how the combination of ecotopian and critical utopian styles avoids the totalitarian pitfalls of sustainable stasis. The final section reads the temporal dynamics of *WET* and *TD* as achieving a confluence between ecotopian and critical utopian impulses, from which emerges a model of how ecological utopianism can move from pastoral to georgic.

The Conditional Utopias of Mattapoisett and Anarres

In addition to being an ecological utopia, *Woman on the Edge of Time* can also be considered a feminist utopia. Compared to its fellow 1970s critical utopias, Piercy's novel fits less with science fiction traditions that it does with the radical politics of the 1960s New Left. Tom Moylan argues that this subtle difference in cultural commitment results in Piercy's text articulating a more activist, feminist stance than her utopian colleagues. "To be sure," he writes, "Le Guin, Russ, and Delany all developed their utopian vision in the same matrix of events and political outlook, but they did so within the artistic activism of progressive science fiction culture whereas Piercy worked within the political activism of radical, socialist, feminist politics" (*Demand* 122).[33] It is *WET*'s overt political commitment that also makes its narrative so formally innovative; perhaps more so than her contemporaries, Piercy manipulates the traditional tactics of utopian fiction in order to capture the contingent process of historical transformation. She does so by using the typical utopian interaction between the protagonist and the utopian guide not simply to describe an alternative future that is more desirable than the present, but to envision economic strategies for resisting present bureaucratic, institutional power and patriarchy in ways that might actively produce a future committed to both sustainability and gender

[33] Because of *WET*'s comprehensive commitment to the radical progressive politics of the 1960s, Bülent Somay claims that it should not be considered a predominantly ecological or feminist utopia. While this is true, I have highlighted the text's environmentalist and feminist commitments here because they are the strongest *cultural* elements of Mattapoisett's transformation, which are just as important as, and indeed tied up with, the utopia's economic and institutional changes. See Somay 30.

equality. *WET* tells the story of thirty-seven-year-old Consuelo (Connie) Ramos, a Chicana woman living on welfare in New York City in 1976. She was born of migrant field workers in Texas and has endured regular oppression due to poverty, racism, sexism, and psychiatric institutionalization. After defending her niece, Dolly, against her boyfriend/pimp's physical abuse, she is wrongfully committed to Rockover State Psychiatric Hospital.

At the same time that she is sent to the mental hospital, Connie is visited by a stranger from the future. At first, pressured by the pathologizing discourse of the hospital, Connie doubts whether this visitor is real or merely a hallucination. Eventually she accepts the situation as real, and the visitor, Luciente, begins to use her telepathic connection to bring Connie into the future world of Mattapoisett, Massachusetts in the year 2137. Mattapoisett is a pastoral, primitive, communal and rural society that is self-sufficient, minimizes waste, and has no central government or sense of ownership over money and material goods. The town has an elected planning council that votes on issues of local governance, and the "Animal Advocate" and "Earth Advocate," who "speaks for rights of the total environment" (151), are among the most revered members of the council. While there are still two distinct genders, there is only one gender-neutral pronoun used to refer to both, "per," short for "person." People can change their names whenever they want, and take turns performing intellectual, physical, and military labor instead of specializing in one career for their entire lives. Thanks to advanced genetic engineering, children are birthed through embryonic machinery, and each child is assigned three "comothers," who can be male or female.

While the first half of the novel merely sets the stage by contrasting Mattapoisett with Connie's present, it becomes clear that the reason Luciente has reached out to Connie is that the future of Mattapoisett is not a given, inevitable future. It is conditional upon what people do in

the present of 1976. Their choices will determine whether or not Luciente's future will prevail, or if a dystopian future characterized by further class stratification, gender and racial inequality, centralized bureaucracy, and environmental degradation awaits them. Near the end of the novel, Connie accidentally travels to this other future when she attempts to contact Luciente, and upon returning remarks, "So that was the other world that might come to be. That was Luciente's war, and she was enlisted in it" (301). Luciente and the rest of Mattapoisett may be the norm of her future, but the potential for that other world still exists even in utopia. Ecotopia and ecodystopia are constantly at war, and Connie finds herself embroiled in the conflict. The institutional power of the mental hospital comes to symbolize that dystopian future that could be if Luciente's faction loses the conflict. As the medical doctors begin to experiment with EEG technology and pharmaceutical brain implant devices that render the patients catatonic and emotionally destitute, Connie must decide whether to resist, escape from, or submit to these technocratic forces. After a failed escape attempt, resistance seems to be her only viable option, and the novel ends with her successful execution of a plan to poison the physician staff. The ending remains open-ended, however, and we do not find out if Connie's actions do result in ensuring Mattapoisett's realization. The uncertain ending reinforces the contingency and non-inevitability of the future, even if we take all the right steps in the present. What is clear is that the future will not come about through fate or destiny, but as a result of labor-intensive transformation, even if the results of that transformation are not entirely predictable. As Luciente puts it, "Much I don't comprehend that led to us. […] But *not inevitably*, grasp? Those of your time who fought hard for change, often they had myths that a revolution was inevitable. But nothing is! All things interlock. We are only one possible future" (177, emphasis in original).

The Dispossessed shares with *WET* a vision of a utopian future still in the throes of revolutionary conflict. Both utopias require a daring act of human resistance to keep open the possibility of social and ecological transformation. If Piercy is more activist in her representation of utopian transformation, Le Guin is more philosophical, dwelling, both in form and content, on the kind of temporal dynamics that must accompany an ongoing anarchist, ecotopian revolution. *TD* tells the story of Shevek, a physicist living on the utopian moon society of Anarres. Anarres is inhabited by those who, over one hundred fifty years ago, followed the revolt of the anarchist visionary, Odo, against the capitalist, "propertarian" society of the nations on the planet Urras. The Anarresti people have become accustomed to living under principles of scarcity: rather than the pastoral setting of Mattapoisett, their world consists of harsh, arid desert regions, with a few oasis-like havens along the coasts and forested mountain foothills where most of the population resides. Due to limited resources, extreme temperatures, and the chronic risk of drought and famine, the Anarresti people are forced to embrace sustainable living practices. They have to trade their one valuable resource—precious minerals such as gold, copper, and aluminum—to Urras in exchange for fossil fuels. Biodiversity is quite limited as well, for "Life there had not evolved higher than fish and flowerless plants" (82). Much like in Mattapoisett, people on Anarres must spend time working at different jobs and social projects. Even those like Shevek who do specialize must take time off to aid in civic duties, such as the afforestation project that seeks to replant forests in one of the desert regions. There is no centralized government, only the Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC) located in the city of Abbenay. At the PDC, "They do not govern persons; they administer production" (67). Local syndicates complement the PDC, organizing communities into living and working groups.

Despite the extensive measures Anarres takes to avoid organized government, centralized bureaucracy begins to gain traction in the planet's institutional practices. The challenge this development poses to Shevek's studies provokes his journey that begins and ends the novel. Shevek must travel back to Urras to complete his General Temporal Theory, which seeks to combine the principles of Simultaneity that detail the cyclical process of time with the principles of Sequency that detail the linear process of time. The chapters follow Shevek's efforts in chronological order, but alternate between different timelines on Anarres and Urras. The Anarres chapters cover the events of Shevek's life up to the point that he departs to Urras, and the Urras chapters start with his arrival from Anarres and end with the completion of his theory and his return to Anarres. The chapter organization, along with the achievement of Shevek's General Temporal Theory, reflects a chronosophic negotiation between cyclical and linear conceptions of time. These temporal dynamics are further symbolized by the ansible device, made possible by Shevek's new theory, which allows instantaneous communication between devices across any span of space. The tasks of transmitting and receiving information, which should, according to special relativity, be separated in time, can now occur simultaneously. Simultaneity and Sequency therefore co-exist in the ansible.

They also co-exist in Shevek's renewed sense of social revolution as a process that must change and evolve. Shevek realizes that the ideal Odonian society is not guaranteed to the people of Anarres, but is contingent upon them constantly renewing their commitment to revolutionary practices. To erase the discrepancy between the bureaucracy of Anarres's present and the anarchy of its past, Shevek has to initiate new historical change. In other words, making the same requires transformation; Simultaneity requires Sequency. By drawing chronosophic parallels between technology and eco-anarchist revolution, *TD* seeks a georgic compromise between

technotopian and ecotopian impulses. Moylan sees this compromise as problematic, arguing that the ansible undermines Le Guin's vision of socialist anarchy, since by making "The prime achievement of the action of the novel […] the production of knowledge and the development of an electronic commodity" (*Demand* 116), *TD* becomes complicit in promoting the dreams of industrial capital and consumer culture. But this is to entirely overlook the conditions of the ansible's production. Shevek makes stipulations on its circulation to stop it from becoming a commodity, from falling into the hands of the propertarians and contributing to the exploitation of nature and human labor.

Indeed, in all the short stories and novels taking place in the Hainish universe (which is the universe of *TD*) chronologically after the events of *TD*, the ansible never appears as a commodity to be bought and sold by individual consumers.[34] Instead, it functions as an instrument of democracy that enables the League of All Worlds (the interstellar republic representing all the known worlds containing intelligent life) to maintain open communication and freedom among its constituent planets. These stories demonstrate the possibility of fulfilling Shevek's utopian hope: technology does not have to function in the service of capitalism, and it is possible to reach an agreement so that nations and worlds "cannot use [the ansible] […] to get power over the others, to get richer or to win more wars. So that you cannot use the truth for your private profit, but only for the common good" (301). *If* the ansible's conditions of use are followed, it has the potential to be not another instrument of technocratic, imperial ecology, but a georgic herald of a common and sustainable future.

The publication of Piercy and Le Guin's two ecotopian texts occurs at a crucial moment in both the history of American environmental culture and of literary utopias. Indeed, *WET* and

[34] See, especially, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), and "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow" (1971).

TD can be said to constitute instances of innovative convergence between environmental and utopian thinking. If we are to understand *WET* and *TD*'s conditional ecotopias as promoting yet tempering the faith that the 1970s environmental imagination had in humans' ability to bring about a sustainable future despite overwhelming signs of environmental degradation, we must thus consider their position at the intersection between two cultural histories. First to consider is the novels' roles in the emerging planetary consciousness and global ecological worldview that typified the "New Environmentalism." Next to consider is how they participated in the formation of "critical utopian" literature as a product of the radical politics of the New Left. Before commenting further on the temporal dynamics of *WET* and *TD*, then, I will assess the New Environmentalism and the ecotopian and critical utopian impulses that provide the cultural and aesthetic contexts crucial for understanding how these texts began the work of reviving the georgic in the late twentieth century.

The New Environmentalism and Sustainable Ecotopias

The birth of environmentalism as a national social and activist movement in the United States is generally attributed to the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which exposed the environmental toxicity of chemical pesticides.[35] The widespread success of *Silent Spring* indicated that it had struck a chord with public anxieties about the environment that had

[35] The general consensus among environmental historians is that prior to Carson's text, "the environment" did not carry the global-scale meaning of natural human and nonhuman habitats it does today. Rather, those concerned with environmental issues referred to themselves as "conservationists" or "preservationists/protectionists." As Mark Dowie writes, "Turn-of-the century environmentalists never used the words *environment*, or *environmentalist* to describe themselves or the natural world. Until the early 1960s they referred to themselves as *conservationists*, although more radical figures like John Muir insisted on the term *preservationist*. The word *environment* to describe an all-inclusive category comprised of both human and natural habitats did not come into common usage until Rachel Carson used it in her groundbreaking exposé" (1, emphasis in original). I will discuss this terminology of conservation, preservation, and protection more below. See Carson.

long been incubating.[36] What was perhaps most novel about Carson's book was the connections it made between the threat of environmental degradation and existing concerns about the unknown and potentially dangerous consequences of human industry, technology, and population growth. In highlighting the relation between such social tensions of modernity and natural issues of the environment, Carson galvanized the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

To be sure, environmental concerns had long found a place in public debate and literary expression prior to Rachel Carson and the environmental movement. But the nature of these concerns, the knowledge and opinions about them, and the cultural and political responses to them, saw a dramatic shift in the 1960s and 1970s. John McCormick notes that even through the 1940s and 1950s, most Western concerns and policies about the environment focused on the *conservation* of dwindling natural resources and the *protection* of endangered wildlife and natural habitats (27-53).[37] Over the course of the 60s and 70s, environmentalism not only took a more radical and activist turn, in conjunction with the counter-cultural tenor of the period,[38] but

---

[36] John McCormick says of *Silent Spring*'s immediate impact that it "sold half a million copies in hard cover, stayed on the best-seller list of the *New York Times* for 31 weeks, and prompted the creation of a presidential advisory panel on pesticides" (55).

[37] McCormick uses the term "protectionist" in a manner that is largely synonymous with the more familiar term, "preservationist," which Dowie argues originates with John Muir in the early twentieth century, characterized by the belief that it is "essential to protect certain areas, whole eco-systems in fact, from *all* resource exploitation. They must be preserved forever as virgin, roadless, damless, and mineless, accessible to humanity only on foot, and only to those willing to sleep on the ground and carry out everything they carried in" (Dowie 16-17, emphasis in original).

[38] A note on how I am using the terms "ecology" and "ecological attitude/consciousness" in comparison to "environmentalism" is warranted here. In general, I use "ecology" to refer to the scientific study of and ethical concern for ecosystems; "ecology" conveys a global sense of interconnectedness among life support systems on our planet. I use "environmentalism" to refer to the political and social practices that activate an ecological consciousness. Although this risks confusing my use of "environmentalism" with more popular understandings of the term as mostly referring to conservation and preservation models that are conducive to neoliberal and

also established a stronger foothold in law and policy, promoted global perspectives on environmental issues, and, perhaps most significantly, expressed a planetary consciousness that understood the fate of humanity as tied to the fate of the earth.[39] Driven by a sense of urgency,[40] this "New Environmentalism" brought nature out of the wilderness and placed it at the center of human life, such that the impact of humans on their nonhuman surroundings could no longer be ignored. As McCormick summarizes this shift,

> For protectionists, the issue was wildlife and habitat; for conservationists, the issue was natural resources; for the New Environmentalists, human survival itself was at stake. […] The new movement was underpinned by a new fear for the future of life and the vulnerability of the human race; after two centuries of industrialism and urbanisation, people now began to rediscover the idea that they were a part of nature. (56)

Nature was no longer understood as something separate from humans that they needed to protect and conserve from afar; instead, they began to tie their fate to its fate. Humans became the

---

managerial ideologies, I intend my discussion of New Environmentalism here to clarify my use of the term as referring to a historically distinct moment when environmentalism in fact began to depart from these models in order to appreciate more fully the relationship between humans' social practices and their nonhuman environments. My understanding of "environmentalism" is thus closer to that of Merchant's "social ecology," or Dobson's "ecologism," or Otto's "transformative environmentalism" in attending to how the exploitation of natural ecosystems is related to social inequality and injustice, and in enlisting visions of sustainability for combatting political and economic structures that uphold these conditions. See Dobson 2-3; Merchant 7-8; Otto 1.

[39] One of the most popular and enduring images of visual culture that marked this new planetary consciousness was the "Blue Marble" photograph, which was taken by the crew of Apollo 17 on December 7, 1972, and which is famous for being the first *full* photo ever taken of Earth. It is hard to overestimate the significance of this image for America's science fiction and environmental imaginary. As Arthur C. Clarke put it, this photograph "must have been the moment when the Earth really became a planet" (qtd. in McCormick 80). See Heise, *Sense* 22-25.

[40] There were three major developments in American environmental history during the 1960s and 1970s that can be said to have sparked the urgent planetary consciousness of the New Environmentalism: the increase in small and large scale pollution, environmental fallout from nuclear testing conducted during the 1950s, and population growth. Key primary texts debating these issues include Barry Commoner's *The Closing Circle* (1971) and Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968). See McCormick 55-106; McNeill 267-362.

primary culprits of environmental degradation—rather than nonhuman spiritual, cosmic, or natural forces—and, now by extension, the primary culprits of environmental threats to their own quality of life; they held themselves responsible both for causing present forms of ecological collapse and for preventing future ones. To contemplate the future of humanity was to contemplate the future of the environment, and vice versa.

One of the most prominent features of this emergent ecological attitude was its skepticism toward industrial and technological innovation. While romantic and pastoral discourses had always pitted industry against the environment, the global perspective of the New Environmentalism added dimensions of complexity to this antagonistic relationship. Perhaps the most ardent articulation of what New Environmentalism meant for the relationship between industry and environment was the Club of Rome's extensive study of global systems in *The Limits to Growth* (1972). The study argued that "the roots of the environmental crisis lay in exponential growth" (McCormick 93). That is, it was not just the mere existence of modern industry that was ruining the environment; the high rate of industrial expansion was introducing new and worsening conditions of environmental destruction. The solution to the problem could not be to engineer new technologies designed to reverse the trend toward ecological collapse, since this would only exacerbate the causes of the problem by triggering feedback loops that would continue to spur industrial expansion and environmental degradation in other, unforeseen areas. In terms of what attitudes toward the future should be adopted to prevent disaster, the Club thus concluded that "Technological optimism is the most common and the most dangerous reaction to our findings from the world model" (qtd. in McCormick 93). Progress, it seems, is antithetical to the cause of environmentalism, which is precisely why proponents of scientific progress like Campbell and Pournelle felt threatened by public fervor over environmental crises.

But a belief in progress is also what lies at the center of the utopian impulse hoping for a better tomorrow. In order to speak to the concerns of New Environmentalism, ecological utopianism would have to reconcile this discrepancy between the skepticism of progress and the hope for a more ecologically responsible future.

The ecological utopia could only resonate with a more ecologically conscious public, then, by radically redefining what it meant to represent utopia in the first place. It did so by positioning itself against the most common type of utopia, the technological utopia. In what is perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of the ecological utopia, Marius de Geus's *Ecological Utopias: Envisioning the Sustainable Society* (1999) begins by making exactly this distinction between technological utopias and ecological utopias, or, as he also refers to them, "utopias of abundance" and "utopias of sufficiency," respectively. He adopts this terminology because ultimately, "The basic difference between these utopias lies in the notion of whether an ideal society should enjoy material abundance and luxury or be based on satisfaction and sufficiency. Is the quality of life to be determined by luxury, richness and excess, or instead, by simplicity, self-restraint and moderation?" (de Geus 21). The alternative to exponential growth that the ecological utopia establishes is thus an economy and ecology of scarcity and austerity that seeks to devalue consumerist incentives toward maximizing luxury and material possessions. It is no wonder, then, that the ecotopia rose to full subgenre status in the 1970s, as the dystopian narratives of the mid-twentieth century had been signaling for decades that the utopian impulse had been co-opted by the desires of consumerism.[41] Utopia in the form of technological progress

[41] There are certainly utopian fictions appearing earlier than 1970 that could be considered ecotopian, including Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). In addition to More's text, de Geus considers Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), and Aldous Huxley's *Island* (1962) as ecotopian texts as well. See de Geus 59-86, 105-20, 153-68. Nevertheless, it was not until the 1970s ecotopias discussed here that the American utopia of

had lost what Tom Moylan identifies as a central component of the utopian impulse: its subversive function. That is, utopian narrative had lost its capacity to oppose "the affirmative culture maintained by dominant ideology" (*Demand* 1) by "generating preconceptual images of human fulfillment that radically break with the prevailing social system" (*Demand* 26). What better discourse than ecology, the "subversive science" measuring the harmful effects of industrial growth, to reinvigorate the utopian impulse's oppositional function and articulate alternatives to the dominant consumer culture of the late twentieth century.[42] This is how the ecological utopia put ecology's subversive factor to work: by using it to place value on alternatives to capitalist growth.

The primary oppositional task set before the ecological utopia was to redefine the good life: what counts as high quality living. For technotopias, as for the dominant ideology of the American century's consumer culture, the good life is defined "in terms of material gratification" and "the highest possible level of consumption" (de Geus 210). For ecotopias, instead happiness is found in "pursuing creative, artistic, and intellectual activities [alongside manual labor and everyday menial tasks, for these are just as essential and not inferior to intellectual labor]; having meaningful relationships; experiencing satisfaction and pleasure in nature, and enjoying a peaceful and well-lived life with a lot of free time" (211). Ecological utopianism believes it is possible to reject a growth economy while still pursuing the good life. The ecotopian good life is

---

sufficiency made a conscientious effort not only to dissociate itself politically, philosophically, and aesthetically from the utopia of abundance, but also to explicitly represent practices of ecological sustainability that did not necessarily amount to a vision of arcadian pastoral. This development has continued in the United States with novels such as Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979), Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Pacific Edge* (1990), and Judy Grahn's *Mundane's World* (1992), and with the poems and short stories collected in *Future Primitive: The New Ecotopias* (1994), edited by Robinson.

[42] Paul Sears is credited with being the first to refer to ecology as a "subversive science" in 1964. See Sears; Shepard and McKinley.

just less materialistic than that posited by consumer culture. Lisa Garforth describes this transition in the means of achieving a high quality of life in terms of "limits" versus "progress," echoing the argument of *The Limits to Growth*. She highlights how the developments of New Environmentalist discourse came to transform the very nature of the utopian impulse in the way de Geus describes it: "Green utopias of sufficiency resolve […] the 'scarcity gap'—that is, the contradiction between human wants and their satisfaction—by recourse to a 'limits' framework, imagining universal restraint and the substitution of nonmaterial for material satisfactions. […] The ecological utopia, then, is distinctive insofar as it uncouples the hope of a better future from hegemonic discourses of progress" (395). It is precisely in its capacity to decouple hope from progress that the ecological utopia is able to embrace the utopian impulse while still criticizing the kind of industrial and technological growth that had been the traditional economic catalyst of utopian transformation. If there was an alternative utopian attitude to technocratic idealism capable of inspiring measures to prevent ecological collapse, then the ecological utopia sought to map out what that alternative vision for the future might look like.

For most visions of ecotopia, producing an alternative to ecological collapse meant adopting principles of sustainability at the level of everyday social practice. A sustainable society is one that values and implements the conservation of natural resources and energy, the minimization of waste through recycling and reuse of materials, and the maintenance of a high quality of life for as many humans and nonhumans as possible. Such goals require sacrificing many unnecessary pleasures and luxuries. Committing to sustainability also means embracing a lifestyle not only of austerity, but of equilibrium and stasis, such that a balance is achieved between the consumption of resources and their availability; whatever you consume you must find a way to reuse or replace. Most visions of ecotopia thus champion a "steady-state" or

"stable-state" economy as the desirable alternative to a growth economy.[43] The decade of the 1970s was not halfway gone before nonfictional and fictional prose attempted to provide proponents of the stable-state society with blueprints for its creation. The January 1972 issue of *The Ecologist*, entitled "A Blueprint for Survival," was devoted entirely to mapping the necessity for and characteristics of such an alternative state.[44] Three years later, the publication of Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* marked the most extensive literary treatment of the dream for a stable society.

Ecotopia and the Critical Utopia

My reading of *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* serves two functions here. First, it provides a characteristic example of how the ecotopian impulse responded aesthetically to the concerns of New Environmentalism to show the American public that there was still hope for a sustainable future. Second, it explains how the novel falls short in its task because it fails to imagine the steps that need to be taken to arrive at a sustainable future. That is, in its commitment to the stable state concept, the novel leaves out the process and labor of historical transformation by dwelling in a narrative register of synchronic stasis, thereby operating according to the principles of the pastoral more so than the georgic. My reading will

---

[43] My use of the term "steady-state economy" is consistent with Carolyn Merchant's definition, which emphasizes its positive ecological impact. She writes, "A steady-state economy would use the lowest possible levels of materials and energy in the production phase and emit the least possible amount of pollution in the consumption phase. The total population and the total amount of capital and consumer goods would be constant. The economy could continue to develop, but need not grow. Culture, knowledge, ethics, and quality of life, however, would continue to grow. Only physical materials would be constant" (36).

[44] The issue's feature essay, "Towards the Stable Society: Strategies for Change," declared that "The principle conditions of a stable society—one that to all intents and purposes can be sustained indefinitely while giving optimum satisfaction to its members—are: (1) minimum disruption of ecological processes; (2) maximum conservation of materials and energy—or an economy of stock rather than flow; (3) a population in which recruitment equals loss; and (4) a social system in which the individual can enjoy, rather than feel restricted by, the first three conditions" (8).

show how *Ecotopia*'s stagnant narrative temporality demonstrates the need for ecotopian narratives to incorporate critical utopian variations on utopian fiction. Integrating critical utopian elements is what allows ecotopian narratives to make a case for more conditional—and thereby more contingent on human agency—takes on sustainability than those resting entirely on the principle of stability.

Ecotopia tells the story of New York reporter Will Weston's trip in 1999 to the nation of Ecotopia. Ecotopia—which consists of the former states of Washington, Oregon, and northern California—seceded from the United States in 1980, forming its own self-sufficient economy and government that is almost entirely isolated from its former nation-state in trade, communication, and travel. (Weston's visit marks the first official visit of an American to Ecotopia since the secession.) The novel is split between excerpts from Weston's formal journalistic reports, and excerpts from his more informal personal notebook; it reads as much like nonfiction as it can. Never having to risk being misunderstood as anything other than fiction due to its estranged setting and circumstances, *Ecotopia* has the luxury of being able to merely describe its utopian locus in the style of a report without having to incorporate more than the bare minimum of narrative elements to be able to declare itself "the *novel* of your future" (emphasis added) on the front cover. The plot is merely an appendage to the description of Ecotopia: Weston embarks on his journey thoroughly skeptical of Ecotopian society, comes to embrace it, falls in love with an Ecotopian woman, and in the end decides not to return to the US.

By stripping down the plot, *Ecotopia* is able to focus on the more important task of describing the inner workings of the ecological utopia, most notably the "stable-state concept" (26) that pervades every aspect of Ecotopian life. At its core, the Ecotopian secession was a revolution based on ecological ethics, driven by the belief that American capitalism was not

conducive to a sustainable lifestyle, that it did not encourage a just and responsible relationship to humanity's nonhuman surroundings. At first, this break from the American markets crippled the Ecotopian economy. But the new nation persevered, and was able to establish a non-growth based economy operating on a twenty-hour workweek that supported its ecological philosophy. Weston describes the transition thus,

> In economic terms, Ecotopia was forced to isolate its economy from the competition of harder working peoples. Serious dislocations plagued their industries for years. There was a drop in Gross National Product by more than a third. But the profoundest implications of the decreased work week were philosophical and ecological: mankind, the Ecotopians assumed, was not meant for production, as the 19th and 20th centuries had believed. Instead, humans were meant to take their modest place in a seamless, stable-state web of living organisms, disturbing that web as little as possible. This would mean sacrifice of present consumption, but it would ensure future survival. […] People would be happy not to the extent they dominated their fellow creatures on the earth, but to the extent they lived in balance with them. (55-56)

This passage conveys Ecotopia's realization of a *Limits to Growth*-like vision of sustainability, and of a style of living well that does not depend on material abundance. But more than that, it ties the ecotopian vision of a sustainable future with the planetary consciousness of the New Environmentalism. That is, it suggests that the economic shift Ecotopia accomplished was made possible by a collective social conscience that agreed that sacrificing the present luxuries of financial expansion was necessary to ensure the future survival of humans, as well as of the nonhuman ecosystems to which they are so intimately entangled.

Since the public holds a consensus on the necessity of an ecological consciousness, rather than expressing skepticism toward it and demanding further argument and proof, there is no conflict in the implementation of sustainable practices, which requires little government oversight. Even though there is a presidential figurehead, Weston is informed that in Ecotopia, he "will find many many things happening without government authorization" (25). The social

conscience keeps everyone in check and does not require a centralized governmental body to do so. Some of the core sustainable practices that do not require government oversight include reducing the population via legalized and low cost abortion and universal contraceptive use, placing manufacturers of processed and packaged foods on "Bad Practice" lists (24), recycling ninety-nine percent of waste products by converting food waste, sewage, and garbage into organic fertilizer that can be reapplied to the land, and diminishing urban pollution by establishing "car-free zones" in major cities and breaking up other cities into smaller communities and neighborhoods. Together, these practices ensure than Ecotopia can survive happily and indefinitely, even though its economy may never grow.

Despite *Ecotopia*'s success in outlining the stable-state economy as an environmentally responsible alternative to consumerism and principles of growth, its valorization and universalization of stasis and its lack of formal innovation leave it open to familiar dystopian criticisms of the utopian mode. In addition to its tendency to be co-opted by the promises of consumerism and material abundance—which the ecotopia emerges specifically to combat—the utopian impulse also has a tendency to support change through totalitarian state institutions. Rather than providing an uplifting vision of an alternative future that has been changed for the better, the utopian impulse has the potential to result in an image of a static society in which nothing ever changes because state institutions see to it that the 'perfect' status quo is maintained so that everyone continues to remain 'happy'—which is precisely the case with *Ecotopia*. Even if governmental oversight is decentralized in Ecotopia, the nation's collective ecological consciousness tends to devolve into social conformity.[45] As Bülent Somay notes, there are

[45] Mathisen discusses at length the tendency of a universal, informal ecological conscience to manifest as totalitarian conformism. I will discuss his critique further below, as Le Guin echoes Mathisen effectively in *TD*. See Mathisen.

moments in the book "when the stability of Ecotopia becomes threatening, manifesting such *Brave-New-World*-like features as the standardization of Ecotopian types" (27), which is an inevitable result of taking the economic principle of stasis, so central to an ecological alternative to growth, and applying it to social consciousness as a whole. This representation of stasis at the level of content is further reinforced at the level of form, for *Ecotopia* follows in the footsteps of the classic literary utopia, characterized by non-narrative, non-fictional styles of description and report that merely lay out the blueprints for an ideal society rather than the work required to achieve it.

