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A Toxic Discourse: Contaminated Hometown Communities in Selected U. S. Ecocatastrophe Prose 1970-2005

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A TOXIC DISCOURSE:

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The idea of the "contaminated community" is central to contemporary American environmental prose, but it seems to have been largely overlooked as a point of examination in current literary scholarship. Since Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, environmentalism has continued to grow as a big part of twenty-first century popular culture. Contemporary adventure stories, historical novels, mystery novels, memoirs, and apocalyptic novels—all of which I examine at length in this study—continue to reveal the fears of the potential for an environmental apocalypse due to human destruction of the natural environment, thus giving rise to the "ecocatastrophe" novel, which has grown in popularity since the 1970s. To engage in what Lawrence Buell calls a "toxic discourse" that addresses the threats to the natural environment as depicted in environmental fiction since the 1970s, this study engages a careful ecocritical examination of ecocatastrophic fiction and non-fiction focused on the "hometowns," or otherwise "contaminated hometown communities" inhabited by the authors and their characters.

Using a variety of theoretical and critical approaches—including ecofeminism, risk theory, environmental justice, and place studies—I demonstrate how the study of regional, hometown literature that focuses on environmental catastrophe and the "lived experiences" of those facing the effects of contamination helps to better understand the

environmental crises facing the United States in the past four decades. Additionally, I argue that despite our acceptance to "live with" our contaminated communities, a polluted environment can never become—for the sake of green activism and successful toxic discourse—normal, everyday activity.

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INTRODUCTION

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF A HOME-FOCUSED TOXIC DISCOURSE

The human race has neglected to take care of the environment, and somehow, humanity has taken it upon itself to destroy its unassuming victim. Speaking from the point of view of a concerned citizen and scientist, Rachel Carson, in her groundbreaking 1962 book *Silent Spring*, engaged her readers in a serious, but often controversial conversation about the polluted environment and how human beings need to begin taking action to save our natural surroundings.

Unfortunately, the warnings Carson discussed in her text have not become a "crisis" of the past. Nearly a half-century later, Carson's warnings are just as urgent, if not more so, than they were in 1962.[1] Has humanity simply brushed environmental issues under the carpet? While the current condition of our environment seems to indicate that to be the case, a careful examination of prose between 1970 and the new millennium indicates that people are extremely aware of the possibility of an environmental catastrophe and the physical and emotional effects that catastrophe will have on their home area.

This dissertation serves as a "toxic discourse" about the problems that Carson saw in the 1960s and representations of those problems that have emerged in American prose since the 1970s. The phrase "toxic discourse" is a phrase Lawrence Buell uses to refer

[1] *Orion*, the journal of nature, culture, and place, includes articles on a regular basis that discuss these concerns in the twenty-first century. The July/August 2008 issue included "Pesticide Drift" an article by Rebecca Clarren that addresses immigrants in Huron, California who cannot open their windows or step outside their homes without fear of breathing poisoned air. The toxic air is a result of thousands of pounds of pesticides used for crops. Bill McKibben contributed "Multiplication Saves the Day" in the November/December 2008 issue, which discusses how easily just 5% of Americans can change drastic climate change.

to the much-needed conversation about toxicity and toxic events affecting the environment and human beings. To conceptualize the environmental problems faced in the past thirty-five years, I examine home-focused environmental prose, while merging those texts and reading them through the lenses of relevant theories: ecocriticism, ecofeminism, environmental justice, risk theory, bioregionalism, and place studies. In doing so, I pinpoint the effects that personal interaction with a collapsing environment have on individuals and communities by investigating narrative technique, character development, and symbolism of toxicity, among other literary devices as portrayed in prose. In particular, I want to stress that "environmental crisis" is a broad, sweeping term, relative to our own lived experiences, and that the toxic discourse in which we engage about those crises relies heavily on literal and figurative interpretations of toxic threats. To that end, the cornerstone of my philosophical approach in this study is to view contemporary environmental writing as a form of grassroots activism and that lived experiences are often best recorded and understood in prose written by those individuals inhabiting an area experiencing the "crisis." Moreover, bringing global environmental problems, which are seemingly out of our control and worlds away, into our own backyards serves as a psychological wake-up call to adopt an alternative way of evaluating the place of ecocriticism in contemporary literary studies.

In 1998, Lawrence Buell argued that ecocriticism had yet to engage itself in a toxic discourse. Later, in the 2002 article "Toxins, Drugs, and Global Systems: Risk and Narrative in the Contemporary Novel," Ursula Heise noted that a toxic discourse as well as attention to risk theory would better serve our understanding of the environmental collapse that has been addressed in contemporary literature. An earlier essay, "The

Postnatural Novel: Toxic Consciousness in Fiction of the 1980s," by Cynthia Deitering, suggests that a "toxic consciousness" has been established in 1980s postnatural novels which, she contends, focus on serious environmental issues such as the Greenhouse Effect and the Three Mile Island catastrophe.[2] Before I address specific works of environmental prose, I build up an even more contemporary theoretical framework from which to examine those works. Building on the theories and concerns that Buell, Heise, and Deitering established in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I first trace how ecocriticism became an established literary theory, and then I define how related theories such as ecofeminism, environmental justice, and risk theory have become significant tools in examining literary environmental themes. Additionally, I argue that the many theories helpful in establishing a contemporary toxic discourse support a symbiotic relationship with nature, which necessitates considering place studies as a means to engaging a realistic study of environmental catastrophe.

An Ecocritical Theoretical Framework: Ecofeminism, Environmental Justice, and Risk Theory in Contemporary Ecocriticism

To successfully employ an ecocritical analysis of a work of contemporary environmental prose, it is important to understand the place of ecocriticism in twenty-first-century scholarship. Contemporary ecocriticism must focus on the conditions of the current environment—not so much in light of aesthetic qualities or human relationship to the environment, but humanity's ability or inability to survive in an increasingly poisoned environment. To understand how we can better shape a contemporary ecocriticism that includes toxic discourse as its foundation, it is important to recognize that toxicity has

[2] Deitiering's essay is included as a chapter in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's collection *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*.

always been, albeit latent, at the heart of ecocritical scholarship. Ecocriticism as a literary theory is contemporary in and of itself, becoming institutionalized in the form of the Association of the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) in 1993. My use of the phrase "contemporary ecocriticism" in this dissertation refers to using the theory as a tool to assess the progression of the environmental literature of the past thirty-five years in light of environmental concerns since the turn of the twenty-first century.

What Lawrence Buell calls first-wave ecocriticism relies on defining human relationships with the environment, characterized by early-nineteenth-century perceptions of human interaction with nature. In *Explorations In Environmental History*, historian Samuel Hays traces human perspectives of nature and the countryside from the early 1800s and accurately addresses what Buell calls first-wave ecocriticism, but also begins to subtly address toxic discourse. Hays asserts that in the early nineteenth century, migrants new to cities sought to continue familiar rural practices but found such practices affected people differently in the city. Many town and city ordinance were created to restrict customary practices. Public health ordinances were created when animals, originally roaming the streets and regarded as nuisances, were pinpointed as threats to public health. Urban fires were yet another concern in cities because flammable structures were built so close together. City streets remained unpaved and smoke from wood and coal burning in the home and factory became problems. The burial of the dead, while designated cemeteries were established in the country, became difficult to accomplish in the city. The dead remained unburied, which posed health threats (71). Human relationships with nature became strained with the emergence of an industrialized

society. An effort to preserve nature for the welfare of nature became central for rural areas, but it was difficult to achieve in cities.

Contemporary conservation, too, can be traced back to the nineteenth century as a direct reaction to the reckless use of the country's natural resources. Nature writing over the past 100 years has mirrored what Riley Dunlap and Angela Mertig classify as the three waves of conservationism. As part of the first wave of conservationism, groups came together to preserve the environment for future human use as well as preserving nature for nature's sake. Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and John Muir contributed to the establishment of national parks, agencies such as the U. S. Forest Service, and organizations such as the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society.

By the mid to late nineteenth century, human relationships with nature shifted to examining cultural implications of that relationship with nature. Hays notes that the conflict between the city as a place of production and the city as a place to live was strong, thus supporting what Buell would later call "second-wave" ecocriticism. Part of the contradiction involved the shift from the outhouse to sewer ditches and ground lines that diverted waste to nearby rivers; industrialization that gave rise to concentrated forms of residential degradation; intensity of transportation taking away open space; new forms of technology including the telephone, electricity, and outdoor advertising bringing environmental blight along with material benefits; and attempts to control disease and improve health. The tension was created by increased populations, which led to an increase in the services needed to benefit communities. These increases had adverse effects on the environment (72). Advances in technology in cities began to compromise the health of not only those in the city but those in rural areas as well.