Traditionally, literary utopias—especially More's *Utopia*, as we have seen—involve a visitor arriving in utopia from a society similar to that of the author's present, who then engages in a Socratic-style dialogue with a guide from utopia who explains to the visitor the ins and outs of the ideal world. Little happens other than this, as leisure more so than action drives the plot, and the visitor in the end must decide whether to take or leave utopia as it is, not to instigate a transformation in the new world or the old. In terms of genre, the static quality of such literary utopias sets them apart from the novel and its core elements of plot development, progression, conflict, and resolution.[46] Surely, as Northrop Frye and Tom Moylan both argue, utopian fiction and science fiction both can be considered romantic fictions, "which are meditations upon deep conflicts in the historical present that are displaced onto the terrain of an other-worldly locus so that the reader, consciously or unconsciously, can see her or his society and its contradictions in a fresh and perhaps motivating light" (Moylan, *Demand* 32).[47] However, what utopian fiction adds to this commentary on the present from a time and place other than the present is the

[46] For more on the generic specificity of utopia, see Jameson, *Archaeologies*; Moylan, *Demand*; Sargent. For classic texts on utopia as a philosophical and political concept, see Bloch; Levitas; Marcuse.
[47] See Frye.

erasure of temporal progression in order to dwell in the synchronic. Apparently, a common element of the representation of ideal societies is that they do not change. And here arises the distinction between the literary utopia and the novel, as well as the charge that the stasis of utopias suggests that perfection is only achievable by establishing a totalitarian state to maintain the status quo. As Naomi Jacobs puts it, according to the traditional utopia, "stability and happiness seemed possible only at the cost of freedom" (110). This is also where we witness the difference between utopian fiction and science fiction. Whereas utopian fiction disrupts narrative progress in order to painstakingly describe the social norms and paradigmatic fabric of its estranged setting, science fiction foregoes doing so in order to avoid narrative stagnancy, forcing the reader to discern the estranged world's "absent paradigm" indirectly from the development of plot events.[48]

Thus, while *Ecotopia* may offer an economic alternative to capitalist growth, it does not, in its endorsement of the stable-state society and traditional utopian descriptive format, offer an alternative to the politics and power dynamics of repressive state institutions. According to Lisa Garforth, the tendency of utopian studies scholars such as de Geus and Krishan Kumar to overlook this downside to visions of a sustainable future is due to a focus on content only and a neglect of utopian form.[49] In Garforth's words, if we only attend to how the content of the

---

[48] Marc Angenot famously defines the science fiction genre in terms of its representation of an "absent paradigm." He argues that it is not necessarily the counterfactual relation of the science fiction storyworld to our own empirical reality—the obvious impossibility of its existence in the here and now—that characterizes science fiction as a unique genre, but the linguistic relation the narrative discourse establishes between the social norms of the fictional world and the signs of those norms in the text. Rather than telling readers outright what the estranged setting of the story is like, science fiction's unique capacity is to convince readers, through patterns of syntagmatic clues (neologisms, alien languages, bizarre clothing and habits that appear commonplace) appearing periodically in the progress of the narrative, that there is an intelligible social fabric for them to discover—the missing paradigm. See Angenot.

[49] See de Geus; Garforth 396; Kumar 402-19.

literary ecotopia differs from the technotopia, then "there is little consideration of how visions of a more sustainable society are articulated, nor of how the utopia achieves the effects imputed to it. Overlooked is the 'specificity of the narrative utopia's representational and cognitive practices' (Wegner xvii)" (396).[50] If institutional practices determine the mechanisms of change and stagnancy in a given social fabric, and literary form dictates the narrative mechanisms of the fictional world's social dynamics, then how the literary utopia depicts the utopian locus as changing or not reflects the degree to which that fictional society tends toward totalitarianism or freedom. *Ecotopia*'s descriptive, static blueprint of a sustainable future falls dangerously close to the former.

The "critical utopias" of the 1970s can be understood as a collective effort to rectify the literary utopia's formal stasis without reverting to outright dystopia. In *Demand the Impossible*, Moylan historicizes the critical utopia as the speculative fiction outgrowth of the progressive, utopian politics of the 1960s and 1970s New Left. Moylan finds the roots of the New Left's utopian impulse in the same place that McCormick finds the roots of New Environmentalism: the postwar affluence of the US and its central concern for leisure and quality of life. Such conditions evoked concern over both the human and environmental costs required to maintain states of affluence and a high quality of life. As Moylan puts it, "The deep conflicts of the 1960s, rooted in an affluence that hinted at the end of scarcity and in an experience of the repression and exploitation of nature and humanity needed to achieve such affluence, significantly awakened a subversive utopianism" (*Demand* 10). Tired of rehashing dystopian and cynical critiques of

[50] See Wegner.

society, social critics and activists were ready to address the tensions of affluence with subversive imaginaries that might inspire hope rather than despair.[51]

But they were also more self-conscious about the pitfalls of utopian thinking that the mid-twentieth century dystopias had exposed, as well as less willing to tolerate its veiled potential to devolve into totalitarianism. As Angelika Bammer notes, the New Left was not only invested in reviving the utopian impulse, but also in "redefining it in such a way that it was freed of its repressive function as signpost to a set future on an equally set path from which deviations were not allowed. In pronouncing the liberation of the imagination as one of its main goals, the New Left radically redefined the utopian" (47). In terms of its manifestation in fiction, this meant that the utopian impulse had to reconfigure its longstanding tradition of formal stability. Moylan describes the new utopian fictions' rejection of previous utopian habits in dialectic terms, portraying the gesture as a negation of dystopia's negation of utopia. The use of "critical" to describe this strategy thus refers to the synthesis that occurs when the utopian impulse encounters, incorporates, but ultimately overcomes dystopian despair. It maintains dystopia's critical outlook on the negative consequences of utopian thinking while at the same time still defending the positive social force of hoping for a better tomorrow. Or, in Moylan's words, "The new novels negated the negation of utopia by the forces of twentieth century history: the

---

[51] Moylan and James Bittner both note that it appears odd that this resurgence and alteration of the utopian impulse became fashionable when it did. There seems to be no reason why the dystopian trend of twentieth century science fiction would not continue into the 70s. By that point, the utopian imaginary had completed a transformation from a force for thinking an alternative future to a tool for sustaining the promise of happiness in the logic of consumerism, and had been rendered obsolete by the threats of nuclear devastation, natural resource depletion, widespread pollution, and overpopulation. If it was not an organic emergence out of mid-twentieth century historical conditions, then, the new utopian trend should be understood as reactionary. It is an expression of the feeling that dystopian critique had become predictable and tiresome, and had run its course in terms of the intellectual tools it offered to social critique and activism. See Bittner 244-45; Moylan, *Demand* 8-9, 15.

subversive imagining of utopian society and the radical negativity of dystopian perception is preserved; while the systematizing boredom of the traditional utopia and the cooptation of utopia by modern structures is destroyed" (*Demand* 10). What the critical utopia strove to achieve was the representation of an ever-changing utopian society—and thus one conducive to narrative rather than description—that could avoid stasis while at the same time preserving a sense that while in flux, this future was still an improvement on the present.[52]

WET, *TD*, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), and Samuel Delany's *Triton* (1976) are typically considered the formative texts of the critical utopian subgenre.[53] In their commitment to resisting utopian prescription, the critical utopias of *WET*, *TD*, *The Female Man*, and *Triton* come closest to realizing Raymond Williams's definition of utopia in his essay "Utopia and Science Fiction" (1978). Williams argues that as a distinct narrative mode, the literary utopia is most characterized by its representation of a "willed transformation" of the present—of "our familiar country transformed by specific historical change" ("Utopia" 210). By this he means that utopia proper envisions a historical shift in dominant cultural paradigms that is driven by the agency of humans. Merely contrasting the conditions of the here and now with a better world existing elsewhere and else-when, or depicting a world transformed by external conditions such as natural disasters or technological advancements does not, for Williams, a

---

[52] While the majority of utopian studies scholars tend to agree with Moylan about this formal shift in the history of the literary utopia, there are certainly those who contest that historical change and narrative dynamism have always been a feature of utopian fiction. As Garforth explains, "The alternative argument is that the open, reflexive and partial characteristics strongly associated with recent science fiction utopias can be read into literary utopias as a whole; that, as Peter Ruppert has argued, 'open-endedness' is 'implicit in the dialectical structure of all Utopias' (161)" (397). See also Ferns 8-9; Nadir 25; Ruppert 161.

[53] As mentioned in an earlier note, *Ecotopia* is sometimes grouped with these four critical utopias, but as we have seen, it falls short in its lack of self-conscious critique and formal changes to the utopian mode. For other takes on *Ecotopia*'s formal relation to these four core critical utopias, see Kumar 410-12; Mathisen; Moylan, *Demand* 197-98; Somay 26-27.

utopia make, for none of these types of narrative place human agency at the center of historical change.[54] To place the onus of utopian transformation on human intervention in this manner is to build present conditions of human error and uncertainty into the utopian locus; it is to admit that if the future is up to us, we may get it right, or we may botch things entirely. As Williams puts it, utopia represents a future that "can go either way: into revolutionary effort, when history is moving; into a resigned settlement when it goes wrong or gets stuck. The utopian mode has to be read, always, within that changing context" ("Utopia" 211). To not close off the possibility for the future to be otherwise is to represent utopia as a "true subjunctive, rather than a displaced indicative, because its energy flows both ways, forward and back, and because in its issue, in the struggle, it can go either way" ("Utopia" 212). When confronted with such a utopian locus whose contingency is readily apparent, there can be no doubt that human agency is involved, that the future is not predetermined, and that our actions in the present are exceedingly significant, semantically overburdened, in their relation to posterity. Expressing hope through a critical utopian lens, one that resists representational stasis, therefore registers the belief that humans can be a force for changing the planet for the better while still admitting that mistakes may be made and that failure may not be so far from success. It is, in other words, a convenient instrument for expressing the conditional utopianism of the georgic between the stasis of pastoralism and the unfettered growth of technocracy.

---

[54] Curiously, these narrative elements that for Williams are not properly utopian are for Jameson precisely the reason for utopia's failure of imagination, its inability to represent the conditions of historical change. It is no surprise that Jameson's definition is based on classical utopian texts, such as Bellamy's and Morris's, while Williams finds the epitome of his definition in Le Guin's critical utopia. Nadir challenges Williams's definition and its application to *TD*, however, arguing that Williams represents "utopia as a return on an investment, a promise fulfilled after a price has been paid" (36). But, as we will see, Williams uses no such terms of fulfillment or metaphors of financial compensation, and is careful to articulate the contingency of the utopian promise of willed transformation. See Jameson, *Archaeologies*; Nadir.

WET and *TD*'s georgic combination of this critical utopian emphasis on anthropogenic historical change with the greenprints of ecotopia can be taken as both supporting and restraining the early environmentalist hope that a sustainable future was still within the grasp of human achievement. Moving beyond *Ecotopia*, these two texts combine the ecotopian vision for a sustainable future at the level of content with the critical utopian approach to labor-intensive transformation at the level of form. As a result, they imagine sustainable futures that come about through, and persist in, struggle rather than leisure and conformity. By introducing critical commentary that is self-conscious of the pitfalls of stable-state alternatives to growth, *WET* and *TD* make room for their protagonists to introduce conflict, change, and transformation not only in the present, but also in the utopian future. The novels' presents and futures both remain open to transformation by those willing to propose alternatives to dominant political economies, power structures, and identities. And yet, both texts align themselves undoubtedly with the tradition of the literary utopia by incorporating variations on familiar tropes such as the visitor-guide dialogue, detailed description of the utopian locus, and transit between the utopia and the society resembling the author's present. It is in their attempt to balance these latter elements of utopian form with the representation of willed transformation that *WET* and *TD* experiment with new ways of negotiating the synchronic and diachronic registers of narrative. In other words, their georgic strategy for envisioning the temporal stasis of sustainability (ecotopia) alongside the temporal dynamics of historical change (critical utopia) consists of holding together the synchronic and the diachronic. This was a significant combination at a time when the fervor over sustainability threatened to neglect the role of human agency in bringing about environmental change, of which the critical utopian form was a helpful reminder.

Eco-Critique, Simultaneity, and Change in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Dispossessed*

WET's eco-critique takes direct aim at the pastoral undertones of sustainable stasis. In terms of critical effort, Piercy's novel surpasses Le Guin's by honing in on the shortcomings of ecotopianism and sustainability discourse from a social justice standpoint. By bringing together a visitor who is a poor woman of color from the capitalist, patriarchal present and a guide from the stable-state, egalitarian future, Piercy is able to emphasize the ecotopian guide's position of leisure and privilege when inviting Connie to marvel at the improvements of Mattapoisett.[55] Often, Luciente overlooks how Mattapoisett's austerity and gender equality resemble the conditions of poverty and female disempowerment that Connie has been fighting against her whole life. Why should she have hope for a future that reflects her experience of the present and past? In one of their first encounters, Luciente is appalled to hear that the stories she has heard about waste treatment in Connie's time are true. After Connie describes the garbage disposal system in her building, Luciente says, with a hint of condescension, "Many of my generation […] suspect the Age of Greed and Waste to be…crudely overdrawn. But to burn your compost! To pour your shit into the waters others downstream must drink! That fish must live in! Into rivers whose estuaries and marshes are links in the whole offshore food chain!" (55). When Connie counters, a little annoyed, asking what they do with their garbage in Mattapoisett (this is before she has seen it for herself), Luciente answers, "We sent it to the earth. We compost everything compostable. We reuse everything else" (55). The nearest thing Connie can think of to compare this to is the outhouse she remembers at her uncle's farm in Texas, where "They

[55] Luciente's gender identity is rendered ambiguous to an onlooker, as Connie mistakes her for a man before learning she has breasts and self-identifies as a woman. Her racial identity is also unclear, but appears to be either Latina or American Indian, or both. When Connie first encounters Luciente, she describes her as a "Young man of middling height with sleek black hair to his shoulders, an Indio cast to his face. More than her, even. Eyes close together, black and shaped like turtle beans. Long nose. Cheeks clean-shaven, skin smooth-looking as hers…had been" (33).

were too poor to have inside plumbing" (55). Luciente confirms that Connie is on the right track, and Connie utters a refrain that becomes one of her familiar responses by the end of the novel: "You're trying to tell me you come from the future?" (56). From Connie's standpoint, Mattapoisett sounds less like a sustainable utopia with a high quality of living than it does a privileged romanticization of the conditions of poverty, both rural and urban, in which she has struggled to live in the present.

Indeed, Connie's criticism echoes common critiques of the way pastoral ideology persists through sustainability discourse. In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, Ursula Heise explores how the pastoral proliferated among 1960s and 1970s environmental culture through the rhetoric of risk, particularly in discourses following Carson, which emphasized the horror of contaminated landscapes by evoking a contrast with pristine, unspoiled habitats. Instead of raising awareness about pollution by representing non-technocratic relations between human labor and the environment, contrasting the pastoral and the contaminated conveys the message that the only way to be ecologically responsible is to have no impact at all on natural processes—a complete erasure of human interaction with the environment. In this way, "Calls for 'risk-free' environments, undisturbed communities and neighborhoods, pure and 'detoxified' bodies, and in some cases, premodern ways of life, in tandem with calls for grassroots democracy, self-sufficiency, and respect for indigenous forms of knowledge that are often articulated in this context seem to spell out a pastoral countermodel to the toxic world" (Heise, *Sense* 140). Such is the case with Luciente's rhetoric, which expresses outrage at pollution and presents Mattapoisett's sustainable practices as counter models to the imperial ecology of Connie's society.

However, such rhetoric does not acknowledge how the drive to keep nature untouched by human intervention has often functioned historically in the service of displacing people of color, and reflects a privileged experience of nature that excludes the urban poor and is reserved for those with the wealth and means to live a safe distance from sources of pollution (Heise, *Sense* 30-31). So, when "The pastoral clutter of the place began to infuriate [Connie], the gardens everyplace, the flowers, the damned sprightly-looking chickens underfoot" (105), Connie is not following the typical trajectory of the skeptical utopian visitor who eventually accepts the lifestyle of the future—as is the case with Will Weston in *Ecotopia*—but is invoking a georgic critique that, rather than negating the utopia as actually a dystopia, details the process of utopian transformation. The historical perspective of her critique signals the diachronic work that must be performed in order to bring about Mattapoisett's reality, and it coexists with Luciente's synchronic description of the ecotopia when she introduces Connie to the sustainable and egalitarian aspects of her society. *WET* achieves the status of critical utopia rather than dystopia by presenting these two elements simultaneously—that is, within the same narrative unit or chapter—and by not using critique to discount the utopian impulse, but to complicate and enrich it with georgic ethics.

Although the pastoral ecology of Mattapoisett certainly requires the restriction of industrial machinery and technology use, functioning as a condemnatory contrast to the biotechnological power structure of the mental hospital, it also offers models of democratizing technology through genetic engineering methods that are conducive to ecotopia rather than technotopia. Along with the development of the ansible in *TD*, then, *WET*'s advancements in genetics offer a revised, georgic version of the *Limits to Growth* call for completely abandoning hope in economy and technology. As Heather Houser notes, Mattapoisett's genetic

advancements are actually crucial to its realization of egalitarian working conditions: "Without genetic, mechanical, and communication technologies, the Mattapoisett utopia of universal labor would not be possible. […] These innovations ease the burdens of reproduction and agricultural production" (173-74). Environmental and economic justice is thus tied to gender equality through technological changes to human labor practices, including the labor of childbirth: "It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth" (105). From the standpoint of 2137, this may be all well and good. But this is yet another moment when Luciente overlooks the historical discrepancy between her time and 1976. Connie still fights daily for economic means of female liberation and empowerment; she does not share Luciente's cultural memory of the process leading to gender equality. Thus, instead of a necessary stage in the creation of a sustainable and non-male-dominated society, Mattapoisett's birthing machinery appears to Connie as a tool for stripping women of a vital source of female empowerment and subjectivity. Upon witnessing the reproduction machines, Connie is horrified. Amidst tears, she recalls the intimate experience of giving birth to her daughter, and thinks, "How could anyone know what being a mother means who has never carried a child nine months heavy under her heart, who has never borne a baby in blood and pain, who has never suckled a child" (106). Connie's critique of ecotopia, once again, introduces historical differences in labor conditions as diachronic interruptions of utopian stasis.

It is upon her return to psychiatric institutionalization after her escape attempt that Connie directly confronts Luciente with their historical conflict, and questions the relevance of ecotopia to her situation. While it is easy for Luciente to say in hindsight that the promises of a

sustainable future are in Connie's best interest, it is less clear from Connie's standpoint that that hope has anything to do with actually improving her lot in life. Luciente remarks that Connie must keep up her courage, must fortify her resolve and become stronger from the experience of failure. Connie rebukes, "Luciente, mercy! Easy. I'm flat on my back. You don't understand. Never in your life have you been helpless—under somebody's heel. You never lived where your enemies held power over you, power to run your life or wipe it out. You can't understand. That's how come you stand there feeding me empty slogans!" (263). Luciente cannot understand the historical and economic conditions of Connie's helplessness, and thus her words of hope ring hollow. The privileged stance of demanding an affect of hope and courage from someone who is so clearly experiencing hopelessness and despair dismisses those negative emotions as personal weaknesses rather than products of repeated, structural oppression.

In representing the confrontation between Connie and Luciente as an instance of the conflict between a capitalist present and an ecotopian future, Piercy expresses the larger problem of asking those dealing with much more pressing concerns of racial, gender, and economic inequality to care about the environment;[56] it is like asking developing countries to curb their carbon emissions in the interest of reducing global warming. Hope cannot come as an external demand or order, but as a willful act of human rebellion against the status quo. As Sojourner, another resident of Mattapoisett,[57] puts it, "The powerful don't make revolutions" (198). Luciente, from her privileged historical position, cannot hope for Connie, cannot do the work of utopian transformation that Connie's generation must enact to keep the future of Mattapoisett an

[56] Tension with other movements addressing more pressing concerns of social justice—such as the Civil Rights movement—is something environmentalism has had to learn to navigate since the 1960s. See McCormick 74-78.

[57] In Mattapoisett, they honor famous historical or mythological women—such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Sappho, and Diana—by naming themselves after them or by staging performances of their feats.

open possibility. Luciente's existence is not a given, and that means that despair may win out over hope—that, as Bee, one of Luciente's friends, tells Connie, "You individually may fail to understand us or to struggle in your own life and time. You of your time may fail to struggle together" (197). The fulfillment of the promise of an ecotopian future depends on the individual and collective historical agency of humans such as Connie who are embroiled in the central power struggles of their own time. But this is also the case for Luciente and her contemporaries, for even though they have made great strides, there are still conservative holdouts of capitalism and bureaucratic power in 2137 with whom the residents of Mattapoisett are still at war. Even those who already inhabit the utopian locus must keep fighting for it; the battle for historical change still rages in both the present and the future. As Luciente muses about the ecological stakes of hers and Connie's parallel struggles, "Someday the gross repair will be done. The oceans will be balanced, the rivers flow clean, the wetlands and the forests flourish. There'll be no more enemies. No Them and Us. […] I can't know that time—any more than you can ultimately know us. *We can only know what we can truly imagine. Finally what we see comes from ourselves*" (317, emphasis added). Connie must come to realize her historical agency without the help and education Luciente and her fellow ecotopians provide; the work and vision of planetary futurity must be her own. Luciente also indirectly presents a strong case against apocalyptic environmental imagining here: If we can only know what we imagine, and our imaginaries of the future are all of pastoral decline, then we will understand eco-apocalypse as our only possible reality.

There are a series of events that take place after Connie's escape that lead her to appreciate and enact her historical and imaginative agency. Soon after her return, she undergoes the procedure to have the emotional control device implanted in her brain. As soon as the

procedure is over, Connie "did not want to move. She did not care about anything," and "for a week she lay numb and uncaring" (283). It is only in witnessing another patient, Skip, who had also undergone the procedure, that Connie sees the possibility for continuing to resist despite the invasive biopolitical control the hospital has over her. In observing Skip, Connie "felt his will all the time like a knife he was carrying concealed, and she envied him for retaining his will. She wondered, when she could bring herself to think at all, how he preserved the power of his will hidden inside" (283). Skip reinvigorates her hope, and she begins to consider Luciente's advice to attempt another escape. But then, during a weekend furlough Skip was granted for his good behavior, he commits suicide. In her ensuing depression, Connie desperately reaches out to Luciente, whom she has been unable to reach since the procedure. Instead, she arrives in the bedroom of Gildina, a woman living in New York City in a future that is Mattapoisett's dystopian counterpart. In this techno-dystopia, male and female bodies have been artificially enhanced to take on extreme attributes of masculinity and femininity, respectively; multinational corporations or "multis" have replaced nation-states to form a single, global corporate governing body; economic inequality has increased, resulting in drastic life expectancy disparity between upper and lower classes (two hundred for the richest individuals, forty for the poorest); almost all food is processed by corporate factory farms; and the polluted air outside is thick, gray, and visibly impenetrable.

It is in response to this dysoptian experience, and to the result of Skip's misdirected will, that Connie decides that escape is not an option. The only way out is to resist; the only way forward is to return to the power struggle of the hospital, not to run from it. At first her method of resistance is to keep trying to reach out to Luciente and Mattapoisett, which works, and the doctors eventually remove the implant device because they are unable to control the fits of

unconsciousness that accompany Connie's periods of connection with the future. The narrative markers of temporal transition that accompanied her earlier visits to Mattapoisett disappear in these final visits; the narrator does not announce the movement into the future as the distance between present and future diminish, as Luciente's struggle becomes Connie's struggle, as Connie's willed connection to the future becomes a force of change in the present. However, Connie cannot incite real historical revolution without confronting the institutional structure of biopower with violence. As Luciente confirms, "Power *is* violence. When did it ever get destroyed peacefully?" (370). In the culmination of the novel's censure of technocracy, Connie resolves to poison the most powerful people in the hospital by pouring a chemical pesticide into their coffee and turning a tool of environmental health injustice against its source. She obtains the pesticide from her brother's greenhouse during a furlough—a greenhouse in which she used to work and where the pesticides used to make her sick. Reversing the exploitative working conditions of her past, Connie uses the pesticide in the present as a "weapon, a powerful weapon that came from the same place as the electrodes and the Thorazine and the dialytrode. One of the weapons of the powerful, of those who controlled. Nobody was allowed to possess this poison without a license. She was stealing some of their power in this little bottle" (362). After Connie poisons the coffee, she finds she can no longer contact Luciente, can no longer "reach over" to or "catch" the future (375). The connection no longer becomes necessary once Connie has initiated the willed transformation of the present.

Connie's discovery about the shortcomings of escapism and the importance of returning from the future to challenge the historical conditions of the present forms the philosophical core of *TD*, articulated succinctly in Odo's maxim, "true voyage is return." The way forward is back; the way back is forward. It is through the exploration of the chronosophy behind this maxim that

the novel negotiates the synchronic and the diachronic at the level of content and form. But unlike *WET*, *TD* does not make as much of a point of performing this negotiation through its eco-critique. The primary object of eco-critique in *TD* is the principle of decentralization that is at the heart of sustainable living in most ecotopias—including Ecotopia, Mattapoisett, and Anarres. Shevek's critique of Anarresti decentralization, however, does not rely on a perspective of historical difference, as did Connie's critique of Mattapoisett's pastoral ecology. Rather, Shevek's critique is an immanent one, as he comes to understand the pitfalls of decentralization from within the ecotopian society of Anarres, rather than from the perspective of an outsider. It is in his attempt to challenge the structure of utopia that he arrives at his General Temporal Theory, that he is able to grasp together Sequency and Simultaneity. If Connie's actions make possible the transformation of the present into utopia, Shevek's actions make possible the transformation of utopia into a further utopia. Connie tries to bring about a future utopia while still critiquing it from the perspective of the present; Shevek tries to bring about the next stage of utopia by critiquing a present utopia from within. In other words, critique introduces the diachronic into the utopian locus in *WET*, whereas in *TD* it is only the condition of possibility for the diachronic to emerge from the utopian locus—a possibility Shevek can only actualize by returning to Anarres's past, to Urras, the origin of the Odonian revolution.

As an ecotopian tenet, decentralization entails two principle types of social organization: communal living and localized government. These practices are features not only of Callenbach's, Piercy's, and Le Guin's ecotopias, but also of other more general critical utopias, such as Delany's *Triton*, thereby signifying decentralization as a central element of the political ideology of the 1970s utopian resurgence. Andrew Dobson and Ursula Heise detail how decentralization functions in the service of sustainability by encouraging communities to be more

self-sufficient in their management of natural resources and waste, and by fostering a strong sense of intimacy with one's bioregion. Dobson writes, "Communes […] provide the site on which personal relationships become fulfilling, and where people will learn to live 'in place' (according to, and not against, their environment)" (95). Heise corroborates the immediate appeal of decentralization as a sustainable living practice, for "the rejection of large cities, the nation-state, and economic globalization along with an emphasis on local production, consumption, and reinvestment, local currencies or trading systems, decentralized power, egalitarianism, and grassroots democracy shape […] visions of local communities" (*Sense* 31). Le Guin seems to have directly translated these decentralization practices into her ecotopian locus. In the middle of a passage of the novel that perhaps most resembles the traditional form of utopian description,[58] the narrator tells us,

> Decentralization had been an essential element in Odo's plans for the society she did not live to see founded. […] Though she suggested that the natural limit to the size of a community lay in its dependence on its own immediate region for essential food and power, she intended that all communities be connected by communication and transportation networks […]. But the network was not to be run from the top down. There was to be no controlling center, no capital, no establishment for the self-perpetuating machinery of bureaucracy and the dominance drive of individuals seeking to become captains, bosses, chiefs of state. (83-84)

By making Anarres a society run from the bottom up, the Odonian settlers were able to adhere to their leader's anarchist principles of solidarity and mutual aid. Decentralization ensured that despite the harsh conditions of the desert planet, they were able to maintain "that balance of diversity which is the characteristic of life, of natural and social ecology" (84).

---

[58] Le Guin is always careful to match her passages of utopian description with relevant plot developments. This narrative strategy constitutes a further alteration of the descriptive format of traditional literary utopias. The passage quoted here, for example, appears in the middle of the most extensive description of Anarresti society that coincides with Shevek's trip to Abbenay, the pinnacle of Odonian culture and the headquarters of the PDC.