Conservationists, too, found a need to control resource problems, especially during Franklin Roosevelt's administration beginning in 1932. The country was facing problems such as the Great Depression, flooding, and the Dust Bowl. The second wave of ecocriticism, however, is perhaps most relevant to the 1950s, where preserving areas of natural beauty and using the wilderness for public enjoyment became the focus.[3]

Toxicity has always been an element of the strained relationship between human beings and nature, but it has not been fully recognized until the twentieth century. The demand of urban dwellers to move away from factories and businesses decreased the open space available in the city. Many workers and business owners lived on the premises above the shop or adjacent to factories. People became more focused on quality of life and living in a healthier environment away from the city. Court officials and other legal officers argued that many people complaining about the quality of life knew before they purchased the property that the area suffered from pollution from factories. In some cases, complaints were dismissed because the benefits of factory production far outweighed the interests of residential owners.[4] Moving away from the factories required workers to gain skills that could lead to improved income, thus moving them to locations up the hillsides from the river-valley flats of mill housing. White-collar workers were able to move further from the city limits and enjoy not only large homes and yards, but also paved streets, flower gardens, piped water, and sewage lines. The demand for and marketability of urban land led to shifts in ownership, which meant that the potential for

[3] Aldo Leopold's pioneering book *A Sand County Almanac* traces a month-by-month observation of the Wisconsin wilderness and the wildlife that inhabits that wilderness.

[4] This complaint is something Rachel Carson dealt with after the publication of *Silent Spring*. In a 1962 *New York Times* article by Walter Sullivan entitled "Chemists Debate Pesticides Book," the American Chemical Society argues that the book would "slacken the pace of pesticide development." Ultimately, there was fear that the public would turn against the use of pesticides or any chemical to kill unwanted pests.

industrial or commercial uses of land increased. These demands began to infringe on landowners and homeowners (73-74).

Toxicity has always been an issue in ecocriticism, but it has not always been acknowledged to the extent that the aesthetic values of nature have. While it is important to consider toxicity in its most literal sense—pollution of rivers, overpopulation of cities, and the destruction of wildlife—it should also be looked at figuratively as the poisoning of the human right to be healthy, own property, and establish a symbiotic relationship with the environment. Efforts have been made to define the city as a place to work as well as a place to live. The establishment of planning agencies create quality of life areas within urban settings—these included parks, playgrounds, open spaces, hiking and biking trails, museums and recreational facilities, commercial areas with more greenery, reduction of air and water pollution, and more spacious central city areas. Sewage treatment plants, cleaner coal or natural gas and restrictions on urban land use and military uses upon the land led to more accessible natural environments for urban dwellers. Resistance of the definition of the city as a place to work rather than a place to live has taken precedence over the city as a place to make a home (74-75). Hays asserts that "Futuristic thinking was dominated by the desire to determine how urban population and income could grow rather than by how environmental quality of life could grow" (75). Hays's assertion is a central characteristic of the problematic thinking that industry embraced in the twentieth century.

Because of the more concentrated effort to make the city a livable, profitable place, toxic discourse must address overpopulation and pollution in cities, as well as the transference of these issues to the countryside. Urban penetration of the countryside first

took place as urban residents needed resources that were not readily available within city limits. Timber to build cities is one such example that Hays mentions. Food, however, was the most taxing on the countryside. With the increase in ways to preserve foods, a new demand was placed on rural growers. Demands on agriculture also increased as farm products began to be a major part of the consumer market. The need for water supplies also placed a demand on the countryside. Rivers and wells did not supply enough water to the increasing population of the cities, so dependence upon water from further away became necessary. In some cities, such as Denver and Los Angeles, urban and rural dwellers had to compete for limited resources.

Limited resources, and a land of too much materialism and production, lead us to what we should hold as the central component of a "third wave" of ecocriticism: toxic discourse. Unlike the former waves of ecocriticism, which embrace a philosophy of the natural, third-wave ecocriticism becomes "operational," attempting to overcome the damage we have done to the environment. This functioning ideal is why toxic discourse is so pertinent to contemporary environmental writing, which seems to more regularly address the subtle and blatant poisoning of nature. The "new wave" of nature writing begins by implementing a toxic discourse.

Waste disposal became an issue in the twentieth century as urban residents, unable to accommodate the refuse produced in the cities, began disposing of it in the largely uninhabited countryside. As time went on, waste was being disposed of further and further away. First, nearby rivers served as receptacles for waste. Drainage ditches and underground sewage systems drained into nearby rivers. Industries also used rivers to remove waste to the countryside and argued that rivers were the best resources for such

activity. Airborne waste also became a problem. Use of toxic chemicals to prevent the decay of items penetrated the atmosphere, and those toxins were found in the environment thousands of miles away. Hays argues that the countryside, both far away from and near urban centers, became the ultimate "sink" for chemicals generated in urban society (77-78).