But there are some unforeseen consequences of decentralization that, if left unchecked, can deteriorate into a distributed kind of totalitarianism or conformity.[59] As we saw in the case of *Ecotopia*, a universal social conscience tends to emerge to compensate for the decrease of governmental organization and oversight that decentralization practices achieve. This development does not always function to engrain new power structures. Quite the contrary, for as Werner Mathisen points out, ecotopian decentralization and a green social conscience are intended as measures for avoiding totalitarian control as much as possible: "The green utopian alternative to the protection of the environment and future generations through strong formal political institutions, is an ecologically educated and responsible people, permeated by feelings of identification and solidarity with both present and future human beings and other living creatures" (67). Establishing such a collective social conscience and ecological sense of posterity is one of the primary goals of the Odonian anarchist revolution, and one of the precepts of Odonian thought to which Shevek is initially fervently loyal. One night when Shevek is a teenager attending the Northsetting Regional Institute of the Noble and Material Sciences, he engages in a debate with his fellow classmates over the reasons why someone may or may not want to see what the planet Urras is like. He reacts rather viscerally in response to those who express curiosity about life on Urras, since everything they should desire as Odonians they can find in their society on Anarres. Why would any true Odonian anarchist want to witness the ways of the profiteering nation-states on Urras? When one of his friends says that it feels like they are forbidden to travel to Urras, Shevek goes on a tirade about Odonian principles: "Forbidden? Nonorganic word. Who forbids? You're externalizing the integrative function itself […] Order is

[59] Dobson and Heise identify further shortcomings of decentralization not mentioned here, such as the impracticability and provincialism of its local ethic. See Dobson 95-102; Heise, *Sense* 28-49.

not 'orders.' […] Are we kept here by force? What force—what laws, governments, police? None. Simply our own being, our nature as Odonians. It's […] our common nature to be Odonians, responsible to one another. And that responsibility is our freedom" (39-40). It is precisely their mutually agreed upon responsibility to one another that allows the Anarresti to do away with centralized government, that allows them to live sustainably on a harsh planet.

As the case of *Ecotopia* has shown, however, a collective ecological consciousness can become a powerful force capable of driving individuals to conform to it against their will. The social conscience of a decentralized society may not exhibit the overt practices of hegemonic control and coercion that are common in capitalist nation-states, but it can persuade people to commit so adamantly to one way of living that any alternative is perceived as blasphemy. Mathisen refers to this capacity of ecotopian societies to dissuade anyone from diverging from their sustainable lifestyle as a kind of "informal social control," which exhibits an unsavory "tendency towards political and cultural conformism" (69). "When so much utopian hope and political importance is attached to a strong and widely shared ecophilosophical consciousness and informal social control," he warns, "the temptation to accept or even stimulate intellectual conformity and 'correctness' is great" (69). These conditions of conformity arise uncritically in *Ecotopia*, but Le Guin devotes a considerable amount of *TD* to self-consciously reflecting upon and critiquing these same conditions on Anarres.[60] After much deliberation and many frustrating

[60] Mathisen praises Le Guin for her critical stance on the social conscience and informal control of her sustainable society in *TD*, but criticizes her for following other ecotopian authors in not offering a substantive solution to the political conundrum of ecological decentralization. Such a claim ignores, much like Moylan, the significance of *TD* within the Hainish universe and within the context of Le Guin's other Hainish stories. *The Left Hand of Darkness*, *The Word for World is Forest*, and "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow," especially, all go on to chart the ecopolitical practices of a centralized, interstellar, and democratic government—known at different points of the history of the Hainish universe as The League of All Worlds and the Ekumen—that complement the decentralized practices of Anarres. See Mathisen 77.

experiences, Shevek begins to realize that conformity, bureaucracy, and control have come to creep back into the Odonian society over the past one hundred and fifty years. If he is to remain true to Odo's utopian promise of revolution and willed transformation, he must learn to use his social and economic position to challenge the very culture founded in Odo's name.

Shevek's apprenticeship under Sabul, a renowned Anarresti temporal physicist with ties to Urrasti physicists, and his conversations with Bedap, a close friend, are the strongest influences on his budding critical outlook. Shevek leaves the Northsetting Institute to study under Sabul at the Central Institute of the Sciences in the city of Abbenay, the closest thing Anarres has to a capital. Their first meeting foreshadows things to come, as Sabul gives Shevek textbooks written by physicists from the Urrasti nation of A-Io,[61] but tells him not to share the Iotic texts with anyone else—an extremely odd propertarian request for an Odonian to make. It soon becomes clear that Shevek, too, is Sabul's property. Sabul puts his name on Shevek's work, uses Shevek's ideas to gain an edge over the Urrasti physicists, and censors anything Shevek tries to publish that will not reflect favorably on him. Sabul is driven by power and the profit incentive, engaging in the maneuvers of mystification typical of holders of intellectual capital. He ultimately comes to represent the indirect way that power structures begin to take hold in a society held together by a collective morality. And it takes the words of his good friend, Bedap, for Shevek to realize this, for him to question his faith in Sabul and in the Anarresti society's implementation of Odo's revolutionary principles.

Shevek goes to Bedap in frustration. Sabul will not endorse anything Shevek writes on Simultaneity Theory since he believes, along with the majority of physicists on Urras and

[61] There are three nations on Urras: A-Io, Thu, and Benbili. The nations are allegorical representatives of the Cold War geopolitical order, with A-Io representing the capitalist United States, Thu representing the socialist Soviet Union, and Benbili representing a Third World country run by a military dictatorship.

Anarres, that Sequency Theory is the only proper field of temporal physics. And it is the Odonian social conscience that Sabul uses to silence Shevek. At one point Sabul publicly denounces Shevek's deviance from scientific consensus as an "Egoistic divagation" from the "solidarity of principle" (209). (Being found guilty of "egoizing" is about the most shameful thing to an Odonian.) Bedap, who has always been quicker to critique than Shevek, immediately identifies the relationship between knowledge, power, and social conscience at work here. He tells Shevek that Sabul "gets [power] from the innate cowardice of the average human mind. Public opinion! That's the power structure [Sabul's] part of, and knows how to use. The unadmitted, inadmissible government that rules the Odonian society by stifling the individual mind" (145). It is the social conscience's tendency toward stasis, toward conformity, that allows structures of power back into a seemingly anarchist, decentralized world. It has reached the point at which "The social conscience isn't a living thing any more, but a machine, a power machine, controlled by bureaucrats!" (146-47). Shevek at first resists Bedap's critique, but his further encounters with Sabul only strengthen Bedap's argument in his mind. While he struggles with the idea of abandoning the Odonian principle of solidarity, Shevek eventually realizes that conformity is not the same as solidarity. What Anarres had forgotten was that according to Odo, revolution and utopian transformation were not processes meant to reach a stable state, for the true "Odonian society was conceived as permanent revolution" (290). Instead of an abandonment of Odonian society, then, Shevek's revolt against Anarres would be an act of responsibility toward it: "Bedap had forced him to realize that he was, in fact, a revolutionary […]. He could not rebel against his society, because his society, properly conceived, was a revolution, a permanent one, an ongoing process. To reassert its validity and strength, he thought, one need only act…act from the center of one's soul" (154). And so, it is through his critique of the stasis

of the Anarresti ecotopia that Shevek comes to understand the importance of the diachronic movement of historical change, as well as the active role of his intellectual labor in willing such change.

Ironically, the Simultaneity theorist's insight about historical Sequency is what leads to his decision to travel back to Urras—a journey forward that is also technically a return to the origins of the Odonian movement. Within this paradox lies the epiphany at the center of the novel's chronosophy that makes possible the invention of the ansible as an ecotopian rather than technotopian evolution. In a debate with Dearri, another physicist, at a party on Urras, Shevek expounds on the concept of the General Temporal Theory. He explains that it will not entail a dialectical synthesis of the ideas of Sequency and Simultaneity, becoming and being, duration and extension, linearity and cyclicity, but a holding or taking of the two together. The form of the novel supports Shevek's vision by using the gap between discourse and story to hold together the synchronic and the diachronic without allowing one to collapse into the other. Through the contrapuntal pattern of chapters alternating between Anarres and Urras, the stasis typical of the utopian fiction is shot through with linear progress. Two stories move forward in different places and different times, but the text represents the events of both stories simultaneously—that is, alongside one another in adjacent chapters. This is a macroscopic version of *WET*'s microscopic negotiation of synchronicity and diachronicity, utopian description and critique, within the same chapter.

Dearri objects to such non-dialectic strategies, claiming that surely, one of these temporal registers must be an illusion. A General Temporal Theory must amount to a reconciliation of the two contradictory principles; otherwise it is impractical. "But what's the good of this sort of understanding," Dearri inquires, "if it doesn't result in practical, technological applications?"

(196). It is Shevek's objection to a practical solution to the problem of Sequency and Simultaneity that allows him to arrive at the General Temporal Theory and the concept of the ansible. The ansible is a product of his scientific labor, designed to resist being appropriated by capital and technological progress, more conducive to limits than growth. It is a georgic, ecotopian promise that symbolizes a commitment to a more sustainable tomorrow. In the words of Odo, "A promise is a direction taken, a self-limitation of choice" (214), a decision to act, to change, to transform. But a promise is not a guarantee, for only how humans choose to use the ansible will determine its role in history. Luckily, Shevek takes his theory to Keng, the Terran (Earth) Ambassador on Urras, who, as the existence of the League of All Worlds and its use of the ansible in other Hainish stories attests, follows through on the ansible's promise.

Breaking the Promise

Through their georgic critiques of pastoral ideology and decentralization, along with their balance of synchronic and diachronic narrative registers, *WET* and *TD* thus offer a cautionary addendum to 1970s environmentalist principles of sustainability while maintaining hope in humanity's ability to generate a more sustainable future. It is hard to imagine, however, that such an ecotopian impulse has any chance of surviving in today's environmental imagination. With climate change and the Anthropocene dominating environmental discourse since the advent of the twenty-first century, the prognosis for planetary health has been grim, cementing humanity's centuries-long exploitation of nature as the cause of irreversible damage. Over the past four decades, what was once perceived as a correctable problem has become understood as inevitable; we apparently have not followed through on the conditional promises of ecotopia.

Witness the difference in grammatical mood between the 1972 *A Blueprint for Survival* and Roy Scranton's 2013 *New York Times* editorial, "Learning How to Die in the

Anthropocene." Whereas *The Ecologist*'s issue uses the conditional mood when speaking of our planet's inevitable demise, the Scranton editorial uses the indicative. The former argues that "*if* current trends are allowed to persist, the breakdown of society and the irreversible disruption of the life-support systems on this planet, possibly by the end of the century, certainly within the lifetimes of our children, are inevitable" (1, emphasis added). The latter, however, says of the consensus of climate experts that "This chorus of Jeremiahs predicts a radically transformed global climate forcing widespread upheaval—not possibly, not potentially, but *inevitably*. We have passed the point of no return. From the point of view of policy experts, climate scientists and national security officials, the question is no longer whether global warming exists or how we might stop it, but how we are going to deal with it" (Scranton, emphasis in original). If the characteristic moods of science fiction and utopian fiction are the subjunctive and conditional, then while they suited the 1970s sense that planetary demise and sustainability were equally contingent, it seems they are not appropriate for expressing America's current ecological attitude of fatalism and defeatism.

However, as I argue in the following chapters, American fiction has learned how to express conditional utopianism in moods other than the strictly subjunctive, branching out to genres other than science fiction and the literary utopia. In order to sustain the cultural relevance of visions of a sustainable future amidst a national environmental imaginary that increasingly shifted to the cynical and apocalyptic, utopian imaginaries had to become more flexible. The first stage in this transition was the prominence of magical realism and transnationalism in 1980s American fiction, coinciding with the emergence of the environmental justice movement.

CHAPTER 3. UTOPIAN TRANSMIGRATION: GLOBAL TOXICS AND US MAGICAL REALISM

Magical realism in non-Latin American literature. The environmental justice movement. Transnational theory and aesthetics. These are three historical phenomena that emerged in full force in the 1980s, and that carried a unique valence in discursive formations in the United States. For instance, Stephen M. Hart lists an ethnically diverse range of 1980s fiction that signals "the reformulations of the magical-realist mode of narrative which emerged in non-Hispanic countries" (5). The environmental justice movement is largely agreed to have begun with the media coverage of two events: the 1980 EPA finding of chromosomal damage in residents of Love Canal, New York who had been exposed to toxic chemical wastes dumped decades earlier, and the 1982 Warren County, North Carolina protests against a local PCB landfill.[62] And Ursula Heise notes that transnational discourse really picked up steam in American studies when, "In the 1980s and early 1990s, a great deal of work in fiction, poetry, biography, and autobiography, as well as in cultural criticism, was dedicated to the detailed exploration of family histories, places of origin, migration, inhabitation and reinhabitation, local communities, material contexts, embodied experiences, and situated forms of knowledge, all of which were understood to contribute to alternative social visions" ("Transnational Turn" 382).

Despite the shared 1980s origins of these phenomena, their histories are rarely discussed in concert with one another in literary studies scholarship. The focus, instead, is on how these developments can constitute a robust methodology of reading, an approach which inadvertently obscures historical intersections. In literary studies on the aesthetics of magical realism, the transnational or global, and environmental justice alike, critics are most interested in developing replicable techniques of reading that can identify the kernel of their object of study in textual

[62] See, for instance, Adamson 76-77; Sandler and Pezzullo; Szasz.

artifacts from a variety of historical and national traditions. What is the difference between magical realism and realism that will allow us to locate the former mode wherever it appears (Zamora and Faris 3)? How can we read any work of American literature as a transnational subset of World literature (Dimock, "Planet and America" 4)? Is there an identifiable poetics of environmental justice that would allow us to expand the ecocritical canon of environmental literature to include more texts concerned with race, class, and gender (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 9)?

As admirable and important as such questions are for contributing to critical-theoretical methodologies of literary practice, they nevertheless leave under-addressed the historical conditions engendering the possibility for these kinds of inquiries in the first place. In other words, while the transhistorical purview of these methodological questions makes these fields of study available to and significant for a broader range of literary scholarship, they foreclose research questions that can help us understand the conditions responsible for the very emergence of these fields—questions that can guide us to see cultural texts as contributors to method rather than simply as passive objects of inquiry. Why is it that transhistorical approaches to magical realist, transnational, and environmental justice aesthetics began to appear at around the same time? What might their temporal convergence suggest about the different forms of imagining that are most effective in intervening in particular arrangements of social and environmental life? How might historicizing these methodological commitments reveal the limits of abstracting an aesthetic line of inquiry from the cultural artifacts that inspired it?

By prioritizing such questions, this chapter seeks to investigate key developments in American environmental history during the 80s that were at the center of the broader cultural phenomena providing the conditions of possibility for the emergence of these three fields of

literary research and aesthetics. In particular, I argue that developments in policies of toxic waste disposal during the 80s presented new tensions between planetary and national citizenship in the US, tensions that helped galvanize the field of transnational studies, and which the environmental justice movement confronted politically, and magical realism confronted aesthetically. More importantly, understanding historical changes in the practice of toxic waste disposal as underlying and tying together the surge of new interest in transnational, magical realist, and environmental justice discourses and imaginaries during the 80s will allow me to trace the subtle passage of the utopian impulse from the barks of its embattled home genre to its intermingling with other styles and genres—a process I will describe as utopian transmigration. This transformation of utopia is a critical though undocumented moment in literary history, and attending to its conditions and affordances can enable us to identify utopian resources for ecological politics in unforeseen textual spaces. In what follows, I first document the significance of georgic rhetorics on toxic waste regulation and disposal for understanding emergent activist and theoretical discourses of environmental justice and transnationalism. I then turn to the affordances of magical realism for resisting unjust frameworks of global toxic waste disposal, and use readings of Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988) to demonstrate how these historical and aesthetic perspectives reveal a new utopian formalism that emerges from the ashes of the literary utopian genre and becomes an instrument of eco-political thinking across a variety of narrative forms.

Toxic Waste from Local to Global

In June 1979, the State of North Carolina received approval to dump 31,000 gallons of oil contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB), a toxic carcinogen, in a landfill in Warren County. The choice of location for the landfill was politically suspicious. Not only did the county

not meet the EPA's federal guidelines for chemical landfill sites, but also "Warren County [was] the poorest county in the state with a per capita income of around $5,000 in 1980. Its population [was] 65% black" (Geiser and Waneck 50). As it became clear that the county was not chosen because it made the most ecological sense, but rather because the State deemed the lives of the poor, mostly black residents not worthy of protection from toxic exposure, what at first seemed to be only an environmentalist issue was revealed as a civil rights and social justice issue as well. Despite a number of lawsuits filed against the State—both on the grounds that the landfill failed to adhere to EPA regulations and that it constituted a racist, civil rights violation—the trucking of the oil to the landfill site commenced in the summer of 1982. Joined by civil rights activist allies, hundreds of Warren County residents staged a protest to protect their local environment and personal health by blocking the road along which the trucks had to travel. 523 arrests were made as a result, and although the State was eventually able to continue with the establishment of the landfill, the protests brought new attention to the connection of environmental degradation with issues of race, power, and injustice.

Because of the striking and explicit manner in which the 1982 Warren County protests brought together civil rights and environmental activism, they are often described as marking the emergence of the concept of "environmental racism," as well as the birth of the environmental justice movement.[63] As one of the leaders of the protests and, at the time, head of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, Rev. Benjamin Chavis, defines it, environmental racism refers to the "racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic

[63] See Pezzullo for a comprehensive account of the rhetoric of environmental racism used during and after the Warren County incident that established it as foundational moment for the environmental justice movement.

waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the presence of life-threatening poisons and pollutants in communities of color, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the environmental movement" (xi-xii). The environmental justice movement, then, is the deliberate attempt to contend with such histories and practices of racial discrimination by making environmental protection more equitable and democratic. The environmental justice approach to ecological politics demands a more inclusive participatory framework for environmental decision-making, and attends to how cultural identity influences who benefits from and who is burdened by the unequal distribution of toxins and pollutants.

This development in environmental thought and activism during the 1980s created a rift within the environmental movement in the US. On the one hand was the mainstream environmentalist groups—mostly composed of and reflecting the values of middle-to-upper class white citizens—invested in preserving and protecting nature as a good in itself, and on the other hand was the environmental justice movement that treated concern for the physical environment as an instrument of social justice, as a tool for combatting racist systems responsible for the unequal distribution of natural resources and toxic waste.[64] The latter picked up steam in the early 1980s through extensive media coverage on television, and in magazines and newspapers, of toxic waste tragedies like that of Warren County. Andrew Szasz reports extensively on the media's role in creating an ecopopulism out of the environmental justice movement, as widespread coverage of incidents such as the contamination of Love Canal, the Three Mile Island nuclear meltdown, and the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill all heightened national fear and attention regarding various forms of hazardous waste. As Szasz writes of television audiences in the US during the 80s, "Viewers were reminded again and again that unregulated economic activity can

[64] For more on this distinction between environmentalism and environmental justice frameworks, see L. Buell, *Endangered*; Gottlieb; Sandler and Pezzullo; Szasz.

produce catastrophe, and that neither industry nor government could be trusted to keep the public safe" (39). Using such rhetoric—a variant on the georgic that ties political economy to both environmental degradation and public health—this kind of media coverage functioned to amplify environmental justice issues from the local, grassroots level to the national level, a process which reached its peak by the late 80s as media coverage became buttressed by scientific studies on the prevalence of toxic waste exposure nationwide. Perhaps the most influential study in this regard was the 1987 report on *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, conducted by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. The report consisted of findings from two cross-sectional, nationwide studies recording the local demographic information of communities surrounding two types of locations, respectively: commercial hazardous waste facilities and uncontrolled toxic waste sites.[65] The chief finding of the studies was that "Race proved to be the most significant among the variables tested in association with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. […] Communities with the greatest number of commercial hazardous waste facilities had the highest composition of minority residents" (Lee 48). *Toxic Wastes and Race* and subsequent national studies, along with the extended media coverage of toxic waste contamination and protest, strategically employed a georgic focus on the impact of industry on land and livelihood to expose a gap between the severity of the problem of environmental racism and the almost complete lack of federal environmental policy initiatives addressing the problem.

Although passed by Congress in 1976, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), designed to regulate the treatment and disposal of hazardous wastes, was not substantially implemented and enforced until the issue of toxic waste received heightened

[65] While the terms "hazardous" and "toxic" are often used interchangeably when referring to harmful waste materials, "hazardous" is a broader term referring to any waste material that poses an environmental or public health risk, while "toxic" refers to those types of hazardous waste that pose health risks when ingested or abosorbed.

national attention in the 80s. By the mid-80s, Congress made moves to increase the enforcement and oversight capacity of RCRA. As Szasz recounts, "The focus of the oversight hearings shifted from solid waste […] to the hitherto neglected hazardous waste provisions. Congress scored the EPA for failing to meet statutory deadlines, failing to get implementation off the ground, weak enforcement, and other failings. Members of Congress competed to lead the call for new legislation to speed the cleanup of abandoned waste dumps" (52). As a result, industries became more accountable and less cavalier in their dumping of toxic waste, and by the end of the decade the number of incidents of contamination and protest diminished.

However, even though the issue of toxic waste seemed to have been adequately dealt with on the local and national level, hazardous wastes were still being produced by US industries and still needed to go somewhere. This led to an increase in international dumping of US toxic wastes, primarily in nations of the global South where regulations were less strict, cost was low, and publicity and resistance were minimal (see fig. 2). David Pellow captures the cruel irony of this situation: "The environmental and environmental justice movements in the North have unwittingly contributed (at least partially) to the flow of destructive multinational corporate operations and hazardous wastes to the South" (14). Unfortunately, it appears that the victories won by the grassroots efforts of environmental justice activists in the US, using georgic rhetoric to gain nationwide publicity and galvanize the enforcement of stricter federal regulations on toxic waste disposal, actually facilitated the shift of global toxic dumping from rich northern nations to poor southern nations. Indeed, in the same year that *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* was published, *The Nation* ran an article entitled "The Export of U.S. Toxic Wastes" that informed readers of "a growing shadow industry that is exporting [hazardous and toxic] wastes from the United States, particularly to countries in the Third World" (Porterfield

and Weir 341). Unlike the swift governmental response to the national injustices documented in *Toxic Wastes and Race*, when it came to international waste dumping, Porterfield and Weir write, "U.S. government agencies that are supposed to enforce the laws regulating such shipments lack the money and the personnel to do the job. […] U.S. officials who are aware of the sensitive legal and foreign policy questions involved seem reluctant to crack down on illegal dumpers" (341). Tension thus arose between national and international interests concerning global toxics and environmental justice. In particular, a zero-sum game appeared to arise whereby regulating toxic waste disposal at the local and national level meant increasing dumping on the international level, and vice versa.

Figure 2. Cartoon in Porterfield and Weir (343)

The zero-sum game of global toxic waste disposal, and the georgic approach to environmental justice that led to it, epitomizes the dissonance between the limitations and possibilities of nation-state coherence and sovereignty during the 1980s. Intensified processes of globalization and capitalist imperialism led to the remapping of geopolitical and racial stratifications with diminishing regard for national borders, even as nationalist ideologies continued to be the driving forces behind such processes. The cultural and literary dimensions of this situation in the US included the proliferation of terms, theories, and aesthetics of "transnational" American identity, as well as what Lawrence Buell refers to as "toxic discourse."

Among these discourses, challenges to the nation were represented as coming from both within and without, sometimes depicting the challenges as triumphal, sometimes as deceptive, sometimes as fearful and unwanted. American studies's transnational turn in the last few decades can be characterized by efforts to both chart and build cultural resources for cultivating forms of social belonging and imagination that are not confined by the geopolitical boundaries of the nation-state. What if US culture could be expressed in ways that do not reinforce a coherent sense of national citizenship? What kinds of "imagined communities," to use Benedict Anderson's influential term, could be formed that cannot be described as nationalist?[66] Motivated by such research questions that sought alternatives to "nation-based concepts of identity, a wide range of theorists [and artists] instead presented identities shaped by hybridity, creolization, *mestizaje*, migration, borderlands, diaspora, nomadism, exile, and deterritorialization" (Heise, *Sense* 5). Under the umbrella term of transnationalism, which generically signals forms of belonging across and beyond the nation-state, a slew of such particular terms proliferated to identify vectors of multicultural transit and intersection with precise geographical and historical trajectories.

The usual historical reason cited for the heightened attention to and proliferation of such transnational vectors is the phenomenon of "globalization," with special emphasis placed on the sociological, economic, and political changes this term connotes.[67] As Nick Bisley succinctly defines the term, which "appeared to develop as a collective common wisdom in the 1980s and 1990s," "globalization" refers to "the set of social consequences which derive from the increasing rate and speed of interactions of knowledge, people, goods and capital between states and societies" (1; 6). Such a global increase in rate and speed of exchange was made possible by

[66] See Anderson.
[67] For a more cultural understanding of this term, see Appadurai.

infrastructural advancements in information and transportation technologies, which enabled "reductions in the transportation costs (both fiscal and ideational) associated with movement and the reduction of barriers that prevent or constrain these exchanges from taking place" (Bisley 30). The consequences of globalization for the nation-state are not as straightforward as they might appear, especially within a US context. From the perspective of many champions of the transnational turn, globalization signals "the unraveling of national sovereignty" and puts pressure on nationalism to "give way to other forms of human association" (Dimock, "Planet and America" 1). Skeptics, however, point to the way in which globalization ushers in an unassailable capitalist world order, iconized as the "'McDonaldization' of the world, a regime of standardization and homogenization ushered in by the erosion of national borders, presided over by […] the 'unchallenged primacy of the United States'" (Dimock, "Planet and America" 2). Under the regime of globalization, even as the national sovereignty of the US becomes undermined along with other countries, its economic sovereignty thrives as late capitalist, consumerist ideology intensifies and expands, carrying its American labels to every corner of the globe.[68]

The zero-sum game of toxic waste disposal is an illustrative example of how the consequences of accelerated globalization both challenge and buttress the US nation-state in this manner. One the one hand, the georgic rhetoric of the environmental justice movement emerges as a challenge to state sovereignty from within, as the geographically marginalized resist federally sanctioned dumping of toxic wastes that industries are producing at an increasing rate. The movement demonstrates how the physical environment and people of color and the poor are intersectionally excluded from and thereby undermine imaginaries of national coherence. On the

[68] For accounts of globalization as describing late capitalism in terms of a world system, see Jameson, *Postmodernism*; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

other hand, the new channels of international exchange globalization makes possible allow the US to export its wastes to the global South on the cheap, thereby appeasing the environmental justice movement with new national sanctions but still continuing to perpetuate state sovereignty across borders and extend nationalist ideologies of economic expansion, racial oppression, and environmental exploitation.

Transnational American studies ultimately orients itself toward developing solutions to such apparent impasses between globalization's opportunities for deflating and inflating US sovereignty. The goal is to imagine and cultivate forms of belonging that might bring together those experiencing inequality both within and beyond US borders as a result of processes of globalization. But as the case of global toxic waste disposal illustrates, such a transnational, coalitional politics cannot be successful unless its imagination also incorporates the physical environment as an aggrieved party. In order to be effective in upending state sovereignty and ideological imperialism in an era of globalization, the local resistance to US environmental racism in the form of unjust practices of toxic waste dumping not only needs to foster transnational attachments with those in the global South experiencing toxic contamination from the same US sources, but also, in proper georgic fashion, with the local and international spaces that are, along with their residents, chosen as sensible economical choices for exposure to environmental health risks. One of the foremost consequences of globalization is the intensification of risk externalization—that is, as production and exchange accelerate and spread, the material costs of this expansion get externalized to the environment at an increasing rate.[69] Hence the emergence of toxic waste disposal as an issue that gained heightened visibility: globalization meant these wastes were being expelled to the environment at a greater rate than

[69] This acceleration of risk under globalization has been famously referred to by Ulrich Beck as "world risk society." See Alaimo; Beck; Heise, *Sense*.

ever before (Pellow 8). The land, as well as the humans depending on it for their livelihood, can only take so much before demanding reparation.

It is because of this need to account for the environment as a member of aggrieved transnational citizenry that I adopt the framework of "planetarity" to describe modes of ecological belonging that emerged in the 1980s to resist the environmental injustices of global toxic waste disposal practices.[70] Gayatri Spivak famously introduces planetarity as a transnational vector directly opposed to globalization in that it captures the very forms of alterity that fail to conform to globalization's abstract principles of ideational and material exchange economies (72-73). It refers, in other words, to the communion of transnational spaces of humans and nonhumans considered as external costs of economic globalization, those parts of the world global capital would prefer to keep out of sight and out of mind. Planetarity doesn't so much signal a resolution of the zero-sum game of global toxic waste disposal, but a short-circuiting of its international flows and striations, an imaginary community whose premise is the resistance of the very concept of externalization that is responsible for tensions between local and global environmental justice activism. At the center of planetarity's mode of belonging is a human identification with the reparations owed to the physical environment on a global scale for the damages it has incurred in the name of the externalization of fiscal cost—reparations indifferent to the territorial sovereignty of the nation-state.[71] This human-nonhuman coalitional identity is possible precisely because the environmental damages produced by globalization's acceleration of externalization travel along geographical and racial gradients of social injustice.

---

[70] For debates surrounding the terminology of planetarity, see Dimock, "Planet and America;" Elias and Moraru; Gilroy; Heise, *Sense*; Spivak; Taylor.

[71] As Wai Chee Dimock describes the effects of this as yet unknown environmental reparation, it will mean that the US becomes "the place on the map where large-scale forces, unleashed elsewhere, come home to roost. […] The experience is novel, mind-shattering in many ways, and a numbing patriotism is not incompatible with a numbing shame" ("Planet and America" 2).

In other words, by marking reparation for globalization-driven toxic waste disposal as a non-localizable basis for ecological citizenship, planetarity offers a coalitional framework for reconciling not only national with international movements for environmental justice, but also the anthropocentrism of environmental justice with the ecocentrism of mainstream environmentalism. Planetary imaginaries mobilize attempts to reveal and repair associations between geographically marginalized human identities and ecosystems that have historically been disadvantageous to both because of the ways they have been economically marked as convenient zones of externalization.