One example of toxic waste removal is outlined in Hal Rothman's book *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945.* Because of the Three Mile Island catastrophe in 1979, Rothman notes that in December 1980, the Low-Level Nuclear Radioactive Waste Policy Act was passed to address the problem of disposing of spent but still radioactive fuel rods used in reactors across the country. However, Rothman notes, policies for handling such waste were important, but policies for high-level radioactive waste were not in place. In 1982, the Nuclear Waste Policy Act was passed. The act required that two sites be chosen for the disposal of radioactive materials. Three areas—Deaf Smith County in west Texas; Yucca Mountain, sixty-five miles northwest of Las Vegas; and Hanford Reservation in central Washington—were chosen. Protests in Texas and Washington led to those sites not being chosen (166). The political issues in selecting Yucca Mountain in Nevada bring Rothman to the conclusion that "this typical exercise in power revealed much about the relationship between risk and culture in American society. Everyone was willing to enjoy the benefits of technological innovations, but when the benefits had consequences, no one stepped forward to shoulder a share of the responsibility" (167).

Contemporary environmental prose that highlights the lived experiences of those whose home areas have been threatened by environmental disaster relies on the

foundation of the early concepts of environmentalism. Rothman points to the late 1960s as a crucial time in the development of U. S. environmentalism. In particular, American culture began to embrace a kind of utopian vision by the late 1960s (83). Concerns for the condition of the physical environment and affects human activities on the physical landscape became mainstream. As discussed later in this chapter, by the late 1960s Carson's 1962 classic book had already had its huge impact. "Instead of efficiency that so dominated the scientific conservation of the turn of the century," Rothman asserts, "Americans developed a new ethic that emphasized the concerns of an affluent, optimistic society that envisioned no limits to its possibilities" (84). People began to adopt a belief in creating an environment safe from chemical hazards as well as long-term global threats. Moreover, Rothman asserts that Americans became obsessed with individualism, individual rights, and personal entitlement, rather than the "collective rights and personal obligations that the nation's founders envisioned" (85).

For the purposes of this study, it is necessary to evaluate the "levels" of ecocriticism that have developed over the course of the past few decades. For example, environmental justice is a relatively new approach that considers the treatment of people of various races and classes in relationship to environmental pollution. A theory that shares many of the same concerns as environmental justice is risk theory, which is used to examine perceived environmental threats by both scientists and community members. Ecofeminism focuses on the role that women play in environmental issues and advocates dismissing the patriarchal view of nature as strictly "feminine."

Examining the emergence of environmental justice as a critical approach to understanding the effects of environmental catastrophe on people's homeplaces will help

to bridge the gap between the cultural, societal, and scientific ramifications of environmental pollution. Joni Adamson's *The Environmental Justice Reader* serves as an essential cornerstone for such an analysis. In that collection of critical essays, T. V. Reed, in "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism," states,

> I want to argue that the center of concern needs to shift significantly for ecocriticism to truly represent the range of connections among culture, criticism, and the environment. Where a certain type of ecocritic worries about "social issues" watering down ecological critique, mounting evidence makes clear that the opposite has been the case, that pretending to isolate the environment from its necessary interrelation with society and culture has severely limited the appeal of environmental thought, to the detriment of both the natural and social worlds. (146)

Recently, it seems that Reed's argument has taken shape within the realm of literary criticism. In fact, Reed's argument is particularly germane to the connection between an individual and his or her original or adopted homeplace. As I demonstrate in my next chapter on Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the environmental depletion of the desert has negative psychological effects on community members, especially Hayduke, one of the novel's four protagonists, whose boyhood home is the desert. Similarly, environmental degradation, because of the growth of the coal-mining industry, prevents citizens from *having* families, as I illustrate in Chapter 2, on Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven*. Whereas those chapters focus on connections to one's birthplace, Chapter 3 on Nevada Barr's *Track of the Cat,* which is perhaps less of an environmental justice text as compared to Abbey's and Giardina's novels, serves as a commentary on

the conflict between ranchers who call the Guadalupe Mountain National Park home and the enforcement officers who have *adopted* it as their home. More critical attention to the intersection of the environment and one's "home" helps to bolster the much needed discussion of environment and culture for which Reed calls.

The second half of Reed's comment, about limiting the appeal of environmental thought because of a detachment of the environment from the culture, concerns the type of gap between people and their environment that I want to bridge. Bridging the gap between society and culture and environmental concerns is of critical importance to a toxic discourse, and in considering the impact of environmental catastrophe on one's homeplace, it is essential to evaluate the level of environmental racism present in a community. Reed suggests that in describing and developing an environmental justice criticism, it is important to "identify images/stereotypes, uncover and map traditions, and theorize specific approaches within the field" (152). Reed states, "We can examine the cultural assumptions in various environmental rhetorics, both texts that have helped enable racism, and texts that have called attention to instances of environmental racism" (152). Literary texts, then, become a central point of discourse on not only catastrophic environmental threats but injustices related to those threats.