Appropriately, one of the principle aesthetic vehicles for transnational imaginaries of planetarity since the 1980s has been what Lawrence Buell coins as "toxic discourse."[72] In novels such as Don Delillo's *White Noise* (1985), Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990), and Richard Powers's *Gain* (1998), toxic discourse creates a unique aesthetic out of 80s and 90s conditions of local and international toxic waste exposure while drawing on long-established traditions of American thinking about ecological contamination from the likes of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Rachel Carson.[73] Defined as "expressed anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency," toxic discourse serves to critique the practices of US industries that exploit the accessible and pervasive exchange channels of globalization to find new and convenient dumping grounds (L. Buell, *Endangered* 31). Whether from Yamashita's international perspective of US corporate interests and waste disposal in Brazil, or Powers's local perspective of chemical exposure in a Midwestern town leading to cancer risks in its residents, toxic discourse typically relies on narratives of "pastoral betrayal," whereby toxic

[72] See L. Buell, *Endangered* 30-54.
[73] See Heise, *Sense* 91-177, especially, for readings of toxic discourse in these novels.

contamination's horror rests on the fact that it has denied an environment and its populace of an experience of natural beauty and purity. Toxic discourse's representations of pastoral betrayal can be said to express planetary imaginaries in that they render the desire for an uncontaminated space as a common interest of both mainstream environmentalist values of landscape preservation and environmental justice values of resisting human health risks. The two sets of values end up finding common ground in the way they "share the conviction that the biological environment ought to be more pristine than it is, out to be a healthy, soul-nurturing habitat" (L. Buell, *Endangered* 38). Toxic discourse fictionally emplots the urge to expose the workings of corporate and state power responsible for the externalization of toxic risk to the environment along transnational gradients of social inequality. In doing so, it becomes an imaginary resource for planetary politics not only by dramatizing the biohazardous effects of racist and classist ideologies of environmental decision making, but also by connecting local and global, ecopopulism and ecocentrism.

Despite toxic discourse's facilitation of planetarity in this manner, it ultimately falls short of doing justice to the coalitional politics the term promises in that it replaces the vision of future environmental reparations with a vision of pastoral-that-could-have-been. The stakes of this replacement is that toxic discourse's reliance on the older ecotopian tradition of American pastoral—which the critical utopias of the 1970s were beginning to eschew—means that it ultimately reinforces nationalist ideologies encoded in images of pastoral wilderness and settler colonialism, as outlined in chapter 1. Rather than using the coalitional power of planetarity to contest national hegemony, toxic discourse uses it to reinforce a form of environmental attachment and belonging that perpetuates American expansionist logic. Toxic discourse, in other words, co-opts the oppositional agenda of transnationalism that planetarity seeks to

mobilize by bringing environmentalism and environmental justice together under a nationalist ideology of pastoralism that reinforces American imperialism under the regime of globalization. It is with this failure of toxic discourse in mind that I turn to a different 1980s aesthetic, which, I argue, is better equipped to represent the environmental reparations so critical for planetarity's opposition to global toxics: magical realism.[74]

The Planetary Affordances of Magical Realism

My argument for magical realism in 80s US fiction as a resource for planetary politics relies on an understanding of what I call *narrative transmigration* as referring to the movement of a style of storytelling from genre to form. According to Caroline Levine, the distinction between genre and form is based on whether a particularly arranged set of narrative elements (style, theme, plot, character, setting, etc.) is portable across different historical-material contexts of production and reception (13-14). Forms typically migrate across time and space in ways that genres cannot. While genres like science fiction may be legible as such to different cultures in different centuries, two readers from different cultures and time periods may not agree that what one labels science fiction counts as science fiction to the other. Genre is highly dependent on marketing conventions and audience expectations, which are both quite contextually constrained. Forms, on the other hand, are iterable and transferrable across contexts, achieving a translatable degree of contextual abstraction that enables them to become embedded in a variety of story and publication types. If *migration* is the term Levine prefers to describe the flexibility and

[74] Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* is an interesting example of toxic discourse in that it is also generally considered magical realist. I point this out in order to acknowledge that the distinction I am making here between magical realism and toxic discourse is of course not cut and dry, and there are many instances of overlap. They are also very different categories: toxic discourse is characterized by a series of rhetorical gestures that appear in many different kinds of fictional and non-fictional writing, and magical realism is a uniquely fictional genre/form. Nevertheless, highlighting the different focuses of the two will be important for identifying different manifestations and uses of ecological utopianism moving forward.

movement of forms, I will adopt the term *transmigration* to refer to those special cases when a particular arrangement of narrative elements perishes as genre and is reborn as form. Such is the case, I claim, with both magical realism and utopia in 1980s US fiction. The generic heyday they both experienced in the 60s and 70s turned out to be a last gasp, as critics and authors alike have withdrawn from overt commitments to magical realist labels, and the canonical trope of the utopian traveler has scarcely been seen since *Ecotopia*. And yet, many new works of fiction are still evaluated for their magical realist or utopian qualities. The next two sections will detail how it is in their generic afterlives that magical realism and utopia find one another in the 80s among literary spaces that are now open to them as forms that were once foreclosed to them as genres. And it is precisely this transmigratory collaboration that provides the aesthetic conditions for planetarity to muster a transnational response to the environmental injustices of global toxics.

Magical realism's defining feature as a genre is its sincere commitment to treat the fantastic and the mundane as equally representative of everyday experience. The routine and mimetic events of classical realism, as well as the improbable and empirically unverifiable events of fantasy are likewise treated with a tone of familiarity, restraint, and unremarkability.[75] Magical realism became a prominent feature of Latin American and Afro-Caribbean literature between the 1940s-1970s, as its serious treatment of the fantastic was adopted as a mark of distinction from European modernist styles that reveled in the unreality of breaking natural laws. As Alejo Carpentier put it in his famous preface to *The Kingdom of this World* (1949), magical realist authors in the Americas sought to distinguish "between the imaginatively impoverished and thoroughly reified legerdemain of European Surrealists and the utopian vitalism of an authentic, American marvelous realism" (E. Smith 9). Carpentier saw what he originally referred

[75] For formative scholarship on magical realist aesthetics, see Cooper; Faris; Sandín and Perez; Zamora and Faris.

to as "marvelous" realism as a genuine commitment to the coexistence of the miraculous with the commonplace as distinct from the conjuring of the fantastic as either a cheap trick or transcendent vision, the latter of which he diagnosed as typical in European imaginaries. As a historically and regionally distinct genre, then, magical realism came to signify the condition of postcoloniality in the Americas, dramatizing a hemispheric encounter between Western and non-Western knowledges and belief systems, "history versus magic, the precolonial past versus the post-industrial present" (Cooper 1).

By the 1980s, magical realist stories noticeably infiltrated US imaginaries, most frequently among authors approaching African diasporic and Native American cultural memory from a postcolonial perspective, such as Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed* (1980), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988), Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1989), and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991). However, the relationship between post-industrial capitalism and its alternatives was beginning to shift. Namely, under the regime of globalization, the latter were beginning to fade. As Eric D. Smith notes, following Jameson, "magical realism emerges as a narrative mode to address the structural doublings, dislocations, and diremptions of a constitutive shift or disturbance in the mode of production […] one that sees the uneasy cohabitation of capitalist and precapitalist forms" (11). Yet, as discussed above, by the 1980s, this cohabitation began to collapse, raising the question, "what happens to it [magical realism] once capital has saturated the world system through the IMF and World Bank and the collapse of the Soviet Bloc?" (E. Smith 11). According to Smith, magical realism's best option was to transform into science fiction (a process analogous to utopia's embedment in the critical dystopia, which will be the

subject of the next chapter), but, as the prevalence of magical realist styles in US fiction during the decade suggests, this was not the only option.

Following Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez, I argue that magical realism persisted in the 80s by becoming more covert, subtle, and disruptive—namely, by transmigrating from genre to form. In US fiction of the 80s, magical realism manifested as punctuated moments of interruption within realist narratives, not so much achieving a comprehensive balance of the fantastic and the mundane, but rather employing instances of such balance strategically. As Sandín and Perez write, "the magical realist moment, effect, or irruption, then, represents a place of both opacity and illumination in an otherwise realist text where a forgotten or repressed history or discursive formation intrudes or appears for the US subject in a manner that is catalytic" (1-2). Imbuing transnational histories of US culture with moments that defy empirical understanding became a fictional method for revitalizing forgotten pasts and demonstrating how the act of remembering itself can evoke alternative visions, however fleeting, that destabilize homogenous ideologies of national community in the present.

The narrative logic of such stories featuring magical realism as a formal device for interrupting American nationalism is one of postcolonial reparation, which is to say an expression of poetic justice and redemption for past colonial violence committed in the name of national sovereignty and unity.[76] US histories of slavery and African diaspora, as well as of Native American settler colonialism, are retold as reminders of the racist atrocities perpetrated in the pursuit of building a stable national identity, but with a magical realist twist that draws characters and readers alike into an alternative, transnational imagined community based on a

[76] Here, I am following William Flesch's work on comeuppance as an essential literary plot device for engaging readers by appealing to evolutionary affinities toward justice and vengeance. See Flesch.

shared investment in achieving justice and retribution against US state apparatuses. One of the principle magical realist strategies US fictions of the 80s use to achieve this effect is representations of character transmigration: characters who exhibit immortal tendencies, who experience unnaturally long lifespans, or whose souls become reincarnated in different bodies. The untimeliness of such characters provides an opportunity not only to recall memories of injustice that may otherwise be long forgotten, but also to signify a politics of enduring resistance against, and potential reparation for, present forces that have inherited US traditions of nationalism and colonialism. It also creates an isomorphism of form and content, whereby the transmigration of characters over time maps onto the transmigration of magical realism from genre to form. The overall effect is the constitution of a formidable fictional imaginary contesting the community building function of the nation-state.

Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* and Erdrich's *Tracks* are powerful demonstrations of how these magical realist elements of reparation and transmigration can be combined with contemporaneous themes of global toxics and environmental justice to constitute a georgic approach to planetarity that is quite different from the pastoral betrayal strategy of toxic discourse. Both novels contain stories about colonial violence and environmental loss, in which histories of slavery, racism, and native dispossession are inextricable from histories of resource extraction, deforestation, and toxic waste dumping. Two seemingly immortal characters—Lissie in *Temple* and Fleur in *Tracks*—tie these histories together for the reader through supernatural cycles of death and rebirth, thereby providing a long temporal perspective that aligns the reader with a sense of collective reparation for the racial injustices and environmental destruction perpetrated over generations by the legal and economic institutions of the nation-state. Glimpses of a pastoral life that could have been function less as the utopian space of uncontaminated

nature that ought to be, as in toxic discourse, and more as the remnants of a strong generic utopianism that continues to haunt fictional spaces of hope that transgress the boundaries of utopian science fiction. In other words, the pastoral vision that defined the future ecotopias of science fictions past becomes in these magical realist novels not something to be regained, an end in its own right, but a means, a catalyst, for a new future vision of planetary reparations-to-come.

Temple has no real plot per se. The closest thing to a plot summary would be to say that it is about a black professor of American History named Suwelo who travels to Baltimore to attend to and sell the house his great-uncle had left to him when he passed away. From this central thread sprout numerous intersecting tales told by a host of different characters, all tied to Suwelo in one way or another: there's his ex-wife, Fanny, his former mistress, Carlotta, his uncle's best friend, Hal, and the life-long friend and love interest of Hal and Suwelo's uncle, Lissie, whose capacity for transmigration is the single element of magical realism in the novel. This collage of characters is more interesting for the overlapping, personal and transnational histories it tells than for any emergent sense of a narrative whole that exceeds its parts. Featuring racial identities ranging from Native American, to African American, to Latin American, a networked US cityscape connecting San Francisco, Baltimore, and Charleston, and hemispheric connections with South America and West Africa, the novel is much more interested in tracing vectors of transnational belonging and power dynamics than it is in telling a compelling, coherent story. Less expansive in scope, *Tracks* tells the story of a handful of Chippewa clans living on a reservation in North Dakota from 1912-1924 from the perspective of two contrasting narrators, Nanapush, a tribal elder, and Pauline, a woman of mixed race, who speak from the perspective of the 80s present. Nanapush and Pauline detail the clans' hardships in the aftermath of the Dawes

Act allotments as they face a consumption epidemic and overwhelming pressure to sell their land to lumber companies. Although the action never strays from this locale, hybrid cultural encounters pervade the story, principally through Pauline, whose mixed ancestry includes European, Canadian, and Chippewa, and who converts to Catholicism and disdains Chippewa mythology and medicinal practices.

As these summaries indicate, the novels are largely realist in their attendance to the details of characters' everyday lives in colonial and postcolonial histories. Empirically unverifiable events are rare, and restricted almost entirely to the unnatural life spans of Lissie and Fleur. Lissie's soul has manifested in numerous bodies over thousands of years, and Fleur should have died of drowning at least three times. The two characters' repeated rebirthing into the world becomes a magical realist epistemology for understanding the long past of US nation-state complicity in environmental racism. But more than that, the characters' magical resilience in the face of the systemic oppression of certain marginalized locales and their residents establishes hope for retribution through environmental justice as a transnational mode of belonging in which both characters and readers can engage. Lissie and Fleur function as what Joni Adamson has called "seeing instruments" of planetarity, capable of teaching other characters and readers alike how to "remember the past, and move beyond the present into the future" in ways that respond to grievances of injustice on behalf of both humans and the land (Adamson 145). It is because of the length of time she has lived that Lissie can tell Suwelo in *Temple*, with a tone of genuine belief and conviction that can only come from first-hand experience, "The life in this place is your life forever. You will always be here; and the ground underneath you. And you won't die until *it* does. It *is* dying, and the people are too" (190). This supernatural knowledge of the intimate and everlasting connection between human and

environmental fates promotes planetarity as a rallying cry for human-nonhuman coalitional politics.

Turning to Lissie first, she is a much more capacious and didactic character than Fleur, condensing disparate cultural and geographical histories into oral tales told primarily to Suwelo, who upholds a textbook, nationalist understanding of America's past and is not well versed in the dynamics of environmental racism. In the present, Lissie is a woman who grew up on an island off the coast of Charleston in the early 1900s. Lissie, along with many other black children on the island, developed vitamin deficiency because they were not allowed to partake in the abundance of fruit, greens, and milk on the island, as industrial agriculture's division of labor dictated that these provisions be harvested on the island but sold on the main land. Suwelo quickly learns that Lissie—whose name, we are informed, means "the one who remembers everything"—is actually a reincarnated soul who has lived through countless lives since the beginning of human civilization (52). Most of her stories are about living and dying under systems of racism and environmental injustice, such as those determining black oppression on the Charleston island, and recall "only moments—at most, days—of peace" (82). However, in one of her first stories, she recounts how all of her memories seem to be haunted by a timeless, utopian foundation that straddles the line between memory and dream, an arcadian vision of communion among humans and between humans and nonhumans.

This "dream memory" consists of a pastoral world where forest covers the whole earth, bestowing the everyday with a sense of ecological infinity (86). Lissie's human community shares the trees with monkey-like animal "cousins," who "seemed nearly unable to comprehend separateness; they lived and breathed as a family, then as a clan, then as a forest, and so on. If I hurt myself and cried, they cried with me, as if my pain was magically transposed to their

bodies" (85). This transcorporeal communion of human and animal, to use Stacy Alaimo's landmark ecocritical term, models an ideal scenario of ecological sensitivity and connectivity: an ahistorical utopian barometer against which to assess historical encounters between the social and the natural.[77] Unfortunately, the majority of the novel's stories, its "non-dream" memories, bear no resemblance to this utopia, instead detailing deeply engrained practices of environmental exploitation that historicize toxic waste dumping as only the latest instance of such practices rather than as an anomalous contemporary development. The novel's hemispheric reach ranges from tales of slavery on a South American papaya plantation whose settlement saw large swaths of forest waylaid, to an African rubber plantation that led to the erosion of people and soil alike, to the burial of nuclear waste from Western nations in poor African countries, to Missouri copper mines and Texas petroleum fields that left "the planet quaking and shrinking in on itself, like a squeezed orange that has been sucked to death" (88-89). Channeled through the historical endurance of Lissie, these stories from the mortal characters reveal that Lissie's capacity to see otherwise, to hold onto the dream world of utopia alongside the history of environmental degradation, can be the catalyst for working toward a better future. And while this remainder of futurity makes no claim to resembling the pastoral world that Lissie recalls, that memory does provoke the possibility of reparation for and freedom from not only resource exhaustion and ecosystem collapse, but also the racial injustices that have been perpetrated en route to such disasters.

Given the novel's structure of intersecting stories, and the non-presence of magic in any of these stories besides Lissie's, Lissie's utopian vision can be said to haunt the stories of environmental racism that the novel layers on top of it. This utopian haunting is a unique feature

[77] See Alaimo.

of the "momentary" magical realisms of the 80s, in which utopia can be said to be felt as both a presence and non-presence. It can be understood as distinct not only from the overt "utopian vitalism" of earlier magical realism, to reiterate Eric Smith, but also from the tendency of dystopian narrative to critique realist and utopian endeavors by haunting them with forgotten losses.[78] For instance, many of Ursula K. Le Guin's dystopian short stories feature utopias haunted by a terrible past. "Newton's Sleep" (1991) is exemplary in this instance, as it tells of a group of primarily white spaceship colonists endeavoring to create a more rational human society that begin to hallucinate visions of the people of color suffering from the environmental destruction they have left behind on earth. Teresa Shewry has argued that such dystopian narratives use the haunting of past losses to provide a sense of hope insofar as the trope reorients characters to the work that still needs to be done in the present; the haunting visions in "Newton's Sleep" can be said to be hopeful in that they force the characters to realize that they must confront the problem of environmental racism on earth before progress can be made. As Shewry puts it, such a story "associates hope with people's efforts to repair damaged ecosystems, to remember and care for the dead, and to confront social injustices" (*Hope* 160).

By situating Lissie's utopia prior and subordinately to the majority of the events in *Temple*, Walker starts where such narratives end. Instead of using loss to reorient the characters to the problems that must be dealt with before a better future can be achieved—which would do no more than preserve toxic discourse's dynamic of pastoral betrayal and recovery—Walker begins with Lissie's utopian vision in order to haunt her characters with the hope they need to endure experiences of loss to which they have already been oriented. As the dream memory that

[78] Of course, magical realism is a flexible form, and while my argument here is that it is adept at departing from this kind of dystopianism, many magical realist novels also adopt this dystopian strategy of haunting, such as Morrison's *Beloved*.

is out of time—at once before, after, and during the novel's other stories—the story of the cousins demonstrates how a future free from environmental injustice is precisely what is at stake in the capacity of the characters to retain a semblance of utopian imagination. At one point Fanny, the ultimate mediating voice of *Temple*, wonders, "Are we collectively responsible for disasters because we image them and therefore shape them into consciousness?" (301). The converse of this is that in order to shape a better future, we first need to imagine it. But more than that, we need to acknowledge that what is more important than what we imagine is *how* we imagine. The utopian form of the story of the cousins becomes more important than its pastoral content; its effects on the other characters' styles of thought is more important than its representational material. Or, in Lissie's words, what is at stake in the story and memory in general is not belief in something concrete, but the capacity of the imagination in general: "I swallowed past experiences all my life, as I divulged those that I thought had a chance, not of being believed […] but of simply being imagined" (366). As such an imaginary rather than a belief, the story of the cousins divorces the utopian impulse from the estranged settings and spaces that have traditionally defined it. The imaginary function of utopia—its education of desire, to use Abensour's term—becomes form, abstracted from and prioritized over utopian genre and its conventions of spatializing, localizing, and hylomorphizing social dreaming.[79] By carrying the ghost of Lissie's utopia throughout their narratives, the characters of *Temple* delocalize utopia, thereby transforming it from genre to form much as Lissie's isolated immortality transfers magical realism from genre to form. Once delocalized in this manner, utopia can then become a resource for planetary reparation.

[79] See Abensour.

The clearest examples of this use of transmigrated, delocalized utopia for the expression of planetarity are the effects Lissie's story has on Suwelo and his nationalist understanding of American history, as well as the story's thematic coextension with Fanny's desire for racial justice. Immediately after hearing the story, Suwelo "found himself more conscious of his own nonhuman 'relatives' in this world," and reflects on his complicity in resource extraction and petrocapitalism, pondering the origins of the plastic in his glasses: "He knew it was a product of petroleum, of oil, and so he assumed plastic was made out of the very lifeblood of the planet" (88-89). Suwelo's new found understanding of the planet as an aggrieved party due to the extraction of its lifeblood coincides with an emerging transnational understanding of American history. Fanny tells Suwelo stories about her parents living in the fictional West African country of Olinka, stories about disease, deforestation, and erosion they experienced shortly after being married, and about the changing African climate, which was becoming ever more arid and drought-ridden during their later years. As a supplement to these stories, Fanny recommends to Suwelo a novel by an African author, which he never reads because he sees it as irrelevant to his interest in American history. Yet, these encounters with African authors and environmental histories nevertheless begin to make Suwelo question his insular approach to America's past, and consider the merit of a more transnational approach even as he resists it: "He wanted American history, the stuff he taught, to forever be at the center of everyone's attention. […] But now to have to consider African women writers and Kalahari Bushmen! It seemed a bit much" (178). Despite his reluctance and allegiance to a narrow view of modern history confined to the progress of nation-states, it is the combination of Lissie's ecotopia and Fanny's stories of environmental racism in Africa that push Suwelo toward a planetary understanding of the

connection between the grievances of black people and the land at the hands of nationalism and capitalism.

If Suwelo thus only arrives at a nascent sense of planetarity, Fanny expresses a much more keen sensibility of utopian retribution on a global scale for the combined injustices of racism and environmental degradation. The epitome of this is when she is recalling, in broad terms, the murderous practices of white people against black people that haven been exhibited across the stories of the novel, and proclaims, "I hate white people. […] I visualize them sliding off the planet, and the planet saying, 'Ah, I can breathe again!'" (301). For Fanny here, racial and environmental grievances are interchangeable. The wrongdoing is expressed in racial terms, the reparation in environmental terms, but this is expressed as one process not two. Planetary reparation is appropriate retribution for racist histories; the anthropocentrism of environmental justice is on the same side as the ecocentrism of environmentalism. However, as Suwelo is quick to remind Fanny, this planetary idea of racial justice remains an imaginary vision, a utopian possibility rather than a reality. This point resonates strongest at the end of the novel with the abrupt imposition of the contemporaneous: the global inequalities of international hazardous waste disposal practices. Just before his death, Fanny's father hears on the news "that Western Europe and the Soviet Union were clandestinely selling, for burial in Africa, millions of tons of radioactive waste to dozens of poor countries, Olinka included" (349). Globalization and its internationalization of environmental injustice through clandestine waste dumping rear their heads in the end, a painful reminder of the now in a novel mostly about the past. The reparation that would lead to planetary citizenship remains a possibility, a hope dependent on confronting the unsolved problem of global toxics in the present.

While we find a similar message in *Tracks* regarding the utopian not-yet of planetary citizenship and reparation-to-come, the novel's link to toxics is rather more indirect. Unlike *Temple*, which shuffles back and forth between waste disposal practices in the present and past histories of environmental racism not subject to the 80s regime of globalization, guiding the reader to explicitly make connections between past and present injustices in order to evoke a longing for retribution, *Tracks* keeps the present at a remove even as its urgency remains felt through the way the novel highlights environmental racism in the past. That is to say, the novel's focus is on past events of environmental injustice that would not have been recognized as such prior to the epistemological consolidation of environmental and racial grievance made possible by the coining of the term "environmental racism" in the 1987 *Toxic Wastes and Race* report. Even though exposure to toxic substances and waste disposal practices does not appear in *Tracks*, its investment in chronicling environmental injustice in Native American communities at the hands of economic and state practices of deforestation and land dispossession is nevertheless inflected by a georgic lens that cannot but be tied to the forces responsible for local and global inequities in toxic waste disposal in the 80s.

Tracks, like *Temple*, is haunted by a utopian vision channeled through an intermittently magical character—Fleur Pillager—who impossibly endures hardships of environmental racism. The novel begins in 1912 with Nanapush's narration of the loss of life due to white-settler-induced consumption endured by the Chippewa people living on a reservation along Matchimanito Lake. Nanapush recalls what it was like then, to think about and remember those myriad lives lost to an environmental health disaster that disproportionately affected Native Americans:

> We feared that they [the dead] would hear us and never rest, come back out of pity for the loneliness we felt. They would sit in the snow outside the door,

> waiting until from longing we joined them. We would all be together on the journey then, our destination the village at the end of the road where people gamble day and night but never lose their money, eat but never fill their stomachs, drink but never leave their minds. (5)

Nanapush here articulates a utopian vision of environmental justice for the Chippewa as a kind of revisionary haunting, whereby the very oppressions white settlers had enacted on the clans—gambling, consumption, and alcohol—become recast through the figures of the dead as the material conditions for a better quality of life. Nanapush and Fleur share this vision on the very first pages of the novel, establishing it, much like the story of the cousins in *Temple*, as an ecotopian ground that will come to inspire, inform, and permeate (read: haunt) the formal sensibility of retribution and resistance *Tracks* cultivates from this point forward.

Nanapush's utopian vision serves this formal function of educating a desire for reparation most prominently in the magical realist moments of Fleur's communion with the lake monster, Misshepeshu, whose supernatural power manifests through Fleur's miraculous deaths and rebirths. Misshepeshu's role and meaning in Chippewa culture is varied and mutable, but most scholars of American Indian literature agree that for Erdrich the lake monster represents "Native resistance to white encroachments" (Shackleton 198).[80] More specifically, in *Tracks*, Misshepeshu lies in waiting, initially enduring white encroachments and brooding in anticipation of moments of retribution. For instance, during the time of the consumption epidemic, government surveyors come to Matchimanito to map the land and the lake for potential sales to lumber companies. This is a striking example of the environmental racism tag team of state and industry, coming in once the consumption epidemic has cleared a path of dead indigenous bodies over which surveyors can trod. None of this is lost on Misshepeshu, who watches invisibly and

[80] For more on the meaning of the lake monster in Chippewa culture and *Tracks*, see Brehm; Hanif and Marandi.

takes note: “Only now they walked upon fresh graves […], crossed death roads to plot out the deepest water where the lake monster, Misshepeshu, hid himself and waited” (8).

When he does take revenge, Misshepeshu acts through Fleur as a conduit, drowning her three times throughout the course of the novel in order to lure Chippewa men to her rescue who have been aiding the surveyors or supporting selling the land to the lumber companies. When they arrive, the monster revives Fleur and takes the lives of the men instead. In the case of her second drowning, for example, after falling in the lake, Fleur “washed on shore, her skin a dull dead grey,” but somehow revives on her own, and in the days that followed the man who found her “grew afraid, wouldn’t leave his house and would not be forced to go near the water or guide the mappers back into the bush” (11). He soon drowns, ironically, in his new bathtub. With Fleur as his conduit, the lake monster thus achieves moments of retribution for the injustices perpetrated against the Chippewa people by the combined forces of state-sanctioned dispossession, capitalist resource extraction, and patriarchal power.

Unfortunately, as in *Temple*, and as a very consequence of the transmigration of magical realism and utopia from genre to form, such instances of retribution are only momentary and are not representative of the overall plot trajectory of *Tracks*, which in the end sees the Chippewa clans lose their land closest to the lake to the lumber companies despite the efforts of Fleur and Misshepeshu. Those magical realist moments of planetary reparation in the novel, haunted by the utopian (re)vision of state sponsored environmental injustices that Nanapush articulates, thus remain representative of a speculative possibility rather than a substantive reality. Upon learning that her clan’s land has been sold, Fleur is inconsolable and attempts her third drowning. Nanapush helps recover her this time, and fears that his life will be the one Misshepeshu decides to take as retribution. But Fleur assures him that he is not in danger, but instead, “She would

curse the lumber bankers and officials in their nests" (214). She follows this with a knowing smile and laugh, the signature smile of the Pillager clan, which the novel ends by noting has passed on to Fleur's daughter. Even though wholesale reparation is not realized in the end—Nanapush's vision does not come true—the hope inspired by the imagination that it could be realized one day endures in the Pillager smile, and in a curse that, this time, extends beyond the personal and the local.

Conditional Utopianism and Weak Theory

As my readings of *Temple* and *Tracks* suggest, the manner in which these novels' magical realist moments express planetary imaginaries of unrealized but *possible* environmental retribution against the US nation-state suggests that they have stumbled upon a transmigratory kind of utopianism. That is, we may not encounter the fully envisioned ins and outs of an alternative, ecotopian society in either novel—as was still the case for the novels discussed in chapter 2—but we do encounter blips of one, and an overall hope that it may still be possible to bring such a society into being. It is this dilute, indirect, intermittent form of utopian expression that constitutes a more refined conditional utopianism than that of the novels I assessed in chapter 2—a development made possible by a historically specific utopian transmigration from genre to form similar to that experienced by magical realism.

Utopia as genre was certainly in dire straits, if not already passed, by the 80s. As discussed in the introduction, the list of voices documenting the twilight of utopia over the course of the late twentieth century in political thought, literature, and environmentalism is long. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan perhaps capture the impact of 80s globalization on the utopian impulse best when they write, "In the face of economic restructuring, right-wing politics, and a cultural milieu informed by an intensifying fundamentalism and commodification," the

utopian resurgence of the 70s "came to an abrupt end" in the 80s as the dystopian genre took over science fiction imaginaries (2). If the historical collapse of alternatives to global capital in the 80s signaled a crisis for magical realism, as Smith claims, it signaled an even more fundamental crisis for utopia, which staked its very existence on the possibility of imagining alternatives to dominant social and economic systems.