Some of the environmental racism issues came to light in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, particularly with the onset of the Reagan administration, which largely ignored any civil rights activities. As Rothman points out, the EPA under the leadership of James Watt was viewed as an agency with great respect, but by 1983, "it was widely perceived as a sink of corruption and deceit, an agency that had abdicated its most important responsibility—to protect the public from hazardous waste" (161). As

more industrial dangers were uncovered and people started questioning various manufacturing tactics, the number of high-paying jobs declined. Many communities demanded that the nation take responsibility for the illnesses and deaths that were resulting from exposure to toxins.

In Chapter 4, on Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* and Lois Gibbs's *Love Canal: My Story*, I address how working-class communities became victims of toxic dumping and how disease and illness, particularly in women in Williams's book, became part of the consequences of living too close to industrial wastes. Rothman asserts that in the early 1990s, more information came forth revealing that the military "engaged in plutonium experiments on mentally handicapped, terminally ill, incarcerated, and otherwise incapacitated individuals" (162). He says, "Environmental justice purported to show that minority communities in the United States were singled out for the siting of environmental hazards, both employment-offering industry and waste dumps, on the basis of the racial makeup of communities" (162).

Environmental prose establishes a commentary on real environmental injustices, as perceived by readers and authors. In yet another critical essay in Adamson's *The Environmental Justice Reader,* "From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice" Julie Sze asserts that "Environmental justice is a political movement concerned with public policy issues of environmental racism, as well as a cultural movement interested in issues of ideology and representation." Additionally, she contends that environmental justice "challenges the mainstream definition of environment and nature based on wilderness/preservationist frame by foregrounding race and labor in its definition of what constitutes 'nature'." She further argues that

"Literature offers a new way of looking at environmental justice, through visual images and metaphors, not solely through the prism of statistics" (163). Sze's view of literature's role in providing a discourse on environmental injustice supports the toxic discourse in which I engage in each of my chapters. Sze argues that "Literature, through its testing of the boundaries of realism and temporality, is not a route of escapism from the lived experience of environmental racism in the contemporary moment. Rather, environmental justice needs literature to better understand why and how the exploitation of people of color, women, and the environment are linked, historically and systematically" (173). This link for which Sze calls is initiated by examining the lived experiences of those closest to the land: the people who call it home.

Environmental catastrophe reaches beyond the realm of poisoned waterways, toxic waste dumps, coal-mine explosions, and overdevelopment of the desert. Environmental catastrophe also takes the shape of individuals not being "allowed" to fully be part of the environment they call home. In "'Nature' and Environmental Justice," Mei Mei Evans argues that wilderness in the United States, in the form of "culturally constructed locations," has been off limits to women, people of color, and gays and lesbians.[5] "Nature in the U. S. is largely determined and dominated by white hegemony," she argues. "As such, it is not 'space' easily entered by a black man, no matter how 'sweet,' 'happy,' or 'kind' one is" (189). Evans further asserts that "Women, people of color, and gays and lesbians go into nature in fear of encountering straight white men. U. S. Nature is assumed to be a location removed from culture, a space that is open to all, but one has only to look at what happens to those who are not male, not

[5] Mei Mei Evans's essay is included in Joni Adamson's *Environmental Justice Reader*.

white, and/or not straight when they attempt a transformative experience in nature to see what they risk" (191).

It seems, then, that environmental justice as a political and literary movement within the past two decades challenges the historically accepted concept of environmental justice. The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental justice as "the fair treatment for people of all races, cultures, and incomes regarding the development of environmental laws, regulations and policies" (qtd. in Buckingham and Kulcur 659-60). Environmental justice has been concerned predominately with race and ethnicity as focus points beginning with the African–American rural hazardous waste site protests in the 1980s. In 1982, a poor, predominantly black community in Warren County, North Carolina became a key factor in bringing environmental justice and racism to the foreground. As Julie Sze explains, demonstrators protested the building of a Polychlorinate Biphenyl landfill facility (164). Sze cites a 1987 report, *Toxic Wastes and Race,* which places race at the forefront of the environmental justice movement. The report finds that race was of the most important factors associated with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities (165).

Environmental justice—also brought to the forefront of public attention in 1987 by the Reverend Benjamin Chavis, the leader of the United Church of Christ and head of NAACP—has grown beyond what it historically was meant to deal with. While the concept of environmental hazards becoming an increasing problem for people of color was and may still be relevant, contemporary environmental prose stretches those boundaries. Susan Buckingham and Rakibe Kulcur point out that poverty has become an area of focus in the environmental justice movement. They argue that environmental

justice or injustice needs to expand beyond race, culture, and income to include age, disability, and gender.

It is here that we can begin to see a clear connection with ecofeminism. Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s; it's a term coined by Francoise d'Eaubonne (Merchant, *Earth* 5). In short, ecofeminism may be used to examine the archaic views that the earth serves as a living organism and nurturing mother, a view that, Carolyn Merchant explains, restricts the way cultures "use" the land. Ecofeminists who criticize commercial mining might argue that one would not dismantle his mother's body; therefore, why dig into the earth? As long as the earth was considered alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to destroy it (Merchant, *Earth* 78). It was believed that minerals and metals ripened within the earth the way a child grows in the mother's womb. Therefore, in this metaphor, mines serve as a woman's vagina, and taking minerals from the earth could be compared to rape and abortion (Merchant, *Death* 4). Merchant adds, "In addition the mining of gold contributed to human corruption and avarice" (30). Hazardous chemicals that threaten the biological reproduction of humans are looked at by women as a direct assault on their bodies and children (MacGregor 7).

Since 1995, there has been an effort to take gender into consideration when it comes to environmental legislation and decision-making. Institutions have taken measures to assure that more women are drawn into "representative and effective decision making" (Buckingham and Kulcur 670). Initiatives set up by women, including the Network of Women Ministers of the Environment (NWME), established in 2002,

positively promote women's participation in environmental policies and enhance gender perspectives in national and international environmental decision-making (671). Ecofeminists support some form of environmental ethic that deals with these equal dominations. Generally, an ethic of care or nurture arises out of women's culturally constructed experiences (MacGregor 7). According to Karen Warren,

> An ecofeminist ethic is both a critique of male domination of both women and nature and an attempt to frame an ethic free of male-gender bias about women and nature. . . ecofeminism builds on the multiple perspectives of those whose perspectives are typically omitted or undervalued in dominant discourses. . . an ecofeminist perspective is thereby. . . structually pluralistic, inclusivist, contextualist, emphasizing. . . the crucial role context plays in understanding sexist and naturist practice. (qtd. in MacGregor 7)

The lack of evidence to suggest that environmental pollution causes illness or negative impacts on one's emotional connection to his or her homeplace is more devastating than any certainty of disaster; therefore, toxic discourse needs to consider the psychological components of environmental degradation. The real toxicity is established when there is a fear of the unknown. If community members don't feel safe in their home areas and environments, then whether or not there is scientific proof of harmful pollutants is irrelevant. An important point Lawrence Buell makes about toxic discourse is that even though it is meant to "imply that [it] rests on anxieties about environmental poisoning for which there is copious historical evidence, it is plainly a discourse of allegation rather than of proof" (659). Before turning to a more focused analysis of

Giardina's use of narration and character development as it relates to her commentary on environmental crisis and the role the coal mine wars had on polluting hometown communities in Chapter 2 and Terry Tempest Williams's and Lois Gibbs's perceived risks related to toxic dumping in Chapter 4, it is important to consider risk theory as a relevant approach to literary and environmental scholarship.

Risk theory, paired with ecocriticism, functions as a backbone for a toxic discourse of contemporary literature. Ursula Heise's work situates risk theory at the forefront of ecocritical studies; Heise contends that risk theory has been neglected by literary criticism partly because the idea of risk is generally contained in the social sciences and some of its theories don't necessarily parallel that of environmentalism per se. Heise argues that the connections among ecocriticism, risk theory, and narrative result in the sharpening of the reading of contemporary texts and that risk theory requires narrative articulation therefore uncovering important implications for the analysis of narrative form (747).

According to Heise, the approach to risk that has produced the greatest amount of research is the focus on how different social groups perceive particular risks and what reasons led them to their assessments.[6] The key phrase in the application of this theory is *perceived risk*. In particular, Heise discusses expert and lay perceptions of risk. For example, she notes that experts tend to rank risk associated with nuclear power plants much lower than non-experts do, based on the limited number of accidents and deaths. Non-experts, however, rank them higher in hazardous risk than coal mines or highways,

[6] Psychometric theory draws from empirical studies to determine how the public perceives and assesses a wide range of risks. Cultural theory holds that individuals do not make risk assessments on a case-by-case basis. Heise notes an argument by anthropologist Mary Douglas and sociologist Aaron Wildavsky that asserts that any social community is affected by wide range risks, but only some of these are selected for conscious awareness and given particular significance (760).

the sites of larger numbers of fatalities each year. Such variables as voluntary versus involuntary risk, the scale of controllability of adverse effects, the presence or absence of a particular kind of dread, and the level of public trust in the authorities who manage a particular risk are all important to consider when applying the theory to a specific situation (760-61).