If any methodological framework could provide tools for reading traces of utopia that survived the onslaught of its generic foothold in the 80s, it would be "weak theory," as introduced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, drawing on Silvan Tomkins, and further elaborated in literary critical terms by Wai Chee Dimock and Paul Saint-Amour.[81] Weak theory demarcates a style of reading texts that, as opposed to a sovereign or strong theory, does not make claims about a reading with finality or completeness, or with totalizing gestures to literary history. The claims I make in this project about the transition of utopia from genre to form, from totalizing to conditional aesthetic, are not meant to be final and incontestable, but to provoke an exploration of utopian resources for ecological politics in places we might not otherwise look, especially in such environmentally apocalyptic times. The novels I foreground in this and subsequent chapters are by no means to be considered utopian from here on out. But they could be. Such a weak approach is to abandon the sovereign aspirations of interpretive predictability in favor of highlighting the complex and sublime range of literary possibility. It is to occupy a critical stance that "shrugs off the promise of mastery over data, facts, figures, and projections to immerse itself into a relentlessly creative practice of reading for what is in excess of the probable or predictable" (Nersessian 98). In doing so, weak theory achieves political import indirectly by

[81] See Dimock, "Weak Theory"; Saint-Amour 37-43; Sedgwick.

willfully sidestepping the allure of strong knowledge claims. That is, weak theory's "ability to discredit forestructured historical narratives lies precisely in its tentativeness" (Saint-Amour 38).

Just as in strong theory where "There is a curious resemblance […] between the totalizing zeal of the theorist and the totalizing claim being made on behalf of its object," so with weak theory can the weak aspirations of a text reveal themselves through the course of tentative reading (Dimock, "Weak Theory" 733). The conditional utopianism I identify in 80s magical realism can be said to be weak in that it sidesteps the strong claims of the utopian generic tradition, claims that reify the space of the alternative through a thoroughgoing, descriptive account of the setting of the ideal world. As Phillip E. Wegner argues, utopian fiction traditionally achieves its own claims to sovereignty over the future by virtue of its comprehensive spatial remove from present sovereignties—namely, nation-states. He writes,

> The narrative utopia plays a crucial role in the constitution of the nation-state as an original spatial, social, and cultural form. Beginning with the work that founds the genre, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), there has been a continuous exchange of energies between the imaginary communities of the narrative utopia and the imagined communities of the nation-state, the former providing one of the first spaces for working out the particular shapes and boundaries of the latter. […] The utopia's imaginary community is […] a way of imagining space, thereby helping the nation-state to become both the agent and locus of much of modernity's histories. (xvi-xvii)

By defining its worlds so strongly and completely in opposition to the nation-state, utopian fiction inadvertently reinforces that most modern form of sovereignty from which it seeks to break. It is apparently no coincidence, then, that a weak form of utopianism can be said to be forming as the nation-state is experiencing new internal rifts in the face of globalization, and as explorations in transnational forms of belonging are becoming more abundant. Such a crisis in spatial imagining allows utopia to share its burden of nation-state resistance with other cultural

formations, to become weaker—i.e., more formal and less generic—and consequently, paradoxically, a more formidable political adversary of nation-state sovereignty.

As *Tracks* and *Temple* demonstrate, magical realism and planetarity are two such cultural formations with which utopia begins to share its burden of alternative imagining in response to the dilemma of global toxic waste dumping. The remaining chapters touch on two other prominent forms in which conditional utopianism takes up residence at the turn of the twenty-first century, critical dystopian narratives and Anthropocene fiction, and details the associated developments in environmental history that both conditioned these further transmigrations and determined the georgic terms of their political aspirations. The following chapter serves as a companion chapter to this one, focusing on a twin environmental problem of 80s globalization to that of toxic waste disposal—namely, neoliberal privatization of the commons—and the concluding chapter addresses how the inauguration of a cultural imaginary surrounding the Anthropocene transformed the spatial consciousness of the regime of globalization.

CHAPTER 4. BETWEEN GROUND AND SKY: ATMOSPHERIC AMBIGUITY IN OCTAVIA E. BUTLER'S *PARABLE* SERIES

The term "atmosphere" carries so many different literal and figurative meanings that perhaps its defining semantic features are ambiguity and uncertainty. In its most denotative sense, "atmosphere" refers to the layer of gases—or "air"—surrounding the Earth. Atmosphere separates the terrestrial surface from the void of outer space, protects life forms from harmful radiation and earth-bound projectiles, mediates weather and the water cycle, and moderates global temperatures. There are many physical qualities of this ethereal dome that make it particularly conducive to figurative translation. Typical descriptors of air include light, extended, diffuse, ephemeral, and invisible. Such qualities lend themselves to standing in for one aspect of human lived experience, in particular: mood. Understood as the ambient sphere of feeling that coats the surface of intersubjective relations, but exceeds the interiority of any individual subject, mood is to affect what atmosphere is to air, and it is to bodies what atmosphere is to Earth's surface. What mood and atmosphere share is an overriding sense of betweenness, of spatial ambiguity regarding position, materiality, and identity.

In literature, the connection between mood and atmosphere has led to formalist understandings of "literary atmosphere" as referring to the overarching mood of literary texts. Whether through "novelistic weather reports—'fog everywhere'; 'it was a dark and stormy night,'" or more subtle techniques of making social and psychological interactions felt in an ambient manner, literary atmosphere figuratively renders the indistinct qualities of air in order to bestow a work of literature with a blurry but identifiable haze of feeling (Lewis 2).[82] In other

[82] Timothy Morton refers to such "novelistic weather reports" as ecomimesis, a term I adopt here. Ecomimesis is a rhetorical device that "serves the purpose of coming clean about something 'really' occurring, definitively 'outside' the text, both authentic and authenticating. […] It wants to break out of the normative aesthetic frame, go beyond art" (*Ecology* 31). Morton

words, what makes the mood of a work of literature atmospheric is a certain undifferentiated quality, an indefiniteness of feeling that pervades a passage or an entire work. William Empson's New Critical study on literary ambiguity describes it best as "a sort of taste in the head" that involves "no assembly of grammatical meanings, capable of analysis, but a 'mood,' an 'atmosphere,' a 'personality,' an attitude to life, an undifferentiated mode of being" (17). Contemporary critics such as Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, Steve Mentz, and Justine Pizzo have started giving the study of literary atmosphere a more historicist slant, examining how literary works employ figurative representations of atmosphere to respond to historical changes in social and ecological climates.[83] These scholars reconfigure the reading of literary atmosphere so that it is understood as more metaphoric rather than symbolic, contextual rather than archetypal, standing in for culturally specific but perhaps ephemeral and uncertain developments in environmental, economic, and political history.

There is common acknowledgement that contemporary crises of earth's actual atmosphere are inspiring critical attention to imagined atmospheres throughout literary history.[84] However, the majority of the contemporary historicist scholarship on literary atmosphere is

---

extends the definition of ecomimesis to include those devices I label as ambient mood-making (*Ecology* 32-35). I thus part from Morton here by making a sharper distinction between ecomimesis proper and ambient mood. As I make clear in the next section, this distinction serves to point out how the stylized conventions of science fiction have the effect of rendering the figurative dimensions of literary atmosphere as undermining rather than reinforcing the illusion of authenticity.

[83] See Bachelard; Böhme; Irigaray; Sloterdijk; Lewis; Mentz; Pizzo. Over the last few decades, phenomenological, aesthetic, and political theories of atmosphere advanced by continental philosophers such as Gernot Böhme, Luce Irigaray, Guy Bachelard, and Peter Sloterdijk have established air alongside weather and climate as an ecocritical topic of interest, but it is only within the last few years that literary critics such as Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, Steve Mentz, and Justine Pizzo have begun to formulate a more robust understanding of how literal atmospheres relate to the way in which literary atmosphere functions in modern fiction and poetry.

[84] As Lewis observes, the growing interest in the topic reflects current anxieties "about how long either literature or the air about us might last in its present form; about the nature, degree, and significance of our contribution to the shelters that both provide" (2).

directed to periods prior to the formation of today's aerial anxieties. In other words, the way in which twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction responds to threats of air pollution, greenhouse gases, ozone depletion, and acid precipitation through transformations in literary atmosphere has been largely neglected. As a result, we are left with a meager understanding of what atmosphere means for us today, and how it figures in our orientation to ecological politics.

Addressing this question of atmosphere's meaning amidst new environmental threats to the sky, this chapter argues that Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), *Parable of the Talents* (1998), and *Parable of the Trickster* (2001) draw on the characteristic ambiguity of literary atmosphere to combat 1990s dystopian fears of neoliberal and atmospheric enclosures. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, US scientists and citizens were experiencing two new sources of enclosure, one literally atmospheric and the other figuratively so: meteorological degradation and neoliberalism. On the one hand, the scientific community was getting closer to a consensus on the warming effects of the anthropogenic increase in CO_2 emissions over the past century, on the ozone-degrading effects of chlorofluorcarbons (CFCs) produced by various spray-based consumer products in the 70s and 80s, and on the increase of atmospheric acid depositions caused by the increase of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions over the last half century or so.[85]

At the same time, and inaugurated by swift changes to the policy frameworks of the IMF and World Bank, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher launched a new neoliberal agenda that permeated the Anglo-American world and beyond, where "the effect was to make a new round of 'enclosure of the commons' into an objective of state policies. Assets held by the state or in

[85] See Fleagle for a comprehensive assessment of the environmental relationship between and policy challenges of these three phenomena.

common were released into the market" (Harvey 158).[86] Mirroring but expanding the early modern British enclosures that Jeffersonian American georgics defined themselves against, neoliberalism became an economic "atmosphere" in the 80s and 90s, elusive and diffuse in its workings, global in its reach. As Tom Moylan remarks, neoliberalism's "new hegemonic constellation generally succeeded in shifting from a less profitable centralized mode of production to a more flexible regime of accumulation that took full advantage of technological developments in cybernetics and electronics" (*Scraps* 184). Both this economic atmosphere and its physical, meteorological counterpart were being newly defined by decentralized phenomena of enclosure—widespread risks to financial and bodily security—whose sources were difficult to locate, and thus difficult to resist. Alternatives, in other words, were hard to come by.

Butler's *Parable* series, I contend, nevertheless manages to invoke the utopian openness of air as an ambiguous georgic contrast to the new atmospheric and neoliberal enclosures. If literary atmosphere functions to dramatize the ambiguity of literal atmospheres, then in the context of the 80s and 90s, it calls for the possibility of an open alternative to enclosure, even as enclosure becomes the dominant feature of the period. The utopian style Butler uses to express

---

[86] Harvey's use of "enclosure" here reflects a common use of the term to refer to privatization schemes of neoliberalism that involve "accumulation by dispossession" (176). The Midnight Notes Collective popularized this terminology of enclosure in the context of neoliberalism in 1990. They distinguished the "new enclosures" of neoliberalism from the old enclosures (discussed in more detail in chapter 1) introduced in the late 1400s during the transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy, claiming that the new enclosures are unique in that they name a globally interconnected yet discrete set of privatization procedures whereby a local act of expropriation is felt on the other side of the globe through a different but corresponding process of dispossession (Midnight Notes Collective 1-2). If the US gains financial capital through an acquisition by dispossession in China, for example, it will not only take on the accumulated wealth, but will also see a new enclosure take shape within its borders. I use the term "enclosure" in a manner consistent with this understanding of a complex global system of privatization procedures in economic contexts, but I also use it more generally to refer to experiences of confinement and asphyxiation associated with air pollution. The point of constellating these connotations in one term is to reinforce this chapter's focus on the georgic relations between economy, atmosphere, and bodily health and agency.

aerial openness and futurity precisely in contradistinction to enclosure marks a new, historically specific manifestation of the georgic's call for a commonwealth political economy.[87] By drawing on the stylistics of literary atmosphere, Butler's tales of possibilities for reopening the commons amidst a global warming dystopia reorient contemporaneous public anxieties about meteorological degradation, directing readers' attention to how air can still signify utopian possibilities of freedom despite the apocalyptic dread it increasingly evokes.

The following sections chart the contours of this relationship between literary atmosphere, utopia, and a georgic commons by examining the ways in which formally distinct figurations of air and atmosphere model elusive alternatives to equally elusive forces of enclosure. The first section explores the core mimetic and mood-generating features of the novels that both register the public anxiety surrounding meteorological deterioration, and constitute a conditional hope for reversing aerial enclosures. The second section investigates the formal features of the "critical dystopia" that enable Butler to represent the atmospheric diffuseness of neoliberal privatization efforts while also employing the trope of flight to define an opposing, emancipatory ideology of dispersal in the form of the protagonist's Earthseed religion. The third and final section analyzes how Butler extrapolates the biopolitical implications of meteorological and neoliberal enclosures for human embodiment and evolution, where I understand biopolitics as referring to practices of social organization based on the

---

[87] Here I follow Hardt and Negri in understanding a commonwealth political economy as consisting of the equitable distribution and sharing of "the material world—the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty" as well as "those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth." As they articulate it, the georgic connotations of this definition—in that it emphasizes the balance between economy and environment—become especially critical in responding to late twentieth-century regimes of globalization and neoliberalism: "In the era of globalization, issues of the maintenance, production, and distribution of the common […] in both ecological and socioeconomic frameworks become increasingly central" (*Commonwealth* viii).

inclusion or exclusion of certain forms of life. According to the *Parables*, we should not respond to new risks of biological harm from airborne compounds by furthering economic policies of regulation meant to preserve the bodily enclosure of the human, but by reimagining instances of exposure as opportunities for utopian resistance through embodied openness and adaptation. Together, these three levels of literary atmospheric analysis provide a sense of how Butler disperses the utopian impulse across different forms, using the weak theoretical qualities of conditional utopianism as a strength for fending off enclosure and apocalypse.

Literary Atmosphere Between Ecomimesis and Ambient Mood

Parable of the Sower begins with the protagonist narrating a recurring dream of hers in which she is learning to fly. It has taken her a series of dreams to get the hang of it, each subsequent dream serving as a further lesson in flight. In the particular stage of the dream series that opens the novel, she is on the cusp of aerial proficiency, just about ready to soar but not quite. "I lean into the air," she says, "straining upward, not moving upward, but not quite falling down either. Then I do begin to move, as though to slide on the air drifting a few feet above the floor, caught between terror and joy" (4). The protagonist experiences a multifaceted betweenness here, a state of existing between reality and dream, restraint and flight, ground and sky, dystopia and utopia. The concept of air as elemental medium—that is, as atmosphere—comes to signify a subjectivity defined by its betweenness. From the very beginning of the novel, then, Butler sets the tone for a narrative exploration of literary atmosphere's ambiguity.

Given the anxious uncertainty about physical and economic atmospheres during the late 80s and early 90s, this task could not have been more relevant. In this section, I analyze how the two registers of literary atmosphere mentioned above—ecomimesis and ambient mood—function to resist the new aerial enclosures; the following section will concern critical dystopian

form and neoliberal enclosures. Balancing strategies of ecomimesis and ambient mood-making, Butler captures atmosphere's ambiguity through settings, character attributes, and plot events that trend toward both dystopia and utopia, at once disabling and enabling, harming and helping, dividing and uniting, characters in precarious circumstances. But it is ultimately by using these strategies for utopian ends, opening up the air as a space of future possibility, that she seeks to oppose the political quiescence that accompanies narratives proclaiming the inevitability of atmospheric fatality.

Butler's literary atmosphere amplifies the historical uncertainty about the future health of the earth's atmosphere by translating it into the subjunctive grammatical mood. What if the hole in the ozone layer gets too big? What if anthropogenic CO_2 emissions actually lead to a warmer climate? These were questions that even atmospheric scientists during the 80s and 90s were still trying to come to consensus on. In the case of global warming, for example, while evidence of CO_2 accumulation in the atmosphere since the mid twentieth century was well documented, throughout the latter half of the twentieth century it was still unclear how the rise in CO_2 impacted global temperatures. This was largely due to the fact that in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, global temperatures were observed to have decreased since around 1940. Additionally, Global Climate Models (GCMs) during this period were not yet able to adequately account for the complexity of climatological systems. As a result, "The modelers admitted that they still had a long way to go. Their arcane GCMs could inspire little confidence among the public. People wanted a more straightforward indicator—like the weather outside their windows. It was scarcely possible to get the public, or even most scientists, to take greenhouse warming seriously when the average temperature of the planet was dropping" (Weart 115). In other words, uncertainty about the climatological impact of the greenhouse effect, as well as the extent of

ozone depletion and acid deposition, within the scientific community and public at large created a gap in the environmental imagination concerning what the social impact of extreme atmospheric degradation might look like. Speculative treatments of the topic in literature, including Butler's, emerged to fill this gap, applying the characteristic subjunctivity of science fiction to literary atmosphere so as to extrapolate the hardships and possibilities of a radically transformed aerial existence.

Butler's two *Parable* novels are written in the form of journal entries, and take place between the years of 2024 and 2035. They tell the story of a black woman named Lauren Olamina and her attempt to establish a new religion called "Earthseed," whose core georgic tenets state that change is absolute—expressed by the mantra, "God is change"—and that humans need to establish a more sustainable, caring relationship with the land upon which their livelihoods depend. Lauren has what is called "hyperempathy syndrome," a condition in which she feels the pleasure and pain felt by those near her. Known as "sharers," Lauren and others with hyperempathy syndrome are an especially vulnerable population, as their ability to feel with others is a blessing and a burden, susceptible to both empowerment and exploitation.

The world of the *Parables* is decidedly post-apocalyptic, taking place in a California ravaged by the effects of global warming and drought, and a US government torn apart by political forces of anarchy, lawlessness, and extremism. Lauren grows up in a poor, racially diverse, and relatively safe town in Southern California, but shortly after her eighteenth birthday the town is attacked and burned by one of the many roving bands of destructive criminals that are an ever-present threat. *Sower* recounts Lauren's journey north with the few survivors from her town, as well as some poor travelers they encounter and take in along the way. *Talents* begins where *Sower* ends, with the founding and development of the first Earthseed community

of Acorn in northern California. Over the course of *Talents*, Lauren's beliefs and personal relationships are challenged as a group of religious extremists destroy Acorn and enslave its residents. Her and the other former residents of Acorn manage to escape, but the community becomes scattered, and Lauren must learn how to balance her desire to find her only child, from whom she had been separated during the enslavement of Acorn, and her desire to gather followers of Earthseed. The ending is ambiguous, as Earthseed becomes an international movement, but Lauren's daughter cannot bring herself to forgive her mother for the sacrifices she made for her belief system.

Considering first the novels' strategies of ecomimesis, the *Parables* consist of a future *novum* whose setting is characterized by atmospheric collapse and aerial contamination. Their representation of global warming in California consists of predictable effects such as extreme Pacific storms and drought in the Southwest, but also connects to harsh weather conditions across the nation. Such widespread atmospheric degradation, in tandem with decreased access to and funding for immunizations, has led to the spread of contagions that have not been health risks for centuries. As Lauren explains, "There's cholera spreading in southern Mississippi and Louisiana. […] Tornadoes are smashing the hell out of Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and two or three other states. […] And there's a blizzard freezing the northern Midwest, killing even more people. In New York and New Jersey, a measles epidemic is killing people" (*Sower* 53-54). Later, in *Talents*, this matrix of climate-induced effects would come to be known as "the Pox," creating a parallel between the airborne diseases of the past and future (13-14).

Based on the novels' ecomimetics, then, the future prospects of atmospheric decline that Butler stages seem to be straightforwardly apocalyptic. In this capacity, literary atmosphere functions to critique the repressive forces that circulate in the sky. In turn, the techniques of

literary atmosphere appear to be a poor fit for expressing a utopianism that should, in principle, offer an alternative to aerial harm and decline. When we turn to the novels' stylistics of ambient mood, however, we find ambiguously utopian instances of literary atmosphere. That is, the figurative use of aerial language and subtle evocation of indefinite mood in the *Parables* function to resist the unequivocally destructive forces of the atmosphere represented via ecomimesis. It is thus the ambient mood component of literary atmosphere that results in the novels' more ambiguous sense of the relationship between air and futurity.

The *Parables* construct the mood component of literary atmosphere through two distinct tropes: the "sharing" experience of hyperempathy and the explosiveness of fire. And both of these tropes enlist both sub-strategies of ambient mood: metaphor driven by aerial diction, and the subtle ascription of aerial qualities to people and events. Hyperempathy is a strong example of the way in which the second sub-strategy works to convey the betweenness of despair and hope in an atmospheric fashion. Hyperempathy is a delusional illness, a neurological disorder that manifests in infants whose mothers took a drug called Paracetco while pregnant. As Lauren notes, "The sharing isn't real, after all. It isn't some magic or ESP that allows me to share the pain or pleasure of other people. It's delusional. […] I feel what I see others feeling or what I believe they feel. […] I get a lot of grief that doesn't belong to me, and that isn't real. But it hurts" (*Sower* 11-12). Hyperempathy is, on the surface, a weakness, something that makes those affected by it vulnerable when others around them are in pain. Corporations, for example, seek out sharers as easily manipulated debt slaves. But hyperempathy also opens carriers of the illness to the (sometimes invisible) presence of others like them, to the air of community and family in unexpected places.

In this way, the vagueness and indefiniteness of air gets applied to the workings of hyperempathic connection to forge an ambiguously utopian sense of community building. For instance, as Lauren is nearing the end of her travels north in *Sower*, fleeing the anarchy of Southern California that led to the destruction of her home community of Robledo, she and her multiracial group of fellow survivors come across two parent-child pairs that they decide to invite to join them. Lauren immediately notices something strange about each pair, whom the group had come upon separately. She says of Grayson, a single father, "That odd tentativeness of his is just too much like Emery's [single mother]. And Doe and Tori [their respective daughters], though they don't look alike at all, seem to understand each other like sisters" (291). Lauren's partner concurs that "They're…odd" (292). There is a mood or air of oddity surrounding these newcomers, a kind of aloofness, a "tentativeness and touchiness—not wanting to be touched" that nevertheless brings them together, and draws Lauren to them as she convinces the others to accept them into their group (299). Lauren eventually learns, after a difficult battle fending off a group of attackers, that all four newcomers are sharers. The hyperempathy syndrome may render them more hesitant to engage in contact with others, and may make them susceptible to enslavement, but at the same time the air of tentativeness surrounding any sharer reaches out to identify other sharers, constituting a kind of atmospheric process of community formation.

In *Sower*, fire functions metaphorically to add a layer of urgency and freneticism to air's ambiguity, ramping up the mood while granting it political exigence. Fire, that is, appears as a particularly charged instance of the first sub-strategy of ambient mood. It is, of course, nothing but air itself: fire and smoke are composed of a combination of gases, usually oxygen, carbon dioxide, and carbon monoxide. It is literally air with added heat and light—added energy. When used figuratively, fire can thus intensify the mood of literary atmosphere. *Sower* particularly uses

fire to figure an inverse relationship between utopia and burning. Fire pervades the setting and mood of the novel, marking the consequences of climate-induced drought and establishing a tone of ominous and unpredictable risk for which Lauren and her family and friends must always be on the lookout. An ever-present danger in *Sower*'s California, for example, is addicts of a drug called "pyro," which "makes watching the leaping, changing patterns of fire a better, more intense, longer-lasting high than sex," and which is especially dangerous in "dry-as-straw Southern California" (144). Pyro addicts shave and paint themselves in vibrant colors, terrorizing public and private property all across the country to get their fix.

Pyro-induced fires combine with fires caused by earthquakes and other natural disasters to bestow the literary atmosphere of the novel with an overall sense of combustive madness. At one point, when fires begin to crop up around Lauren's group in the aftermath of an earthquake, Lauren feels the mood change, feels danger creeping in along the channels of smoke, as the harsh atmospheric conditions render vulnerable travelers such as themselves even more exposed to attack. "The weak would be attacked today," Lauren remarks, "The quake had set the mood" (234). Later, the group barely survives getting caught in a tumultuous firestorm that was "like a tornado of fire, roaring around, just missing us, playing with us, then letting us live" (309). But through all of this, Lauren is able to guide her companions to safety to found Acorn. Most of Lauren's companions think she is just as mad as the firestorms surrounding them to think that it is possible to establish a sustainable community in such a volatile social and ecological climate. But it is Lauren's utopian madness, drawing from but inverting the apocalyptic mood of madness established by the novel's inflamed atmosphere, that ultimately brings the community together and makes their future survival possible. As Harry, one of Lauren's closest friends who survived the attack on Robledo, says, "You're nuts. […] But this is a crazy time. […] Maybe you're what

the time needs—or what we need" (325). Hope in the midst of apocalypse may be a mad affect to embody, but it is no madder than the dystopian fires it seeks to put out.

Lauren's emergent hope in the midst of a world on fire is an instance of what Steven Connor calls the sense of "inauguration" that follows tropes of explosion. Connor surmises that representations of explosive air historically come to figure more and more prominently in temporal imaginaries because "they seem so powerfully inaugurative. Explosions begin as well as end things. We have seen that, long before the idea of the big bang, nature had used the explosion as a means for scattering seed, for the leap into improbability, the looping in of chance to purpose" (307). In the case of *Sower*, this means that even as the novel uses apocalyptic representations of fire to criticize the environmental neglect that leads to atmospheric degradation, it also figures the act of extinguishing and the aftermath of combustion as political opportunities for utopian rebuilding. It is this inauguration of utopia through the very tropes and narrative structures constituting an overarching dystopian mood that characterizes the form of the critical dystopia. To fully understand the inaugurative, utopian potential of air in the *Parables*, then, we must move beyond the analysis of ecomimesis and mood to consider how the novels' literary atmosphere ramifies at the scale of its dystopian narrative template.

Neoliberalism and the Critical Dystopia

Like the critical utopias before them, critical dystopias of the late 80s and 90s established a self-reflexive relation with their generic namesake, challenging dystopia's prescriptive approach to future collapse and making room for utopian contingency and possibility.[88] As Tom Moylan defines the genre, critical dystopias "negotiate the necessary pessimism of the generic

[88] Along with the three novels I discuss here, other canonical critical dystopias include Kim Stanley Robinson's *Gold Coast* (1988), Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991), and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Telling* (2000). For scholarship on the formal characteristics of the critical dystopia, see Moylan, *Scraps*; Baccolini and Moylan.

dystopia with an open, militant, utopian stance that not only breaks through the hegemonic enclosure of the text's alternative world but also self-reflexively refuses the anti-utopian temptation that lingers like a dormant virus in every dystopian account" (*Scraps* 195). The critical dystopia, in other words, refuses to dwell in misery and "includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome" (Baccolini and Moylan 2-3; Sargent, qtd. in Baccolini and Moylan 7). As we have seen, the *Parable* novels certainly satisfy these criteria: they feature a dystopian locus marred by atmospheric environmental degradation but in which the protagonists begin to establish mobile, communal spaces of utopian resistance.

Utopian studies scholars have historically situated the critical dystopia as emerging yet departing from the political despair engendered by the neoliberal economics and conservatism of the 80s. Political theorists, too, converge quite amenably with utopian studies scholars in pointing out the despair of 80s culture and politics, and the difficulty of establishing an alternative sensibility. Witness the similar historical narratives provided from the utopian studies perspective by Baccolini and Moylan and from the political theory perspective by Coles, Reinhardt, and Shulman. Baccolini and Moylan write, "In the 1980s, this utopian tendency came to an abrupt end. In the face of economic restructuring, right-wing politics, and a cultural milieu informed by an intensifying fundamentalism and commodification, sf writers revived and reformulated the dystopian genre. As the utopian moment faded, only a few writers […] kept the narratives of social dreaming alive" (2). Likewise, here is Coles, Reinhardt, and Shulman,

> Since 1980, then, we have undergone a staggering closing down of the sense of possibility that had animated political life not long before, as all the big issues were taken off the table: the organization of the economy (in relation to the meaning of livelihood, to equality and the distribution of income, and to the environment); the racial state of exception; North-South inequality in a global regime of neocolonialism. […] With the collapse of the Soviet Union and surely by 1994, when President Bill Clinton declared that 'the era of big government is

> over,' there seemed to be no compelling alternative to a society organized through a capitalism 'structurally adjusted' according to neoliberal ideology. (8)

As neoliberalism furthered its reach and strengthened its hold on global economics and policy, political despair, apocalypticism, and immobilization crept back into science fiction and social life in the 80s. If utopianism was to intervene, it had very little option but to do so through the very conventions of dystopianism, which appeared to be the only realistic way of considering the future. That is, if Thatcher's famous dictum that 'there is no alternative' to capitalism is the defining sensibility of this moment, then we can consider the contemporaneous critical dystopias as taking issue with that sensibility from within it, seeking to disprove by counterexample the idea that no one could imagine any viable way of resisting capital's global processes of asset seizure and privatization.

What thus emerges from an analysis of the critical dystopia's historical specificity is an understanding that the *Parables*' utopian spaces are responding to the pressures of neoliberal enclosure in the 1980s and 1990s. In terms of concrete social and cultural consequences, the neoliberal turn of the 80s and 90s stripped poor, vulnerable populations of governmental support systems, and at the same time used rhetoric that mystified that process by explaining that the ensuing increase in economic inequality was a result of a lack of entrepreneurial spirit among those who came out on the bottom. Neoliberalism thus bound social gradients of financial burden to racist and classist ideologies about the innate, moral and biological failings of people of color and the poor. As a result, the onus of overcoming financial burdens was placed on those least equipped to do so, justified by a process of naturalizing economic plight as moral failure, which doubly functioned to obfuscate political and ideological causes of structural inequality.