Frederick Buell's book *From Apocalypse to Way of Life* provides additional explanation as to how risk theory can help us understand the longevity of environmental impact on society. With environmental problems occurring more readily with immediate consequences, Buell points out that "society thus lived in a new condition of risk" (192). He suggests that risk and uncertainty are at the heart of "slow environmental crisis," and that the term "risk" incorporates "the effects of actual deterioration, invisible and still virtual deterioration, long-term consequences from present exposures, and probabilistic disasters, both the low-probability and high-impact kind and the high-probability low-impact kind" (192).[7] The events in the prose of Giardina, Williams, and Gibbs are nothing short of immediate, however. Losses of rights to the land and family as well as the deaths of loved ones make the coal companies' intrusions an immediate environmental disaster. Likewise, children being burned by invisible toxins in their backyards, and women inexplicably getting cancer because of where they live, each provide an equally immediate threat of disaster.

Part of the notion of risk theory is that the risk of certain environmental pollutions—for health, landscape, population—is unknown, thus leading to a slow environmental impact. Frederick Buell asserts, "The new, 'undelimitable' risks are

[7] Buell discusses Ulrich Beck's book *Risk Society* and mentions Beck's beliefs that an essential function of modern society is to contain and manage "risk."

impossible to prevent, hard to accommodate, and difficult to assign blame for. Unable to manage these risks adequately, society thus has to shift more and more of its attention from the production of goods to the management of these dangers and the social controversies they create" (193). In Giardina's *Storming Heaven*, the onset of the coal industry had yet to establish itself as a known environmental threat in the early twentieth century. Williams, in *Refuge,* her nonfiction book about her family, does not come to the conclusion that radiation from nuclear testing is causing cancer in women until the end of the narrative where she reveals her own cancer. Additionally, Gibbs and other community members at Love Canal are not aware of the toxic poisons on which their homes sit until many years after the toxic dumping has occurred. Because environmental effects may not be certain at the time, a wait-and-see measure is taken. In short, "risk society thus emerges when modernity, for a host of reasons, proves structurally unable to contain the hazards it produces" (193). Unfortunately, the hazards on the environment and communities by coal companies, the government, and large corporations were relatively unknown.

Perceptions of risk by experts and everyday citizens bring into question the objectivity and subjectivity of the risk assessment. Heise notes that in the 1970s, the prevailing assumption was that assessments of technical risk performed by experts in science, statistics, and engineering represented the objective degree of risk. Perceptions by lay-persons were considered less objective and less rational and in need of clarification and correction. In the 1980s, the focus moved toward an analysis of the social and cultural construction of risk. Heise contends that,

> Technical definitions of risk, which are mostly based on probability and magnitude of adverse effects, leave out crucial dimensions that a more comprehensive but perfectly rational assessment might want to take into account: for example, the unequal distribution of risks and benefits among different social and geographical groups or emergence of indirect costs. (761)

At this point, we are left to decipher whose risk assessments are the most realistic—the expert's or the lay townsperson's—and also what criteria to use to measure degrees of realism in the first place.

Readers of contemporary fiction can use any of the critical approaches I discuss in this chapter to better understand the technological fears of a given society as depicted in a work of literature, but these approaches can also be used to detect how risk perceptions manifest themselves in both literary and nonliterary writings (Heise 762). Heise contends that narrators have to make choices about which individuals or institutions serve as protagonists and antagonists in technological controversies, about where and how to conclude a story, and how to characterize their own relationship with the narrative material (as eyewitness, victim, scientific expert, or journalist). Heise continues, "The question of what prompts individuals and groups to view certain technological and ecological risks as significant and to consider others as minor or nonexistent is itself a matter of crucial importance for an ecocritical perspective" (763).[8]

[8] Questions Heise poses herself include these ones: Do writers and artists approach such risks mainly by way of established templates, or do they modify them and invent new, experimental ones? How are particular representations of risk generated, reflected, worked through, or resisted by means of such formal choices? What might be the cultural and ideological implications? Heise contends that the aforementioned questions provide an analysis that moves beyond the study of individual artifacts to the broader issue of how they participate in social and cultural processes of risk communication (763).

Nature as a Symbiotic Relationship

The operational nature of toxic discourse requires that the third wave of ecocriticism become grounded in a symbiotic relationship between human beings and the natural world. Humans must create an effective symbiotic relationship with the physical environment more now than ever before, and this symbiosis must be established at our own personal residences. Lawrence Buell asserts that physical nature's cultural importance lies in its role as humanity's "codependent and coconspirator." This idea is what defines environmental prose of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Nature must not be so much pristine, but "second" nature (656). We might consider finding the most appropriate way to live off nature rather than just admire it, therefore creating a theoretical inquiry that will appear operational rather than purely philosophical. The modern nature that toxic discourse recognizes is that the physical environment that humans inhabit is not a holistic spiritual or biotic economy but rather a network within which humans overlap and depend on one another.