Contrary to this naturalizing neoliberal logic, Butler enlists the critical dystopia in order to denaturalize economic inequality and undo repressive measures of privatization. What this

dystopian critique does is connect the previous section's analysis of the relationship between futurity and air's ambiguity at the stylistic and tropic level of ecomimesis and ambient mood to a larger-scale plot analysis of the relationship between neoliberalism and economic emancipation. Taking the form of "flight" from economic forces of enclosure and privatization, Butler's utopian literary atmosphere guides the plot to turn the abstract ambiguity, the dispersal and diffuseness, of air into a historically specific alternative to neoliberal structures of injustice.

The primary ideological vehicle of the *Parables*' alternative to neoliberalism is the religion of Earthseed. Over the course of *Sower*, Lauren builds the conceptual base for the church of Earthseed, establishing the denaturalization of vulnerability, debt, and inequality as the cornerstone of her new religion. In other words, Earthseed directly counters the naturalization narrative of neoliberal ideology. As mentioned previously, the core philosophical doctrine of Earthseed is "God is change." What is most significant about this doctrine, for my purposes, is that describing God as a process has the effect of depersonalizing the moral center of belief. That is, according to Earthseed, whether you are good or bad is not based on some innate sense of worth or personal favor in the eyes of the deity. As Lauren writes, "My God doesn't love me or hate me or watch over me or know me at all, and I feel no love for or loyalty to my God. My God just is" (25). By linking change with the absolute, Earthseed denaturalizes personal failure and success, rendering them instead contingent upon the ever-shifting conditions one finds oneself in. Asking whether one is held in God's favor or not based on the fortunes or hardships of one's life has no meaning in Earthseed. What does have meaning is understanding how the God of change shapes conditions of livelihood, and what ability people have to shape God in turn.

Such a perspective fosters a structural and georgic understanding of the entanglement of environmental, economic, and racial injustice. For example, as a new, Reagan-like president takes office at the beginning of *Sower* and proposes to revive the economy by defunding public and governmental programs considered to be non-profit generating, Lauren sees these policy changes for what they are: neoliberal enclosures that will further environmentally and economically burden people of color and the poor. The ever-dwindling water supply in the drought-ridden Southwest has been commoditized, and water prices are ever on the rise. Environmental protection laws are set to be made less restrictive, leading Lauren to question, "Will it be legal to poison, mutilate, or infect people—as long as you provide them with food, water, and space to die?" (27). Those already on the wrong side of economic inequality, and those already vulnerable to the harmful biological effects of environmental degradation, stand to lose even more thanks to these neoliberal policy changes. And equipped with the critical vision Earthseed provides her, Lauren sees these developments as economic exercises in biopower, rather than evidence of the personal failures of minority groups.

The importance of Lauren's Earthseed perspective for combatting neoliberal enclosures is most evident in the case of her reaction to changes in the town of Olivar. Olivar is a small coastal suburb of Los Angeles that is being hit especially hard by the effects of global warming: "Parts of it sometimes crumble into the ocean, undercut or deeply saturated by salt water. Sea level keeps rising with the warming climate and there is the occasional earthquake. Olivar's flat, sandy beach is already just a memory" (118). But it is also a fairly well to-do town, consisting of "an upper middle class, white, literate community of people" who would normally have the necessary privilege to receive financial and infrastructural aid. With the increased environmental burden, however, along with the ensuing depreciation of property value, Olivar has seen an

influx of poor people of color seeking refuge from places whose water supply and economy have already hit rock bottom.

As Olivar thus started to become more desperate to maintain its security and white affluence, "the officials of Olivar permitted their town to be taken over, bought out, privatized" by a corporation called KSF (119). Ostensibly, this was a good compromise for the people of Olivar, who, while accepting smaller wages than they were used to, received in exchange "a guaranteed food supply, jobs, and help in their battle with the Pacific" (119). But Lauren sees through this guise, predicting, correctly, that the post-privatization Olivar will see people fall into debt slavery to KSF, as salaries would quickly become lower than the cost of living. And, as she points out, certain populations will be more susceptible to debt slavery than others: "All those guards KSF is bringing in—they won't be allowed to bother the rich people, at least at first. But new, bare-bones, work-for-room-and-board employees. . . . I'll bet they'll be fair game" (122). It will be the new, minority, refugee laborers who will be most vulnerable to new risks of debt and coercion in Olivar.

Lauren is able to predict, and eventually react to, this matrix of environmental, economic, and racial inequality not only because of her critical Earthseed knowledge, but also because of her ability to recognize plot patterns. She considers,

> Maybe Olivar is the future—one face of it. Cities controlled by big companies are old hat in science fiction. My grandmother left a whole bookcase of old science fiction novels. The company-city subgenre always seemed to star a hero who outsmarted, overthrew, or escaped 'the company.' I've never seen one where the hero fought like hell to get taken in and underpaid by the company. In real life, that's the way it will be. That's the way it is. (123-124)

This passage is paradigmatic of the self-reflexive capacity of the critical dystopia. Here, Lauren criticizes the company-city subgenre of dystopia for its simplicity: it maintains the utopian impulse by adhering to moral binaries of good and evil that allow for the representation of a hero

overthrowing the company. Maintaining a utopian impulse within the more socially complex storyworld in which a town like Olivar exists, however, requires a much more nuanced cultural assessment and aesthetic response—the kind of appreciation of complexity that is the aim of both Earthseed and the critical dystopia. Equipped with both of these religious and fictional epistemologies, Lauren knows the problem of neoliberalism is too widespread, diffuse, and, if you will, atmospheric to be solved by such a morally straightforward act as the dismantling of KSF. The utopian response, in other words, must match the atmospheric quality of its dystopian rival.

Enter what Lauren refers to as "The Destiny" of Earthseed, which is the foundation of the *Parables*' georgic utopian alternative to neoliberalism. One of the most important verses from Lauren's chronicle of Earthseed beliefs is "The Destiny of Earthseed / Is to take root among the stars" (*Sower* 84). Earthseed's destiny to "take root among the stars" is, for Lauren, the real-life manifestation of her dream of flight: a literal call for space travel to establish human settlements on other worlds. This ambiguous combination of airborne and rooted imagery seeks to re-open a privatized space to the possibility of economic and environmental justice, to a commonwealth political economy of equitably distributed land and labor. The public defunding and subsequent privatization of the space program fuels Lauren's anxiety about a destiny involving spaceflight: under the new president, "Near space programs dealing with communications and experimentation will be privatized—sold off," and "No one is expanding the kind of exploration that doesn't earn an immediate profit, or at least promise big future profits" (27; 84). In the world of the *Parables*, not even space remains an open commons free from neoliberal enclosures. But for Lauren, it is the flight from a planet contaminated by economic and

environmental poisons that constitutes a sufficiently airy counter to her diffusely dystopian reality, and thus deprivatizing space becomes her principle utopian objective.

The Earthseed community that is to fulfill The Destiny, then, must be likewise diffuse and figuratively airy, shaping widespread and minimally tangible structures of cultural and ecological difference. Lauren knows this in *Sower* in terms of the kind of heterogeneous mix of identities that should compose Earthseed communities, but the atmospheric organizational principles that should guide their social structure is not yet clear to her. After fleeing the tragedy of Robledo, Lauren and her small group of survivors take to the freeway, which serves as a model of flight for her vision of the first Earthseed community in Acorn. She observes, "the freeway crowd is a heterogeneous mass—black and white, Asian and Latin, whole families are on the move with babies on backs or perched atop loads in carts, wagons or bicycle baskets, sometimes along with an old or handicapped person" (176-77). In her fugitive travels north, these are precisely the kind of people she takes in and converts to followers of Earthseed—those who most feel the effects of the dystopian economic and environmental climate, and who most stand to gain from the creation of a new commons that would manifest as a local, multiracial, sustainable community. They form, in Lauren's words, a kind of underground railroad responding to the new imperialism: "So we become the crew of a modern underground railroad" (292). Since a lot of these people are fleeing encroaching conditions of debt slavery in Southern California due to the region's ecological and economic vulnerability, traveling north once again becomes the geographical vector of emancipation.

It is over the course of the plot of *Talents* that Lauren comes to understand how to use the teachings of Earthseed to apply an atmospheric organizational structure to her group of followers. At first, Lauren had just hoped to create a network of local towns devoted to

Earthseed. As her daughter writes, "She hoped to use missionaries to make conversions in nearby cities and towns and to build whole new Earthseed communities—clones of Acorn" (156). But after Acorn is attacked, enslaved, and eventually destroyed, Lauren revises her understanding of community, deciding that localized, grounded organizations of social resistance can become easy and vulnerable targets. What she needs is not a network of local towns, but the abstract, loose connections of a social movement: "I must build…not a physical community this time. […] I need to create something wide-reaching and harder to kill. […] I must create not only a dedicated little group of followers, not only a collection of communities as I once imagined, but a movement" (267). The organizational framework for the heterogeneous identity of Earthseed, in other words, must take flight. A georgic ethic based solely in grounded locales will no longer do. Lauren achieves this in two stages, first developing Earthseed into a global movement and ideology rather than a localized community, and then sending that movement off-planet, as *Talents* ends with the departure of the first Earthseed space ship on its interstellar journey to realize The Destiny.

The Biopolitics of Atmosphere

The question of biopolitics emerges as a common, latent thread among the preceding sections on the relationship of Butler's literary atmosphere to meteorological degradation and neoliberalism.[89] As the first section noted, the "Pox" in the *Parables* involves various forms of contagion disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations. And, as the second section hinted, a series of neoliberal privatization and environmental deregulation efforts exacerbate such unequal exposure through the removal of governmental support systems. These

[89] With its focus on inclusion/exclusion relations between human and nonhuman bodies, this section's discussion of biopolitics in the context of airborne biochemical compounds draws on posthumanist accounts of biopolitical interpretation, such as Esposito; Haraway, "Biopolitics"; Wolfe.

developments in the world of the *Parables* are biopolitical in two senses. First, they concern air quality and the circulation of toxins in terms of which biochemical compounds are dangerous when they enter the human body from the atmosphere. What airborne agents can we safely inhale, and what must we avoid and regulate? Second, they concern the ways in which political economy determines which lives should be shielded from airborne risks, and which can be exposed to them.

One way to think about the relationship between these two biopolitical aspects in the *Parables* is to say that deregulation appears to lead to greater exposure to airborne contagions along gradients of economic inequality, while regulation decreases exposure along the same gradients (i.e., those most negatively impacted by deregulation are also the most beneficially impacted by regulation). However, as the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments demonstrate, this is not always the case when it comes to air quality control policies, which can function as smokescreens for allowing processes of economic inequality to continue unabated. This section examines the failure of the regulation model—through the example of the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments—for a utopian, biopolitical approach to atmospheric risk, and argues for Butler's ambiguous endorsement of embodied openness to foreign airborne microbes as an alternative. In performing this analysis, I close the chapter by demonstrating how Butler's conditional utopianism manages to register at the level of individual characterization through a focus on embodied livelihood and agency.

The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 are perhaps best known for their control measures on sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions, the leading contributors to acid rain. These measures were indicators of intensified national concern over air pollution in general, for as the 1980s came to a close, "the saliency of air pollution increased as a series of dire warnings

about the fate of the planet […] combined to propel environmental matters to the public's attention" (Bailey 227). The newly elected members of the Bush administration pushed the amendments through congress shortly after election, as they hoped to appease this public anxiety by distancing themselves from the environmental neglect of the Reagan years. However, while the measures were groundbreaking in their targeting of the long under-addressed problem of acid rain, they maintained a consistency with the neoliberal policies of the 80s. As Ellerman, et al. note, while Bush "had promised to be 'the Environmental President'" in order to set himself apart from Reagan, he explicitly "advocated looking 'to the marketplace for innovative solutions' to environmental problems" (21-22).

The 1990 amendments were an exemplary manifestation of Bush's market-based approach to environmental policy, as they adopted an emissions trading framework (commonly referred to as cap-and-trade) of air quality control. Prior to these amendments, "air pollution regulations controlled the emissions rates of individual pollution sources," which is to say that they controlled emissions levels for each pollutant generating plant (Ellerman, et al. 7). However, the new measures focused on capping national aggregate levels of emissions, granting flexibility at the level of individual pollution sources. Fossil-fuel emitting plants were granted annual tradable emission allowances, and as a result they became "free to decide what mix of emission reductions and allowance transactions they will employ to meet each year's allowance constraint, and essentially no restrictions are placed on emission reduction techniques" (Ellerman, et al. 7). This market-driven, neoliberal model functioned primarily to reduce the costs of meeting annual emissions allowances while still claiming to achieve stronger restriction standards. In other words, the very industrial capitalist system that produced the problem of air pollution in the first place continued to flourish under the guise of providing a solution. Under

the new emissions trading framework of air quality control, the regulation of pollutants became a smokescreen for the perpetuation of forces that aggravate economic inequality and continue to render certain populations more vulnerable to airborne risks than others, even if the risks themselves are diminished.

Undergirding the regulation model of air quality control, and the public anxiety regarding air pollution, is the biopolitical urge to keep harmful airborne molecules outside of the human body. The public call for greater emissions regulations strengthens on the basis of fears about how airborne toxins might compromise the boundaries of human embodiment, crossing from the atmosphere into the body and causing health risks. These fears—based on a sense of the betrayal of the promise of nature's pastoral innocence—then become susceptible to manipulation by neoliberal policies of air quality control; the deleterious social consequences of market-based solutions to environmental problems get masked by the seemingly more urgent issue of regulating emissions. Due to concern about the breakdown of the boundary between human and environment, in other words, the structural economic inequality that neoliberal policy solutions perpetuate gets framed as the lesser of two evils.

It is by transforming these biopolitical fears about airborne toxins and the boundary of the human into hope for the capacity of the atmosphere to function as a medium of trans-species embodiment and evolution that Butler envisions a utopian alternative to the regulation model of air quality control. That is, Butler's literary atmosphere functions in a utopian manner at the level of biological embodiment and evolution to target the pastoral bias driving both public fears about air quality decline and the neoliberal policies exploiting and appeasing those fears. Her alternative takes the form of a georgic narrative modeling how humans might be able to live and work with the environment despite exposure to seemingly hostile atmospheres. This is not to say

that such a georgic strategy lets the perpetrators of air pollution off the hook by accepting poor air quality as the new reality. Rather, this strategy critiques the normative, humanist ideologies that enable neoliberal policy and fear-mongering biopolitics in the first place, and thus that contribute to the environmental injustice those economic and political forces effect.

Butler's principle point of departure from anxieties about bodily coherence in the face of atmospheric risk is Lynn Margulis's "symbiogenesis" theory of evolution.[90] The influence of Margulis's symbiogenesis theory on Butler's fiction has been well documented and commented upon in Butler scholarship.[91] As Bollinger summarizes the distinction between Darwinian evolutionary mechanisms and symbiogenetic ones,

> Traditional Darwinian and neo-Darwinian models of evolution focus on competition, on 'survival of the fittest' in reproductive terms, as the primary source of species' mutability. Margulis proposes instead that cellular evolution occurs through symbiotic incorporation of bacterial communities, suggesting that cooperation, not competition, provides the fundamental engine of biological change. […] To characterize the new life forms made possible by such incorporation, Margulis uses the term *symbiogenesis*, insisting that speciation itself emerges out of symbiotic absorption of microbes. (34)

According to symbiogenesis, species evolution occurs as organisms learn how to cooperatively incorporate one another in mutual homeostasis, operating primarily along vectors of lateral gene transfer instead of vertical. It is thus an organism's capacity to remain open to and engage with its environment, rather than its capacity to survive autonomously and reproduce by warding off external threats, that makes evolutionary development possible.

The porosity of the body, the intersubjectivity of species relations, and the lateral directionality of bio-material transfer that are central to symbiogenesis theory directly inform the evolutionary biopolitics of Butler's fiction. Namely, Butler uses the alternative evolutionary

---

[90] See Margulis and Sagan, *Acquiring Genomes*; *Microcosmos*.
[91] See, for example, Bollinger; Ferreira.

mechanisms of symbiogenesis to instill in her characters a combination of hope and anxiety about the breakdown of the category of the human that accompanies the transfer of genetic material across species lines. As Ferreira writes, for Butler's characters the trans-species transfer of biological matter is "a biopolitical strategy for adaptation and survival—forgoing part of their sense of humanity is the only option that gives them a chance to continue living. Connected with this recurring anxiety about the loss of humanity is the fear of penetration and invasion or infection by the alien other, the tinkering with genetic identity at the molecular level" (407). In other words, Butler's future worlds are estranged in such a way that traditional mechanisms of evolution will not do if humans are to successfully adapt to them; the very nature of evolution must change such that symbiogenetic mechanisms rather than Darwinian ones are the principle means of adaptation. But while this means hope for survival, it also means anxiety about species boundaries, which necessarily begin to break down under a symbiogenetic framework. And with the breakdown of Darwinian evolution and species boundaries comes the questioning of reproduction as the central engine of human futurity.

What the *Parable* series, in particular, does with symbiogenesis theory—and what makes it such an effective alternative to the regulation model of air quality control—is demonstrate how humans can adapt to hostile atmospheres by letting go of normative assumptions about human embodiment, reproduction, and evolution. Namely, the *Parables*' juxtaposition of the tropes of the seed and the enzyme function to model, through a logic of contrast, a utopian biopolitics based on bodily openness to the air and the biochemical agents circulating therein rather than on the fear-driven regulation of gaseous emissions that might compromise bodily coherence. Starting with the seed, this image serves as the humanist and pastoral antagonist to the posthumanism and georgics of the enzyme. It figures prominently in Lauren's vision for the

Destiny of Earthseed, as humans are metaphorized as the seeds that are to "take root amongst the stars." The seed signifies that in order to survive, humanity must leave Earth and settle on a new planet, reproduce within that new planetary environment, and maintain species coherence against atmospheric risks on Earth or elsewhere. The seed's relation to air quality is thus very much in line with traditional Darwinian and heteronormative evolutionary paradigms, and thus too with the regulation model: reproduction and bodily boundaries are the keys to avoiding extinction at the hands of aerial contamination.

The seed's reproductive take on futurity appears most prominently in Lauren's post-slavery life in *Talents*, in which she becomes preoccupied with recovering her lost child and generally insuring the survival of future generations. After the destruction and enslavement of Acorn, Lauren is torn between rebuilding an Earthseed community and finding her daughter. At first, it seems as though a sense of reproductive futurity only fuels the latter impulse—the impulse to buttress one's hope for the future with a younger generation of blood relations. However, it becomes clear that the figure of the child drives both of Lauren's competing visions for the future. This is most evident in the evolutionary imperatives Lauren uses to describe the future that Earthseed will bring to humanity. She writes, "Earthseed will go on. It will grow. It will force us to become the strong, purposeful, adaptable people that we must become if we're to grow enough to fulfill the Destiny. […] And when it's successful, it will offer us a kind of species life insurance" (352). The underlying assumption of such "will" statements is that Earthseed's emphasis on change is in line with hereditary adaptability; Earthseed thereby provides a political and religious structure to natural processes of reproduction. The Destiny hinges, in other words, on Earthseed's ability to reinforce a utopian impulse that runs on the desire for children—for fleeing the atmospheric disaster that is Earth and spreading human seed

throughout the universe. Lauren's daughter says as much by identifying Earthseed not as a distraction from her child and family, but as itself the equivalent of a child for Lauren: "Earthseed was her first 'child,' and in some ways her only 'child'" (362). Whether it manifests in Lauren's desire to reconnect with her literal child or her desire to cultivate Earthseed as her figurative child, the utopian biopolitics of the *Parables* seemingly cannot be separated from the reproductive futurity encoded in the seed discourse of their protagonist.

However, there is an alternative trope to the seed in the *Parables* that establishes a different biopolitical relationship to air quality: the enzyme. The trope of the enzyme does not actually appear in *Sower* or *Talents*; Butler only introduces it in her archived notes, and unfinished and unpublished drafts of the series's third novel, *Parable of the Trickster*.[92] *Trickster* tells the story of Imara Wright Drew, a follower of Earthseed living after Lauren has died, and a member of the first Earthseed colony on a planet outside of earth's solar system. Lauren took Imara under her wing shortly before she died, and tasked her with scattering her ashes on the new world. In the most developed drafts of the novel, which only include a few beginning chapters, Imara and a few other colonists begin to develop complex hallucinations—in some drafts, these hallucinations are of sublime images from earth environments, and in others they are bizarre spider-like creatures. From Butler's notes, we know that this hallucination epidemic would spread to infect the majority of the colony, and from both her notes and drafts it is clear that the psychosis stems from humans' maladaptation to the planet's airborne microorganisms. However, Butler suggests that Imara can perform the role of an enzyme to help the humans better adjust to the air and microorganisms of the new planet. Through the figure of the enzyme,

[92] There are a number of variant drafts, and notes on variant versions, of *Trickster*. My reading here is of the most common and furthest developed of the *Trickster* plots. References are to folder item numbers from the Octavia E. Butler (OEB) Papers archive.

Butler draws on the symbiogenetic features of her previous novels like *Clay's Ark* (1984) and *Dawn* (1987) and applies them to the literary atmosphere of the *Parables*, resulting in a revision of the series' representation of the relationship between human futurity and air quality. Rather than being cast as a seed or zygote that will propagate humanity anew on a new planet, the protagonist of *Trickster* is cast as an enzyme, a catalyst, for a process of grafting humanity *to and with* the new world on which they settle and its atmosphere. The utopian, georgic potential of the new world society in *Trickster* thus rests on a symbiotic evolutionary relationship with airborne agents, not a Darwinian one that emphasizes reproduction and the bodily exclusion of nonhumans.

Butler refers to the process of joining a species to a new planet as, following her earlier "xenogenesis" terminology, "xenografting." The task xenografting poses to settlers of a new world, she writes, "is surviving the world and its outright rejection not to mention the tendancy [*sic*] of their own bodies to reject any and all parts of the world" (OEB 2031). And this process must be symbiotic rather than parasitic, as the colonists "see they can't 'conquer' it [the planet] without committing very messy suicide" (OEB 2031). Butler calls the "very messy suicide" of xenografting failure "Graft versus Host" disease, in which the host planet and grafting species reject one another, manifesting in any number of terminal biological and psychological symptoms, such as the mass hallucinations the colonists share in *Trickster* (OEB 2035). Xenografting here serves as a georgic allegory, demonstrating, in scientific and material terms, settler colonialism's error of embarking on a pastoral errand into the wilderness. The challenge of xenografting, according to Butler, plays at out the level of microbes. It will ultimately be the beneficial or deleterious "immuno-chemical" changes human-dwelling microorganisms and the microorganisms of the planet make to one another that will determine humanity's fate (OEB

2032). The rich microbial system of the new planet, and its atmosphere that serves as a vehicle for the microbes, are the immediate factors of interest in the process of xenografting.

The ecology of the new planet is, unfortunately, not very conducive to a simple xenografting experience; hence the need for a catalyst. As mentioned above, the new world's air and plants are its defining features. It is alternately referred to as "Bow," alluding to the rainbow Noah sees in the sky that signals the end of the flood and the beginning of a new tomorrow, and "Oya," Lauren's middle name but also the Yoruba goddess of winds and storms. Its various names thus encode the ambiguity of literary atmosphere, using aerial imagery to at once promise the hope of a new life and the fear of unsuitable living conditions. The literal air quality of the planet is likewise ambiguous, offering enough breathable oxygen to live but just barely. "It isn't a pretty world, but we can breathe the air," says one of the other colonists to Imara; yet, "The air is thinner than we're used to […]. I'm told that living here is like living at about three thousand meters back home" (OEB 2079). The rest of the planet follows suit with this atmospheric ambiguity, as overall humanity's new home is neither hostile nor welcoming. Its pervading grayness symbolizes the planet's relative indifference to its new human inhabitants. The planet is life-bearing, but does not contain any animals, only moss-like plants and microorganisms: no familiar humanoids or charismatic megafauna here to ease the transition. And it smells: "It's not just ugly," one colonist remarks, "It stinks. I mean literally, the air smells terrible" (OEB 2079).

All this adds up to a sense of pastoral loss for the beauty and vibrancy of Earth—rendered Eden-like by comparison—expressed mostly in terms of air quality. The pastoral loss of earth will soon form the bedrock of the colonists' hallucinatory content. That is, the hallucinations will be induced by the neurochemical exchange of intra- and extra-human microorganisms, mediated by air's crossing of bodily boundaries, and filled with the nostalgic content of humanity's former

planetary environment. For example, in one draft, when Imara is feeling particularly sickened by the colorless world, she projects a hallucination of a poppy field onto the landscape: "And there it was. She stood in a place of brilliant orange California poppies and their green stems and leaves. Bright sunlight gleemed off stark desert mountains. The sky was a wonderful, cloudless blue, and there was a sweet wind whipping over the poppies" (OEB 2208). In another draft, a colonist repeatedly hallucinates butterflies; in each case, an "intense and dangerous longing" for earth sparks the hallucinations, which consist of the most vivid images the characters can remember to compensate for the gray of the new planet (OEB 2208).

Eventually, as the same form of hallucination begins to afflict more and more people, Imara starts to speculate that they may be related to some microbial contagion on the planet that the humans are breathing in. It is at this point that atmospheric futurity and the biopolitics of symbiogenesis collide. In one draft, a disease that affects the lungs of pigs the colonists have brought along and bred foreshadows the humans' hallucination epidemic. Butler writes,

> A great many of the first pigs to be born died in only a few months because a species of airborne local microscopic wildlife developed a strange affinity for their lungs. […] The microorganisms set up housekeeping in the pigs' lungs, then multiplied rapidly, as though they had mistaken the alien environment for some familiar native place. Then, as though suddenly noticing their mistake, they all died at once, poisoning and drowning the pigs with their decomposing masses. (OEB 2078)

Perhaps, Imara soon considers, the same thing is happening to the humans in another instance of failed xenografting, but this time with the primary symptom being nostalgic, earthly hallucinations. She begins to hypothesize that the smell of the planet is indicative of some hallucinogenic pathogen in the air: "I can't help wondering whether the smells might have something to do with our problem. What if there's something hallucinogenic in the mix of chemicals constituting the current combination of stinks?" (OEB 2214). And, later, others begin

to take up this view, as the threat of some unknown airborne hallucinogenic agent becomes a public concern. The boundaries of the human are seemingly under attack by an airborne alien microorganism that the colonists must learn to host and adapt to. Thus a new biopolitical dilemma emerges with the threat of Graft versus Host disease: become symbiotic and posthuman, or die.

In order to adapt to the alien microbes and conduct a successful xenograft with the new planet, Imara must learn to function in the georgic capacity of an enzyme. That is, if symbiogenetic adaption requires the human colonists to, instead of conquering and vanquishing à la survival of the fittest, graft *with*, live *with*, and work *with* the planet on a microbial level, then it is the role of an enzyme to catalyze and facilitate such a biochemical interrelation. Although the drafts of *Trickster* do not advance to the point in the narrative when Imara begins to function in her role as enzyme, Butler's notes outline the plan for this plot development. She writes, "Enzymes catalyze reactions. I had thought to make Imara a kind of human enzyme. She tries to help the people of her colony to create something sustainable and foresighted, even though she has no children, no relatives, and thus, no personal genetic stake in things" (OEB 2037). This statement is significant because it establishes a stark contrast between the utopian visions of Imara and Lauren by way of a metaphoric contrast between the types of evolutionary futurity encoded in the enzyme versus the seed.

Whereas Lauren sees the future of humanity in terms of traditional evolution and reproduction, represented by the figure of the seed, Imara sees it in terms of symbiogenesis and posthuman grafting, represented by the enzyme. As Butler succinctly puts it, Imara "believes in change by symbiosis rather than by competition" (OEB 2062). Through the figure of Imara the enzyme, then, and the way in which her task manifests in establishing symbiotic relations with

airborne molecules, atmospheric utopianism in the *Parables* shifts from alignment with reproductive evolutionary mechanisms to symbiogenetic ones. In turn, biopolitics under this symbiogenetic form of futurity translates life into posthumanity, and death into humanity, in its traditional species sense. Regulating aerial threats is no longer an option, nor is the related biopolitical regime of policing bodily boundaries. Symbiogenetic openness and adaptation to airborne biochemicals thus provide a georgic utopian alternative in times of atmospheric crisis.

From Uncertainty to Certainty

It is, perhaps, apropos of atmospheric ambiguity that Butler never completed the *Parable* series. From her notes and drafts on *Trickster* and the series as a whole, we are left not knowing if Imara succeeds in her role as xenograft catalyst, if the Destiny of Earthseed is ever fulfilled, if the utopian approach to the biopolitics of atmosphere pans out. Fear and hope about the future of humans and their environment continue to intermingle as the ambiguity of literary atmosphere remains unresolved. It is possible that this is as far as conditional utopianism could go in the 90s historical moment of atmospheric crisis: an uncertain embedment within an otherwise dystopian narrative. As the scientific and public uncertainty about the fate of the physical atmosphere goes, so goes the fate of the ambiguity of literary atmosphere.

But this state of affairs was soon to change. With the ratification of the United Nations Montreal Protocol in 1987 and its subsequent amendments throughout the 1990s, CFCs and other chemicals contributing to ozone layer depletion were swiftly and completely phased out of use around the globe. The 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act were extremely successful once implemented in 1995, and by the end of the twentieth century sulfur dioxide emissions had been cut by 40% and acid rain became a much less urgent issue.[93] And scientific consensus that

[93] See Coile; Ellerman, et al.

greenhouse gas emissions were indeed contributing to a global warming trend became strong enough by the end of the 90s that in 2001 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported on evidence that "demolished objections from industry-oriented skeptics and persuaded even the most recalcitrant officials" (Weart 178). Whether for better or worse, scientists, the government, and the public were relatively certain about the status of the atmosphere and its future by the start of the twenty-first century.

The culminating moment of this shift from uncertainty to certainty regarding the health status of the atmosphere could be said to be the moment the "Anthropocene" was proposed by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in 2000 as designating a new geological epoch in which humanity's fossil-fuel extracting activity, and its consequences on global climate, became measureable.[94] So significant was the impact of human industry on the environment over hundreds of years that it was leaving its marks on Earth's rock layers, and inaugurating a seismic climatic shift. Such a stark ecological reality, accompanied by emphatic statements about the scientific certainty of that reality, pose a new challenge to utopianism, and the subjunctivity of science fiction in general, as their imaginary engines run on social uncertainty. Which is to say that another stylistic turn appeared to be in order for the literary expression of conditional utopianism.

[94] See Crutzen and Stoermer.

CONCLUSION. POSTCOLONIAL UTOPIANISM FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE: *THE HUNGRY TIDE* AND CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION

Since its publication in 2004, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* has proven to be a generative fictional resource for scholars attempting to rectify the "mutually constitutive silences" that existed between the fields of ecocriticism and postcolonial studies in the closing decade of the twentieth century (Nixon 236). This is largely due to the novel's historical dramatization of the 1979 Morichjhãpi massacre, as well as the conservation project that made this terrible incident possible, Project Tiger. Launched by Indira Ghandi in 1973 to protect the endangered Bengal tiger, Project Tiger established nine initial wildlife reserves across India in which no humans were allowed to settle (Greenough 209-11). One of these was located in the Sundarbans, a vast stretch of islands in the delta of the Ganga River and straddling the border of India and Bangladesh. Morichjhãpi, an island within the borders of the Sundarbans reserve, came to symbolize the tension between human and animal rights in the region when a group of refugees decided to settle there in the late 1970s. Both after the Partition of 1947 and the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971, poor Bangladesh refugees were forced to resettle in Dandakaranya in central India, where they experienced a rocky landscape and semi-arid climate in addition to the prison camp-like conditions of resettlement—"thus an area entirely removed, both culturally and physically, from the refugees' known world" (Jalais 1758). In 1978, soon after the Left Front took power in West Bengal, many of these refugees, assuming they would have the backing of the new government, decided to migrate to the more familiar territory of West Bengal; around 30,000 of these refugees settled on Morichjhãpi (Jalais 1757). The government was unable to drive the refugees out by blockading supplies to the island, and eventually hired off-duty policemen and gangs to kill or forcibly evict the refugees.

This incident appears at the epicenter of Ghosh's novel, which is told in two parts through alternating chapters. The first part is a third-person narration of the present, in which Piya Roy, an American cetologist and conservationist, comes to the Sundarbans to study the migratory patterns of the Gangetic River Dolphin and develops professional and personal relationships with two men. The first is Kanai Dutt, a wealthy translator from northern India who returns to the Sundarbans to help his aunt after his uncle's death—an uncle who aided the refugees at Morichjhãpi in 1979. The second is Fokir Mandol, a local fisherman who helps Piya navigate the labyrinthine rivers of the Sundarbans, and whose mother was among those refugees killed at Morichjhãpi. The second part of the novel is a first person account of the events leading up to the 1979 Morichjhãpi massacre, written in italics and pulled directly from the pages of the journal of Kanai's uncle, Nirmal. Nirmal was a Marxist aesthete, whose love of poetry matches the lyric style of his journal, and who saw in the Morichjhãpi refugees the realized utopia of a labor revolution to seize the means of production. Through Nirmal's first person witnessing of the Morichjhãpi incident, and its historical reverberations through a cosmopolitan cast of twenty-first century characters, *The Hungry Tide* stages the incident's conflicting agendas of species conservation, postcolonial state power, leftist politics, and refugee agency.

Such a complex collision of human and nonhuman interests requires an interpretive lens drawing on ecocriticism's place-based concern for animal habitats, environmental justice's concern for the unequal distribution of environmental burdens and resources among human populations, and postcolonialism's concern for the colonial origins and neo-imperial effects of globalized culture and capital. It is this confluence of methodologies that defines the field of postcolonial ecocriticism, which aims to both culturally identify conflicting interests of

environmentalism and subaltern agency and move beyond their impasse.[95] The payoff of postcolonial ecocriticism for reading *The Hungry Tide* is that it reveals how Piya and Nirmal eventually come to revise their Western ideologies of conservationism and Marxism, respectively, thereby serving as models of a self-critical ecological politics that does not allow its concerns for nonhuman life or its neo-imperial largesse to excuse social injustice.[96]

In this conclusion, I want to reflect on how such a postcolonial-ecocritical reading of *The Hungry Tide* can draw on the discourse of the Anthropocene to teach georgic lessons about twenty-first-century legacies of, and modes of resistance to, the types of Anglo-American economic and ecological imperialism I have examined in the previous chapters. Namely, I argue that the novel demonstrates how a conditional utopian perspective on refugee agency in the global South under conditions of climate-induced migration can advocate for justice on behalf of subaltern lands and livelihoods in the twenty-first century. While *The Hungry Tide* never mentions climate change or the Anthropocene—a justifiable reason for the topics' omission from extant criticism on the novel—the Sundarbans region, threatened by rapidly rising sea levels, has

[95] For foundational works on postcolonial ecocriticism, see DeLoughrey and Handley; Huggan and Tiffin; Nixon; Roos and Hunt.

[96] Piya's environmentalist sensibility, which inspired her career, is challenged when she witnesses local residents killing a tiger that has attacked their village—an act the novel represents as a justifiable suspension of animal care ethics. And Nirmal questions his ivory tower elitism and revolutionary Marxism in the aftermath of the Morichjhãpi massacre, which serves as an allegorical critique of the communist Left Front that prioritized the lives of tigers over those of human refugees. Critics have extolled *The Hungry Tide*'s virtues in using these character transformations as a means of reconciling the clash between the ecocentric values of environmentalism and ecocriticism with the contrasting anthropocentric values of postcolonialism. Exemplary readings of *The Hungry Tide* in this regard include Fletcher; Kaur; Kumar; Prabhu; Weik.

taken center stage in climate change discourse on climate refugees, which was no doubt on Ghosh's mind when he penned the novel.[97]

Postcolonial critics such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Ian Baucom have argued that the term "Anthropocene," by proclaiming that we have altered the earth in ways that can be measured through stratigraphic methods, denotes an epoch in which the human species became a collective geophysical agent—a phenomenon that ties humans to a geological pre- and post-history whose duration far exceeds that of colonialism and cultural difference.[98] At the same time that the Anthropocene term highlights the impact of human agency, then, it also questions the extent to which we can intentionally curtail the damage we have already done. We are at once the unwitting agents of our planetary future and at the mercy of the long enduring geological and climatological forces in which we are now participating. The sense of "deep time" that contemplating the Anthropocene evokes, and that the novel explicitly weaves into its historical narration of the Sundarbans region, adds a new dimension to *The Hungry Tide*'s representation and reconciliation of the transcultural conflict between Western environmentalism and subaltern refugee agency.[99] That is, it suggests that tensions between concerns of biodiversity loss and

---

[97] Ghosh has written about climate change quite often in his essays and interviews. In an interview with the *UN Chronicle* shortly after the publication of *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh states, "Climate change is a matter of particular urgency when you are from a certain part of the world. […] The Bengal delta is so heavily populated […]. If a ten-foot rise or even a five-foot rise in the seas were to happen […] Millions of people would lose their livelihoods. This is something we have to think about; it has to be at the forefront of our minds. It is not something that we can postpone or think about elsewhere; it is absolutely present within the conditions of our lives, here and now" ("Chronicle" 51). See also *The Great Derangement*.

[98] See Baucom; Chakrabarty. For more on the terminology and dating of the Anthropocene, see Crutzen; Lewis and Maslin.

[99] Following Chakrabarty, I understand "deep time" as referring to the history of the planet that exceeds the time of human record. The origins of the term can specifically be traced to the study of geology in the works of James Hutton and Charles Lyell in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively. Rajender Kaur analyses parts of *The Hungry Tide* in terms of deep time, which leads to an astute analysis of how the term both provides an appropriate humbling of the

social injustice in the Sundarbans are a part of a planetary crisis of agency unfolding over a much longer time period—both forward and backward—than that of colonization and decolonization. Addressing such tensions thus requires a longer temporal perspective capable of not only understanding the history of colonialism, environmentalism, and globalization that conditioned events like the Morichjhãpi massacre, but also of anticipating the increasing agential challenges climate and geology will pose in cases of forced migration in South Asia.

Under this anticipatory analytic frame provided by the concept of the Anthropocene, *The Hungry Tide*, I claim, uses the representation of refugee labor in the case of the Morichjhãpi incident to promote a utopian orientation to the future of climate-induced migration. Postcolonial utopias have been discussed as examples of critical utopias, such as those discussed in chapter 2.[100] However, Ghosh's postcolonial utopianism is even subtler than that, as even critical utopias compose a concrete utopian space that stands in opposition to the present. As Moylan writes in a review of Ralph Pordzik's *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia* (2001), "While the critical utopia shares qualities of self-reflexivity and openness with the postcolonial examples provided by Pordzik, however, it also […] generates a diagnostic and critical account of the totality of the oppressive society as well as that of the resistant eutopia" ("Utopia" 269). There is no such "diagnostic and critical account" in *The Hungry Tide*, no precise oppositional space, no Benjaminian irruption of anticolonial history, as Morichjhãpi, despite being a place of subaltern resistance, never develops into a coherent alternative before being wiped out.[101] Rather, through

---

human but also threatens to erase histories of colonial oppression, but stops short of connecting this analysis to the discourse of the Anthropocene and its attendant crises of agency and futurity. See Kaur.

[100] For work on postcolonial utopias, see Forter; Pordzik; E. Smith.

[101] Greg Forter has most recently analyzed postcolonial utopias, and Ghosh's work in particular, by drawing on Moylan's "critical utopia" terminology and Benjamin's messianism, both of which are inappropriate in the context of Ghosh's deep temporal perspective, I claim, because

Nirmal, Ghosh models a deeper, more conditional utopianism to match the deep time and slow violence of the Anthropocene, expressing a hopeful idea about how environmentally displaced refugees might be able to exercise agency that does not yet have enough time or space to be realized. *The Hungry Tide* uses the specter of climate change to extend Nirmal's utopian attitude to the future of the Sundarbans, whereby it becomes a critical resource for addressing the greatest current risk of displacement in the region—climate-induced migration.

In what follows, I first analyze the narrative strategies Ghosh uses to register the deep time of the Anthropocene, and explain how they introduce an added agential and georgic dilemma to the postcolonial context of the Sundarbans and the Morichjhãpi incident. I then assess how the utopian aspects of *The Hungry Tide* follow the deep temporality of the Anthropocene before demonstrating what the novel's postcolonial utopianism adds to discourses surrounding climate refugees. I will conclude by noting that, in addition to introducing conversations on the Anthropocene to criticism on *The Hungry Tide* and laying out a utopian approach to the migration dimension of the climate crisis, my reading also makes the case that fictions of the Anthropocene may appear in novels we least expect.

The Hungry Tide as Anthropocene Fiction

What are the novels of the Anthropocene? This is a question literary and cultural critics of many stripes have been asking quite explicitly, and a preliminary consensus seems to be that the fictions of the Anthropocene can be characterized by a temporal framework whereby the figure of the geological—or, relatedly, the climatological—illuminates multiple intersecting human and nonhuman timelines that reach far into the past and long into the future.[102] This

---

they describe a relatively rapid unfolding of utopian space in opposition to social formations of modern human history. See Forter.

[102] See, especially, Baucom; Marshall; McGurl; Shewry, "Geologic"; Trexler.

fictional figuration of the geological may manifest formally or thematically. In her essay that puts the question front and center—literally titled "What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene?"—Kate Marshall argues for formal criteria, claiming that what marks an Anthropocene fiction is its self-reflexive awareness that it is being produced during a moment in which an epochal shift is taking place. She writes that an Anthropocene fiction is one that "understands itself within epochal, geologic time and includes that form of time within its larger formal operations" (524). On the other hand, Adam Trexler argues in his book-length treatment of the question, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015), for a rather narrow thematic categorization of Anthropocene fiction as constituting those works that are quite explicitly *about* anthropogenic climate change, including plots and settings centered around "melting ice caps, global climate models, rising sea levels, and tipping points" rather than those treating global warming "as an afterthought or a symptom of wider environmental collapse" (13; 6).

The Hungry Tide may not appear to be an obvious candidate for consideration as an Anthropocene fiction according to either of these formal or thematic criteria, apparently more concerned with zoology, tidal ecology, mythology, and linguistic anthropology than with geology or climatology. However, despite the fact that the geological appears only briefly in the novel, it does so in such a way that informs and haunts the intersecting timelines that are more central to the plot. Namely, Ghosh uses a pedagogical style that models for the reader how the perspective of the geological can be used to understand more familiar historical events and environmental phenomena. In one of Nirmal's journal entries, he details how he would teach potential students about the history of the Indian subcontinent and its waterways. He writes,

> I would take them back to the deep, deep time of geology and I would show them that where the Ganga now runs there was once a coastline—a shore

> that marked the southern extremity of the Asian landmass. India was far, far away then, in another hemisphere. It was attached to Australia and Antarctica. […]
>
> I would show them how it happened that India broke away 140 million years ago and began its journey north from Antarctica. They would see how their subcontinent had moved, at a speed no other landmass had ever attained before; they would see how its weight forced the rise of the Himalayas; they would see the Ganga emerging as a brook on a rising hill. (151)

Note here how Nirmal not only invokes the conceptual lens of the Anthropocene through his terminology of geological deep time, but also instills the information about the subcontinent with pedagogical regularity. His style of speaking is repetitive, recycling visual verbs like "show" and "see" to describe the digestion of information, thereby enabling the reader to participate in the intake of geological knowledge as a routine practice of observation. The passage's stylistic regularity alerts the reader to a temporal order that inheres in the geological past of the subcontinent, and that informs present encounters with the Ganga River, rendering it not the permanent geographical landmark it might appear but a historically changeable feature of the planet's profile.[103]

When combined with the more recent colonial and postcolonial histories documented in the novel—e.g., the story of the storm that caused the Matla River to rise and destroy the extravagant port of Canning in 1867, the story of how the Irrawaddy river dolphin in South Asia confounded the taxonomy of British naturalists in the nineteenth century, and the story of the Morichjhãpi massacre—this learned frame of the geological engenders a crisis of human consciousness and agency. How are these fleeting and local conflicts between human and

---

[103] Relevant to and corroborating my analysis of this passage is Teresa Shewry's reading of fictional and poetic representations of Gondwana, "a southern hemispheric supercontinent that disintegrated millions of years ago" ("Geologic" 253). Like Nirmal's history lesson on the subcontinent's movements and the formation of the Ganga River, representations of Gondwana, Shewry claims, introduce the figure of the geological to "stories about ecological crisis and social injustice in the present-day places that took form partly through the emergence and disintegration of the supercontinent millions of years ago" ("Geologic" 254).

nonhuman forces in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries related to the slow, global-scale changes of tectonic plate movements? Do we have the cognitive capacities to identify what events in human history contributed to or were affected by changes in geology? What can we voluntarily do now at the scale of the human to influence the scale of the geological? Mark McGurl writes that contemplating the Anthropocene as geological present "exacerbates and magnifies the dilemma of human agency, locating the blowback of the waste products of modernization on the blurry line between intention and accident" (383). What this means in the case of *The Hungry Tide* is that through the lens of geological deep time, one of the central conflicts of the novel becomes how to consciously reconcile modern colonialist responsibility for human violence and environmental exploitation in South Asia with the accidental consequences of stratigraphic encroachment and global climate change. Is there a way to work with the land without exacerbating the environmental consequences of the Anthropocene?

Ghosh tackles this dilemma through Nirmal's first-person journal, which functions to mediate the gap between deep time and the human scale conflict of the Morichjhãpi incident. The task of mediation in this case is no small feat. As many ecocritics have noted, the problem of confronting planetary phenomena like climate change that have been centuries in the making is fundamentally a problem of mediation. That is, because of the limited scale of human sensory experience, we require an array of what Robert Markley refers to as "proxy data," such as measurements of "ice cores from Greenland, tree rings, sediment layers in mud and swamps, patterns of coral growth," to mediate any understanding of climatological time (56). "You can't visualize the climate," Timothy Morton corroborates, because "mapping it requires a processing speed in terabytes per second," which is beyond the unmediated capacity of human cognition (*Thought* 28). But the proxy data of scientific instruments is not the only representational

medium that can compensate for the cognitive limitations of the human. Fiction, too, can function as a representational device that mediates our knowledge of phenomena that exceed the scale of immediate experience. As a form of fictional biography, Nirmal's journal, in his own words, functions as just such a device, through which "vast durations are telescoped in such a way as to permit the telling of a story" (150). Nirmal's lyrical memoir condenses together biographical experience, colonial history, geological shifts, biodiversity loss, and tidal ecology in a mode of perception that looks both far into the past and into the future. Such condensation is particularly necessary to grasp the volatility of the Sundarbans. In recent years, the number and severity of cyclones in the Sundarbans has increased, tidal surges have become more extreme, and the erosion of island embankments has noticeably increased due to sea levels that are rising faster than anywhere else on earth. It is hard to imagine how such changes will impact the diverse inhabitants of the region, which include dense mangrove forests, dolphins, crocodiles, about 500 Bengali tigers, and 4.3 million people.[104]

Nirmal's journal is thus a critical tool for rendering the unimaginable scale of time that is nevertheless an exceedingly felt presence for the human and nonhuman residents of the Sundarbans. For instance, at one point Nirmal describes how it used to be the case that signs of death and decay for the humans and nonhumans of the Sundarbans emerged slowly and were few and far between. However, "Now," he says, "it was as if I could see those signs everywhere, not just in myself but in this place that I had lived in for almost thirty years. The birds were vanishing, the fish were dwindling and from day to day the land was being reclaimed by the sea. What would it take to submerge the tide country? Not much—a miniscule change in the level of the sea would be enough" (179). The threats of climate-induced sea level rise and species

[104] See Caton.

extinction—processes with long pasts and unknown futures in the Sundarbans—pass through the lifetime experience of one human. Furthermore, these phenomena's questionable status as intentionally versus accidentally caused runs up against the need to take responsibility for social justice and habitat protection in the case of the Morichjhãpi incident. Immediately following this passage, Nirmal contemplates the fate of the Morichjhãpi refugees (the massacre has not yet occurred), and wonders whether he can do justice to their hopes and dreams through his writing. The Morichjhãpi incident thus comes to signify the way in which the urge to support refugee agency not only clashes with the interests of environmentalism—as postcolonial ecocritics discussing the novel have extensively analyzed—but also with the deep temporal perspective on the Anthropocene that blurs the line between then and now, cause and effect, determined and accidental.

The manner in which Nirmal's journal encodes this temporal dilemma in anticipatory but uncertain language also renders it a potent georgic manual for the Anthropocene. Benjamin Cohen and Michael Ziser point out that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, almanacs and guidebooks were a significant part of georgic culture.[105] Farmers produced these manuals from first-hand experience, and circulated them in the interest of promoting best agricultural practices that could be shared among bioregional communities. Like Nirmal's journal, they were empirical and instructional, written with the pedagogical aim of conveying knowledge about the land to others. Furthermore, they were "designed to aggregate observations over time to produce an anticipation of the coming environmental conditions" (Ziser 176). That is, they tended to be most concerned with preparing the reader for what the signs of their land might portend for the future. Nirmal's journal can be read as an updated georgic almanac for surviving the twenty-first

[105] See Cohen, 25-30; Ziser 159-81.

century in the Sundarbans, accounting for the deep time of the Anthropocene in his gathering of ecological data about what humans might expect from, and how they might intervene in, rapidly changing environmental conditions.

Postcolonial Utopianism and Climate-Induced Migration

While the uncertainty about human agency and responsibility that the perspective of geological deep time engenders may appear to be detrimental for any unilateral movement for social justice, it is Nirmal's revised postcolonial utopianism that redeems this perspective as a resource for confronting conflicts of environmental displacement in a climate changed future in South Asia. From the start, Nirmal promotes a revolutionary idealism that repeatedly conjures the utopian impulse, as he attempts to look beyond the imperial history and treacherous landscape of the tide country to its potential as a haven for equality and justice. Lusibari, the fictional island on which Nirmal and his wife, Nilima, settle in 1950, serves as Nirmal's utopian inspiration. In particular, the intentions of the island's founder, the Scottish "*monopolikapitalist*" Sir Daniel Hamilton, are, ironically, particularly appealing to Nirmal's Marxism (42). Sir Daniel apparently sought to found a cosmopolitan society on Lusibari in the early twentieth century, where residents of India could settle for free on the condition that they would not let their cultural differences get in the way of their freedom to live and work together without the threat of exploitation or coercion. As Nirmal tells Kanai in 1970,

> What he wanted was no different from what dreamers have always wanted. He wanted to build a place where no one would exploit anyone and people would live together without petty social distinctions and differences. He dreamed of a place where men and women could be farmers in the morning, poets in the afternoon and carpenters in the evening. (46)

This dream fell apart after Sir Daniel's death in 1939, as the infrastructure to support his vision was never put into place and the island continued to exist in a state of rural poverty. The

undeterred Nirmal, however, continues to find hope in the utopian "not-yet" of Sir Daniel's vision, reassuring Kanai that "it was just that the tide country wasn't ready yet. Someday, who knows? It may yet come to be" (46).[106]

It is Nirmal's hope that Morichjhãpi and its refugees might come to realize Sir Daniel's utopian vision. But in encountering the makeshift community in 1979, he is forced to re-evaluate the parameters of what utopia might look like in a postcolonial context. When Nirmal first arrives in Morichjhãpi, he expects to see conditions of destitution typical of refugee camp iconographies that portray migrants as helpless victims and mobile elites like him as agents of benevolent hospitality.[107] Instead, he finds an overwhelming display of migrant agency and labor:

> What had I expected? A mere jumble perhaps, untidy heaps of people piled high upon each other? That is, after all, what the word *rifugi* has come to mean. But what I saw was quite different from the picture in my mind's eye. Paths had been laid; the bãdh—that guarantor of island life—had been augmented; little plots of land had been enclosed with fences; fishing nets had been hung up to dry. (141)

Nirmal realizes that if what he is witnessing here is indeed the foundations of a new society, then it is at odds with Sir Daniel's imperially inspired utopian vision that he holds so dear. He says, "But between what was happening at Morichjhãpi and what Hamilton had done there was one vital aspect of difference: this was not one man's vision. This dream had been dreamt by the very people who were trying to make it real" (141). Whereas Sir Daniel's utopia required a

---

[106] Nirmal's language here evokes Ernst Bloch's discussion of utopian dreaming as manifest in the "Not-Yet-Conscious" domain of the imagination, which functions to anticipate a future still to come, a future that has not yet been decided. See Bloch 142-50.

[107] These instances of differently privileged conditions of mobility can be read as fictional examples of what James Clifford refers to as "discrepant cosmopolitanisms." This term, Clifford writes, captures how "cultures of displacement and transplantation are inseparable from specific […] histories of economic, political, and cultural interaction," and thus "the notion that certain classes of people are cosmopolitan (travelers) while the rest are local (natives) appears as the ideology of one (very powerful) traveling culture" (36).

pastoral erasure of human agency, labor, and cultural difference, the one Nirmal finds the residents of Morichjhãpi building sheds this imperial requirement. Or, as Pablo Mukherjee puts it, the Morichjhãpi community is working toward "a universality that accommodates, rather than obliterates differences" (153).

Included in this accommodation of difference is the refugees' georgic freedom to use the land they hold in common and defend against its dangers; they refuse to discard that freedom in the interest of adhering to the environmentalist agenda that commissioned the island as a reserve for endangered wildlife. In doing so, the refugees force Nirmal to confront the discrepancy between the political and environmental priorities of Sir Daniel, the Left Front government, Bengal tigers, and West Bengal migrants. He responds not by completely abandoning his utopian impulse, but by revising it to prioritize refugee agency over his own. Even though things turn out poorly for the refugees—and the novel does not pretend otherwise—the potential of Nirmal's emancipatory vision for shaping future history in the Sundarbans lives on in Kanai's memory thanks to the journal.

Nirmal's revised utopia thereby extends into the future as an idea of "what may yet come to be" for ecological refugees in South Asia, not as a realized commonwealth. It may not have been possible in the case of the Morichjhãpi refugees due to the repressive postcolonial state and international interests in preserving the island, but may have more potential in cases related to climate change where the forces of nature are more clearly adversarial. And given the geological lens of deep time that leads to Nirmal's prognostication about the future impact of sea level rise on the Sundarbans—as well as the unexpected cyclone that wreaks havoc at the end of the novel, foreshadowing the climate-induced extreme weather events that are sure to become more frequent in the region—it can be said that *The Hungry Tide* evokes the contemporary crisis of

climate refugees in South Asia as a situation in urgent need of precisely this kind of utopian vision.

The term "climate refugees" refers to people forced from their homes due to events related to climate change in the twenty-first century. The majority of climate refugees are members of poor and/or indigenous communities who have been displaced from rural, coastal areas in the global South—including the Sundarbans. Since the start of the twenty-first century, there have been numerous film and photography documentaries covering these at-risk populations, dubbing them "the human face of climate change."[108] The burgeoning scholarship on climate refugees in the field of forced migration studies has identified two dominant liberal discourses surrounding the phenomenon of climate-induced migration.[109] The first focuses on how developed countries in the global North can offer hospitality to climate refugees from the global South. This is a humanitarian discourse based on the good intention of sheltering those who have been displaced by forces beyond their control.

Yet, the iconography and narratives composing this humanitarian discourse tend to adopt the benevolent, neo-imperial attitude Nirmal displays early on in *The Hungry Tide*. Moreover, they draw on the apocalyptic mechanism of using helpless victims to evoke sympathy and disgust—similar to Nirmal's expectations about finding passive destitution on Morichjhãpi. Giovanni Bettini epitomizes the apocalyptic iconography of the humanitarian discourse with the following list:

> Millions of desperate victims of climate change abandoning their homes sinking under rising seas. […] Children and women walking in lines, with waters up to their chest, carrying on their shoulders the few belongings saved from the storm's fury. […] Tsunamis of peoples displaced from the global South pushing at the

[108] See, for example, Caton; Collectif Argos; Graves and Madoc-Jones; Nash.
[109] For introductions to the study of climate refugees in the field of forced migration studies, see McAdam; Piguet, Pécoud, and de Guchteneire.

> gates screening affluent countries. Climate refugee camps installed in the symbolic epicenters of global capital in the post-climate change apocalypse. (63)

Within this list we find two sub-iconographies: the first depicts climate refugee victims facing, for example, rising seas and melting glaciers that threaten to swallow their homes (see fig. 3). And the second depicts climate refugee settlers from the global South swarming metropolitan areas in the global North (see fig. 4).

Figure 3. Rising Sea Levels in the Maldives (Collectif Argos)

Figure 4. Parliament Square Paddy Fields (Graves and Madoc-Jones)

These two iconographies reveal the victimization tendencies of apocalyptic narrative that rob refugees of agency and subjectivity. As Bettini points out, they "make the climate migrant/refugee into a destitute victim rather than a political subject—regardless of whether they are to be feared (as in conservative discourses) or to be protected (as in a humanitarian discourse)" (70). While the iconographies I have pointed to attempt to raise awareness about the realities of climate refugees, they also strip climate refugees of their own priorities and interests. Furthermore, the second sub-iconography depicting "climate barbarians at the gate" incites Malthusian and xenophobic anxieties of being overrun by people of color and the poor.

A number of dystopian novels about climate change, such as Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015) and Claire Vaye Watkins's *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015), reinforce these

apocalyptic climate refugee iconographies. Bacigalupi's drought-ridden storyworld in *The Water Knife*, for instance, performs precisely the victimization of climate refugees Bettini critiques. The following passage epitomizes the novel's treatment of those displaced by drought conditions: "Refugees emerged as shambling ghosts in the brown haze, illuminated by the truck's storm lights. Bizarre hunched forms stumbling away from the destruction of Carver City and toward the dubious refuge of Phoenix, a steady stream of destitution that slowed their progress to a crawl" (352). These refugee figures are depicted as faceless silhouettes devoid of embodiment, subjectivity, and agency—ghosts swarming the spaces of those privileged enough to still have water. Even if the point of representing climate refugees in this way is to evoke sympathy and critical awareness about the risk of drought in the twenty-first century, the novel only presents an opportunity to imagine responses by those in a position of offering hospitality—not by those actually vulnerable to climate-induced migration.

The second dominant liberal discourse aims to correct the politically unsavory elements of the humanitarian approach. It is an environmental justice discourse that highlights the inequity of socioeconomic structures rendering certain populations more vulnerable to climate change disasters than others. This discourse has the benefit of targeting the causes of disparities in vulnerability between different communities rather than simply trying to mitigate the effects of displacement after a natural disaster has already occurred. It also rightly critiques the humanitarian approach for its benevolent imperialism and neglect of structural and infrastructural conditions of injustice and inequality. However, the environmental justice approach nevertheless tends to pathologize migration, perpetuating what Oliver Bakewell has called a "sedentary bias" that classifies all forms of migration as bad (1345). By attempting to prevent environmental displacement before it occurs, the targeting of root causes of forced

migration assumes that leaving home is inherently less desirable than staying put. It thus implicitly reproduces the same issues that arose in the case of the humanitarian discourse regarding the stripping of agency and inadvertent xenophobia. The sedentary bias elides the ability of at-risk populations to choose whether to move and feeds into conservative arguments for why ethnic minorities should not relocate.

What forced migration studies scholars have been calling for as an alternative to these two discourses on climate-induced migration is an approach that outlines how processes of relocation can prioritize displaced populations' interests. That is, they are calling for precisely the revisionary utopian approach to migrant agency that we find Nirmal articulating in his first encounter with the Morichjhãpi refugees. This imaginative approach endorses the capacity of forced migrants to determine, as much as they can, the terms of their displacement and relocation. It submits that they should be free to determine whether to move or stay, and to determine which aspects of their culture and identity they want to change and which they want to keep; it advocates for enabling refugees to participate in the decision-making process of maintaining their livelihoods. Of course, there is the practical consideration that in many cases, rising sea levels will necessitate migration—staying put will not be an option. However, even when migration is inevitable, measures should be taken to ensure that refugees can use their own knowledge practices to negotiate where, when, and how they are relocated. This utopian attitude upends the sedentary bias, as those who face the risk of future displacement are not being told that their impending nomadism is symptomatic of social and ecological ills. But, conversely, in rejecting the sedentary bias it does not adopt a nomadic bias that romanticizes deterritorialization and condemns as provincial those who may choose to remain sedentary. What Nirmal realizes and promotes is a way for those in the position of offering hospitality to not preemptively ascribe

value to nomadic or sedentary lifestyles. What they can do is help equip vulnerable populations with the means to assess and respond to what the future holds.

Almost immediately after the publication of *The Hungry Tide*, there was a disaster in South Asia that lent itself to the application of Ghosh's utopian vision to the threat of climate-induced migration, and which he subsequently commented on in an essay entitled "The Town by the Sea." In December of 2004, a devastating tsunami hit the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, located south of the Sundarbans in the Bay of Bengal. Ghosh explains how the majority of the islands' inhabitants that were affected by the tsunami were poor settlers from the Indian mainland who had relocated to the islands with aspirational hopes for climbing the social ladder. He writes, "here, in this far-flung chain of islands, tens of thousands of settlers were able to make their way out of poverty, into the ranks of the country's expanding middle class" ("Town" 2). However, as soon as the tsunami hit, this utopian narrative was replaced by one emphasizing the victimization and vulnerability of the settlers at the hands of rising sea levels and extreme weather. Theirs was a vulnerability made possible by the Indian state's development of coastal homes exposed to the natural hazards of the ocean and climate—a misguided infrastructure venture based on the neo-imperial desire to model "the French Riviera or the coastline of Italy" (Ghosh, "Town" 6). As important as it is to criticize such developmental policies and understand the injustice perpetrated on the settlers by the postcolonial Indian state—this was not just a "natural" disaster—it is also important to remember the georgic hopes and dreams that brought the settlers to the islands in the first place. They made a choice to settle and make a living on this land, and in the wake of disaster should also be allowed to let these aspirations guide their resettlement or relocation.

This reminder of the utopian aspirations of the displaced gains new significance in the case of climate-induced migration because of the way the Anthropocene presents a dilemma of human agency per se. Like the Morichjhãpi refugees, the settlers of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands migrated according to the social dream of a better life, only to be further displaced by Western-inspired environmental policies. Unlike the Morichjhãpi refugees, however, their adversary was not just the postcolonial state, but the inhuman forces of geology and climate exacerbating the natural hazards in South Asia. As Ghosh puts it, "it is as if the deep time of geology had collided here with the hurried history of an emergent nation" ("Town" 2). Nirmal's utopian approach to refugee agency, then, is almost more apropos in the case of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, based as it is on the peculiar dilemma of accident versus intention inherent in the encounter between the disproportionate temporal scales of geology and postcolonial state policies. The clash between Western environmentalist principles and subaltern refugee agency evident in the Morichjhãpi incident, which both function on the same human scale, gains a new dimension in the case of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands tsunami as the deeper temporal scale of the Anthropocene enters the scene. Such a situation calls not for a utopianism that pits one set of social values against another—the subaltern against the postcolonial state—but for one that seeks to extend social dreaming to the scale of deep time. As constituting the latter, Nirmal's utopianism seems to not quite fit in the case of the Morichjhãpi refugees, and might be a better primer for addressing the threats of climate-induced migration currently emerging in South Asia.

If contemporary novelists like Ghosh have begun extending social dreaming to the scale of deep time, it may mean that utopia looks quite a bit different from what it used to. A longer temporal frame makes room for more dynamic spatial changes as well; no longer beholden to the static utopian loci represented in classical utopian texts like More's *Utopia* or Callenbach's

Ecotopia, utopian fiction since the end of the twentieth century—coinciding with the emergence of public discourses on global warming and the Anthropocene—has taken on a more stylistically variable appearance that registers a protracted temporality and more complex geography.[110] By employing deep time in this manner, utopian authors not only foreground and model solutions to the longstanding conflicts between human and environmental interests encapsulated in the concept of the Anthropocene. They also change the very style of imagining associated with utopia, making it less rigid and static, more uncertain and dynamic, thereby opening it up to revision through transhistorical and transnational applications without eliding factors of cultural difference. The result is, for example, a novel about South Asian refugees and animal conservation efforts in the 1970s that teaches us how we might address the future of climate-induced migration amidst a variety of ever-changing coastal landscapes.

Weathering Forms

I intend the above reading of *The Hungry Tide* and the application of its utopianism to the case of climate-induced migration to be an endorsement of reading Anthropocene fiction as form rather than as genre, following the distinction between the two outlined in chapter 3. Following Kate Marshall, this means considering the literary styles of self-reflexivity regarding our complicity in the most recent epochal shift of geology as portable across different genres and national literatures. Science fiction has, perhaps predictably, risen to the forefront of conversations about literary representations of climate change. This is certainly justifiable, seeing as how most of the novels currently published that explicitly evoke global warming are

[110] In addition to Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, we might think of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), the spatiotemporally embedded storylines of which Ian Baucom argues register the history of the Anthropocene as "multiply immanent in the present, as 'civilizational' history; as the species history of *Homo sapiens*; as the history of organic life on earth; as the history of the universe; as the blended orders of biographical, nomological, biological, zoological, and geological time" (151).

considered science fiction, as evidenced by Trexler's rather exhaustive archive of mostly science fiction in *Anthropocene Fictions*. And it may indeed be the case that science fiction is the best-equipped genre to handle the crisis of future imagining that is the Anthropocene. As Adeline Johns-Putra notes, because the central concern of the climate crisis is how a rapidly changing climate will alter the future profile of humanity and the planet, many "writers are compelled to draw on the strategies of one of the primary genres of futuristic imagining: science fiction" (749).

And yet, focusing solely on science fiction in a search for Anthropocene fictions seems not only restrictive in that it selects only one genre, but also restrictive in that it selects genre per se as the unit of analysis for composing an archive. By considering the self-reflexive figuration of our geological present as a formal rather than a generic investment, we open up our literary methodologies to consider texts that may not otherwise have fallen under our radar—that may adopt such a formal investment fleetingly rather than comprehensively. Bringing a non-science fiction novel like *The Hungry Tide*, with its indirect formal gestures to geological time and the effects of climate change, under the purview of Anthropocene fiction not only expands our sense of what a literary engagement with the Anthropocene might look like, but also offers us new narrative resources for thinking through and combatting different dimensions of the climate crisis, such as climate-induced migration. Likewise, as each chapter in this project seeks to demonstrate, considering georgic narratives on economy and environment at work outside of representations of farm labor, and utopian visions at work outside of utopian fiction proper, offers otherwise unforeseen imaginative resources for combatting apocalyptic despair over our planet's future.

WORKS CITED

Abensour, Miguel. "William Morris: The Politics of Romance." *Revolutionary Romanticism: A Drunken Boat Anthology*. Ed. and trans. Max Blechman. San Francisco: City Light Lights, 1999. 126-61.

Adamson, Joni. *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*. Tucson: The U of Arizona P, 2001.

Adamson, Joni, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds. *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Tucson: The U of Arizona P, 2002.

Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010.

Amis, Kingsley. *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised ed. New York: Verso, 2006.

Angenot, Marc. "The Absent Paradigm: An Introduction to the Semiotics of Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* 6.1 (1979): 9-19.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.

Ashley, Mike. *Gateways to Forever: The Story of the Science-Fiction Magazines from 1970 to 1980*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2007.

---. *Transformations: The Story of the Science-Fiction Magazines from 1950 to 1970*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2005.

Baccolini, Raffaella and Tom Moylan. "Introduction: Dystopia and Histories." *Dark Horizons:*

Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination. Ed. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan. New York: Routledge, 2004. 1-12.

Bachelard, Gaston. *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*. Trans. Edith Farell and Frederick Farell. Dallas: Dallas Institute, 1988.

Bacigalupi, Paolo. *The Water Knife*. New York: Knopf, 2015.

Baen, James. "If this Goes On (and On, and On…)." *Galaxy* March 1975: 6.

Bailey, Christopher J. *Congress and Air Pollution: Environmental Policies in the USA*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1998.

Bakewell, Oliver. "'Keeping Them in Their Place': The Ambivalent Relationship between Development and Migration in Africa." *Third World Quarterly* 29.7 (2008): 1341-58.

Bammer, Angelika. *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Baucom, Ian. "'Moving Centers': Climate Change, Critical Method, and the Historical Novel." *Modern Language Quarterly* 76.2 (2015): 137-57.

Beck, Ulrich. *World at Risk*. Trans. Ciaran Cronin. Malden: Polity P, 2009.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2012.

Berger, James. *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Bettini, Giovanni. "Climate Barbarians at the Gate? A Critique of Apocalyptic Narratives on 'Climate Refugees.'" *Geoforum* 45 (2013): 63-72.

Bisley, Nick. *Rethinking Globalization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Bittner, James. "Chronosophy, Aesthetics, and Ethics in Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*: *An Ambiguous Utopia*." *No Place Else: Explorations in Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*. Ed.

Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983: 244-70.

Bloch, Ernst. *The Principle of Hope*. Trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight. Vol. 1. Cambridge: MIT P, 1986.

Böhme, Gernot. "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics." Trans. David Roberts. *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 113-26.

Bollinger, Laurel. "Symbiogenesis, Selfhood, and Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* 37.1 (2010): 34-53.

Bookchin, Murray. *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*. Palo Alto: Cheshire, 1982.

Brehm, Victoria. "Metamorphosis of an Ojibewa Manido." *American Literature* 68.4 (1996): 677-706.

Brown, Kate and Thomas Klubock. "Environment and Labor: Introduction." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 85 (2014): 4-9.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2000.

Buell, Frederick. *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.

---. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001.

Butler, Octavia E. *Octavia E. Butler Papers*. San Marino: The Huntington Library, 2013.

---. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Warner, 1993.

---. *Parable of the Talents*. New York: Warner, 1998.

Callenbach, Ernest. *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston*. New York: Bantam, 1975.

Campbell Jr., John W. "Antipollution Device." *Analog Science Fiction and Fact* Oct. 1971: 5-7, 174-178.

---. "Balance and Ecology." *Analog Science Fiction and Fact* July 1971: 4-7, 174-77.

---. "Ecological Notes." *Analog Science Fiction and Fact* Sept. 1971: 5-7, 174-78.

Canavan, Gerry. "Retrofutures and Petrofutures: Oil, Scarcity, Limit." *Oil Culture*. Ed. Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. 331-49.

Carlson, Allan. *The New Agrarian Mind: The Movement Toward Decentralist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000.

Carruth, Allison. *Global Appetites: American Power and the Literature of Food*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2013.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.

Casey, Janet Galligani. *A New Heartland: Women, Modernity, and the Agrarian Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009.

Caton, Peter. *The Sinking Sundarbans*. 2010. Oxo Tower Wharf. *Peter Caton Photography*. Web. 24 Jan. 2015.

Cave, Alfred A. "Thomas More and the New World." *Albion* 23.2 (1991): 209-29.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009): 197-222.

Chavis, Benjamin F., Jr. "Preface." *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and*

Communities of Color. Ed. Robert D. Bullard. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1994. xi-xii.

Clifford, James. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.

Clute, John, David Langford, Peter Nicholls, and Graham Sleight, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. 3rd ed. London: Gollancz, 2011.

Cohen, Benjamin R. *Notes from the Ground: Science, Soil, and Society in the American Countryside*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2009.

Coile, Zachary. "'Cap-and-Trade' Model Eyed for Cutting Greenhouse Gases." *San Francisco Chronicle* 3 Dec. 2007. Web. 27 Sept. 2016.

Coles, Romand, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman. "Radical Future Pasts? An Anti-introduction." *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Political Theory*. Ed. Romand Coles, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2014. 1-36.

Collectif Argos. *Climate Refugees*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2010.

Conlogue, William. *Working the Garden: American Writers and the Industrialization of Agriculture*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2001.

Connor, Steven. *The Matter of Air: Science and Art of the Ethereal*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2010.

Cooper, Brenda. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* 1.1 (1996): 7-28.

Crutzen, Paul J. "Geology of Mankind." *Nature* 415 (2002): 23.

Crutzen, Paul J., and Eugene F. Stoermer. "The 'Anthropocene.'" *IGBP Newsletter* 41 (2000):

17-18.

Curtis, Wade. “Ecology Now!” *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact* December 1971: 81-98.

de Geus, Marius. *Ecological Utopias: Envisioning the Sustainable Society*. Trans. Paul Schwartzman. Utrecht: International Books, 1999.

Delany, Samuel R. *Triton*. New York: Bantam, 1976.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth and George B. Handley, eds. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.

Di Chiro, Giovanna. “Beyond Ecoliberal ‘Common Futures’: Environmental Justice, Toxic Touring, and a Transcommunal Politics of Place.” *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. Ed. Donald S. Moore, Jake Kosek, and Anand Pandian. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. 204-32.

Dimock, Wai Chee. “Planet and America, Set and Subset.” *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. Ed. Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007. 1-16.

---. “Weak Theory: Henry James, Colm Tóibín, and W. B. Yeats.” *Critical Inquiry* 39.4 (2013): 732-53.

Dobson, Andrew. *Green Political Thought*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Donahue, Brian. *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2004.

Dowie, Mark. *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1995.

Elias, Amy J. and Christian Moraru, eds. *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2015.

Ellerman, A. Denny, et al. *Markets for Clean Air: The U.S. Acid Rain Program*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. New York: New Directions, 1947.

Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks*. New York: Holt, 1988.

Esposito, Roberto. *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*. Trans. Zakiya Hanafi. Malden: Polity P, 2011.

Faris, Wendy B. *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2004.

Ferns, Chris. *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999.

Ferreira, Maria Aline. "Symbiotic Bodies and Evolutionary Tropes in the Work of Octavia Butler." *Science Fiction Studies* 37.3 (2010): 401-15.

Fiskio, Janet. "Apocalypse and Ecotopia: Narratives in Global Climate Change Discourse." *Race, Gender & Class* 19.1/2 (2012): 12-36.

---. "Unsettling Ecocriticism: Rethinking Agrarianism, Place, and Citizenship." *American Literature* 84.2 (2012): 301-25.

Fitzgerald, Deborah. *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2003.

Fleagle, Robert G. "The U.S. Government Response to Global Change: Analysis and Appraisal." *Climatic Change* 20 (1992): 57-81.

Flesch, William. *Comeuppance: Costly Signaling, Altruistic Punishment, and Other Biological Components of Fiction*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009.

Fletcher, Lisa. "Reading the Postcolonial Island in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *Island*

Studies Journal 6.1 (2011): 3-16.

Forter, Greg. "Atlantic and Other Worlds: Critique and Utopia in Postcolonial Historical Fiction." *PMLA* 131.5 (2016): 1328-43.

Frase, Peter. *Four Futures: Life after Capitalism*. Brooklyn: Verso, 2016.

Freyfogle, Eric T, ed. *The New Agrarianism: Land, Culture, and the Community of Life*. Washington, DC: Island P, 2001.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.

Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: The Free P, 1992.

Garforth, Lisa. "Green Utopias: Beyond Apocalypse, Progress, and Pastoral." *Utopian Studies* 16.3 (2005): 393-497.

Geiser, Ken and Gerry Waneck. "PCBs and Warren County." *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color*. Ed. Robert D. Bullard. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1994. 43-52.

Ghosh, Amitav. "The Chronicle Interview: Amitav Ghosh." *UN Chronicle* 42.4 (2005): 48-52.

---. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2016.

---. *The Hungry Tide*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

---. "The Town by the Sea." *Incendiary Circumstances: A Chronicle of the Turmoil of Our Times*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. 1-25.

Gifford, Terry. *Pastoral*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia UP, 2005.

Goldsmith, Edward, et al. *A Blueprint for Survival*. Spec. issue of *The Ecologist* 2.1 (1972).

Gottlieb, Robert. *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental*

Movement. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005.

Graves, Robert, and Didier Madoc-Jones. *London Postcards From the Future*. 2010. Museum of London. *Postcards From the Future*. Web. 20 Oct. 2015.

Greenough, Paul. "Pathogens, Pugmarks, and Political 'Emergency.'" *Nature and the Global South*. Ed. Paul Greenough and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. 201-30.

Hanif, Mohsen and Seyed Mohammad Marandi. "The Significance of the Lake Monster in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*." *The Explicator* 72.3 (2014): 249-52.

Haraway, Donna J. "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 203-30.

---. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke UP, 2016.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009.

---. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000.

Hart, Stephen M. "Magical Realism: Style and Substance." *A Companion to Magical Realism*. Ed. Stephen M. Hart and Wen-Chin Ouyang. Woodbridge, UK: Tamesis, 2005. 1-12.

Harvey, David. *The New Imperialism*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.

Heise, Ursula K. *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2016.

---. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008.

---. "Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies." *American Literary History*

20.1-2 (2008): 381-404.

Hexter, J. H. "*Utopia* and Its Historical Milieu." *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*. Ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. Vol. 4: *Utopia*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963. xxiii-cxxiv.

Houser, Heather. *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect*. New York: Columbia UP, 2014.

Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Irigaray, Luce. *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. Trans. Mary Beth Mader. Austin: U of Texas P, 1999.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.

"Issue of the Year: The Environment." *Time* 4 Jan. 1971: 27-30.

Jacobs, Naomi. "Beyond Stasis and Symmetry: Lessing, Le Guin, and the Remodeling of Utopia." *Utopian Studies* 2 (1989): 109-17.

Jacoby, Russell. *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

Jalais, Annu. "Dwelling in Morichjhanpi: When Tigers Became 'Citizens', Refugees 'Tiger Food.'" *Economic and Political Weekly* 40.17 (2005): 1757-62.

Jameson, Fredric. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. New York: Verso, 2005.

---. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Notes on the State of Virginia." *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*. Ed. Merrill D. Peterson. New York: Penguin, 1975. 23-232.

Johns, Adam. "'The Time Had Come for Us to Be Born': Octavia Butler's Darwinian Apocalypse." *Extrapolation* 51.3 (2010): 395-413.

Johns-Putra, Adeline. "Ecocriticism, Genre, and Climate Change: Reading the Utopian Vision of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital* Trilogy." *English Studies* 91.7 (2010): 744-60.

Kassman, Kenn. *Envisioning Ecotopia: The U.S. Green Movement and the Politics of Radical Social Change*. Westport: Praeger, 1997.

Kaur, Rajender. "Home is Where the Oracella Are: Toward a New Paradigm of Transcultural Ecocritical Engagement in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 14.1 (2007): 125-41.

Killingsworth, Jimmie M. and Jacqueline S. Palmer. "Millennial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from *Silent Spring* to Global Warming." *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America*. Ed. Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1996. 21-45.

Kumar, Krishan. *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

Kumar, Priya. "The Environmentalism of *The Hungry Tide*." *Ecocriticism of the Global South*. Ed. Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015. 11-34.

Latour, Bruno. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2004.

---. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.

Lee, Charles. "Beyond Toxic Wastes and Race." *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*. Ed. Robert D. Bullard. Boston: South End P, 1993. 41-52.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

---. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

---. "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow." *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. 181-217.

---. *The Word for World is Forest*. New York: Tor, 2010.

Lepore, Jill. "A Golden Age for Dystopian Fiction." *New Yorker* 5 June 2017. Web. 5 June 2017.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015.

Levitas, Ruth. *The Concept of Utopia*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1990.

Lewis, Jayne Elizabeth. *Air's Appearance: Literary Atmosphere in British Fiction, 1660-1794*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2012.

Lewis, Simon L., and Mark A. Maslin. "Defining the Anthropocene." *Nature* 519 (2015): 171-80.

Low, Anthony. *The Georgic Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.

Major, William H. *Grounded Vision: New Agrarianism and the Academy*. Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 2011.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon P, 1955.

Margulis, Lynn, and Dorion Sagan. *Acquiring Genomes: A Theory of the Origin of Species*. New York: Basic, 2002.

---. *Microcosmos: Four Billion Years of Microbial Evolution*. New York: Summit Books, 1986.

Markley, Robert. "Time, History, and Sustainability." *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of*

Climate Change. Ed. Tom Cohen. Vol. 1. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities P, 2012. 43-64.

Marshall, Kate. "What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene? American Fiction in Geological Time." *American Literary History* 27.3 (2015): 523-38.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1974.

Mathisen, Werner Christie. "The Underestimation of Politics in Green Utopias: The Description of Politics in Huxley's *Island*, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, and Callenbach's *Ecotopia*." *Utopian Studies* 12.1 (2001): 56-78.

McAdam, Jane, ed. *Climate Change and Displacement: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Oxford: Hart, 2010.

McCormick, John. *The Global Environmental Movement*. 2nd ed. New York: Wiley, 1995.

McGurl, Mark. "The New Cultural Geology." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57.3-4 (2011): 380-90.

McNeill, J. R. *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century World*. New York: Norton, 2000.

McRae, Andrew. *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996.

Merchant, Carolyn. *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Midnight Notes Collective. "Introduction to the New Enclosures." *Midnight Notes* 10 (1990): 1-9.

Miller, Perry. *Errand into the Wilderness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1956.

More, Thomas. *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*. Ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter.

Vol. 4: *Utopia*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963.

Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010.

---. *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009.

Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. New York: Methuen, 1986.

---. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview P, 2000.

---. "Utopia, the Postcolonial, and the Postmodern." *Science Fiction Studies* 29.2 (2002): 265-71.

Mukherjee, Pablo. "Surfing the Second Waves: Amitav Ghosh's Tide Country." *New Formations* 59 (2006): 144-57.

Nadir, Christine. "Utopian Studies, Environmental Literature, and the Legacy of an Idea: Educating Desire in Miguel Abensour and Ursula K. Le Guin." *Utopian Studies* 21.1 (2010): 24-56.

Nash, Michael P., dir. *Climate Refugees*. LA Think Tank and Preferred Content, 2010.

Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1967.

Nersessian, Anahid. "Utopia's Afterlife in the Anthropocene." *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. Ed. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann. New York: Routledge, 2017. 91-100.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011.

Otto, Eric C. *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism*. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2012.

Peck, Gunther. "The Nature of Labor: Fault Lines and Common Ground in Environmental and

Labor History." *Environmental History* 11.2 (2006): 212-38.

Pellow, David Naguib. *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice*. Cambridge: The MIT P, 2007.

Pezzullo, Phaedra C. "Performing Critical Interruptions: Stories, Rhetorical Invention, and the Environmental Justice Movement." *Western Journal of Communication* 65.1 (2001): 1-25.

Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. New York: Knopf, 1976.

Piguet, Étienne, Antoine Pécoud, and Paul de Guchteneire, eds. *Migration and Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.

Pizzo, Justine. "Atmospheric Exceptionalism in *Jane Eyre*: Charlotte Brontë's Weather Wisdom." *PMLA* 131.1 (2016): 84-100.

Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013.

Pordzik, Ralph. *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

Porterfield, Andrew and David Weir. "The Export of U.S. Toxic Wastes." *Nation* 3 Oct. 1987: 1+.

Prabhu, Gayathri. "Retelling Nature: Realism and the Postcolonial-Environmental Imaginary in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *Transnational Literature* 7.2 (2015): 1-13.

Robinson, Douglas. *American Apocalypses: The Image of the End of the World in American Literature*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1985.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. *Forty Signs of Rain*. New York: Bantam Spectra, 2004.

Roos, Bonnie, and Alex Hunt, eds. *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2010.

Ruppert, Peter. *Reader in a Strange Land: The Activity of Reading Literary Utopias*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1986.

Russ, Joanna. *The Female Man*. New York: Bantam, 1975.

Saint-Amour, Paul K. *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, and Encyclopedic Form*. New York: Oxford UP, 2015.

Sandín, Lyn Di Iorio, and Richard Perez. "Introduction: Tracing Magical Irruptions in US Ethnic Literatures." *Moments of Magical Realism in US Ethnic Literatures*. Ed. Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 1-15.

Sandler, Ronald and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, eds. *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*. Cambridge: The MIT P, 2007.

Sargent, Lyman Tower. "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited." *Utopian Studies* 5.1 (1994): 1-37.

Sayre, Laura. "Apocalyptic? No, Georgic!: Literary Agroecology from Virgil to *Silent Spring*." *Toward a Literary Ecology: Places and Spaces in American Literature*. Ed. Karen E. Waldron and Rob Friedman. Lanham: Scarecrow P, 2013. 103-20.

Schneider-Mayerson, Matthew. *Peak Oil: Apocalyptic Environmentalism and Libertarian Political Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015.

Schuster, Joshua. *The Ecology of Modernism: American Environments and Avant-Garde Poetics*. Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 2015.

Scranton, Roy. "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene." *New York Times* 10 Nov. 2013. Web. 28 July 2015.

Sears, Paul B. "Ecology: A Subversive Subject." *Ecology*. Spec. issue of *BioScience* 14.7 (1964):

11-13.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

Shackleton, Mark. "'June Walked over It Like Water and Came Home': Cross-Cultural Symbolism in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and *Tracks*." *Transatlantic Voices: Interpretations of Native North American Literatures*. Ed. Elvira Pulitano. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2007. 188-205.

Shepard, Paul, and Daniel McKinley, eds. *The Subversive Science: Essays Toward an Ecology of Man*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

Shewry, Teresa. "Geologic Fictions: Science, Imperialism, and Transnational Literatures of Deep Time." *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 21.2 (2014): 253-70.

---. *Hope at Sea: Possible Ecologies in Oceanic Literature*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2015.

Sloterdijk, Peter. *Foams: Spheres Volume III: Plural Spherology*. Trans. Wieland Hoban. Cambridge: The MIT P, 2016.

Smith, Eric D. *Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction: New Maps of Hope*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Smith, Kimberly K. *Wendell Berry and the Agrarian Tradition: A Common Grace*. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 2003.

Somay, Bülent. "Towards an Open-Ended Utopia." *Science Fiction Studies* 11.1 (1984): 25-38.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.

Stengers, Isabelle. *Cosmopolitics I*. Trans. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P,

2010.

---. *Cosmopolitics II*. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011.

Sturges, Mark. "Founding Farmers: Jefferson, Washington, and the Rhetoric of Agricultural Reform." *Early American Literature* 50.3 (2015): 681-709.

Sweet, Timothy. *American Georgics: Economy and Environment in Early American Literature*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002.

Szasz, Andrew. *Ecopopulism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994.

Taylor, Matthew A. "At Land's End: Novel Spaces and the Limits of Planetarity." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 49.1 (2016): 115-38.

Thompson, Paul. *The Agrarian Vision: Sustainability and Environmental Ethics*. Lexington: The UP of Kentucky, 2010.

Tichi, Cecilia. *New World, New Earth: Environmental Reform in American Literature from the Puritans through Whitman*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2015.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015.

United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Study of the Racial and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*. New York: United Church of Christ, 1987.

Vieira, Fátima. "The Concept of Utopia." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Ed. Gregory Claeys. New York: Cambridge UP, 2010. 3-27.

Walker, Alice. *The Temple of My Familiar*. New York: Harcourt, 1989.

Walsh, Chad. *From Utopia to Nightmare*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Weart, Spencer R. *The Discovery of Global Warming*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008.

Wegner, Phillip E. *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002.

Weik, Alexa. "The Home, the Tide, and the World: Eco-Cosmopolitan Encounters in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 13.2-14.1 (2006-2007): 120-41.

White, Richard. "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do Your Work for a Living?': Work and Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Ed. William Cronon. New York: Norton, 1996. 171-85.

---. "Play It Again, Sam: Decline and Finishing in Environmental Narratives." *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*. Ed. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, Michelle Niemann. New York: Routledge, 2017. 239-46.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.

---. "Utopia and Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* 5.3 (1978): 203-14.

Winthrop, John. "A Model of Christian Charity (1630)." *Puritan Political Ideas: 1558-1794*. Ed. Edmund S. Morgan. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965. 75-93.

Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010.

Worster, Donald. *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1985.

Zamora, Lois Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris. "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora

and Wendy B. Faris. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. 1-11.

Ziser, Michael. *Environmental Practice and Early American Literature*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2013.