Toxicity, or a toxic discourse, then, must be viewed as a symbiotic relationship in our own home places. The idea of symbiosis distinguishes a toxic discourse as an understanding that environmental threats are best understood on an emotional level. We depend on nature—for food, oxygen, and everyday human functioning—but we attempt to understand the environment best when these necessities are threatened. When it comes to reading about the many environmental problems plaguing the world, it is easy for any one of us to cast the problem aside as "just another problem." While a person in New York City may be legitimately concerned about the hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica, unless the ozone opens up over Central Park, it is difficult to contextualize the

problem. The point is that we understand that environmental pollution is a problem—the media will continue to remind us of that.[9] But unless we are directly and immediately affected, both physically and emotionally, the problem takes a back seat so to speak. The symbiotic relationship is not clearly established when the environmental issue is at a distance. Environmental pollution becomes a real threat when our personal space—our hometown communities and our own backyards, the space we've transformed into a personal place—is suddenly at risk.

To adequately establish the symbiotic relationship in literature, then, there are important questions that must be considered. For example, it is important to know if the media have had a major role in the disaster. Buell notes that narratives that focus on issues widely covered in the media leave important questions to be answered. Lois Gibbs's *Love Canal: My Story,* for example, forces readers to ask to what extent media coverage of the 1970s Love Canal catastrophe in New York shaped Gibbs's autobiography. Or did resident testimony shape the media coverage? In what is perhaps a subtle answer to the question, Lawrence Buell argues that the fear of poisons and toxicity has been around for ages, asserts that contemporary toxic discourse retells narratives of "rude awakening from simple pastoral to complex, " and reminds us to consider the "facticity" and accuracy of the images that are produced in such works (647-48).[10]

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[9] Finis Dunaway writes about images of environmental pollution portrayed by the media in her essay "Gas Masks, Pogo, and the Ecological Indian: Earth Day and the Visual Politics of American Environmentalism." For example, one image Dunaway includes is an ad that depicts a woman's breast as a toxic cylinder because of the buildup of toxins in the mother's milk. Dunaway also incorporates images of a mother and her infant wearing gas masks as they walk down the street, seemingly unaffected by the fact that the air they breathe is toxic.

[10] Buell notes that toxicity has been a theme in works by such nineteenth-century authors as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Catherine Beecher (647).

Part of Buell's call for such a discourse stems from the need to merge ecocentric and anthropocentric values in a "cross-fertilization" between ecocriticism and cultural studies, which I argue is present in *Silent Spring* but largely neglected by literary scholars. The best way to incorporate both a human-centered and environment-focused discussion is to concentrate on that entity which threatens both: toxicity. To do so, it is helpful to evaluate both human beings and nature as victims of toxicity as it appears in the places we know—our own backyards, where we are both victim and victimizer of our communities. Unfortunately, toxic discourse has not reached its full potential in the study of literature, but establishing a toxic discourse in home-focused prose about ecocatastrophes could prove significant in the advancement of our understanding of the relationship between nature and human beings, thus realizing Buell's goal of a cross-fertilization of anthropocentric and ecocentric viewpoints. Throughout the rest of this study, I use the phrase "ecocatastrophe prose" to refer to prose written about specific ecocatastrophic events.

Toxicity in literature becomes both a situation that is transposed onto the physical environment as well as a concept that affects the way we use, protect, and interact with the environment, suggesting that blended perceptions of the environment with human beings' desire to conquer or restore nature rest on their visions of the way nature "should be."[11] Buell asserts that toxic discourse calls for the "imagining of a physical

[11] Roderick Nash concludes in his classic book *Wilderness and the American Mind* that "Too much civilization, not too little, seemed at the root of the nation's difficulties" (143). Many theorists, including Nash, analyzed people's attitudes toward nature. Nash's book suggests that the relationship formed with the land is based on how much time and effort we spend fighting or cultivating it. Nash further asserts that our change in conception of wilderness from the days of the Indians until the early 1900s rests on an over expanding population and a change in the way we think about nature. Nash cites differences in thought, influenced by writings of such authors as Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Herman Melville, as one of the reasons people changed their perceptions of wilderness.

environment together with a social constructivist and restorationist perspective" (656). However, a successful toxic discourse, especially as it pertains to nature writing, cannot rely altogether on imaginings. Toxic discourse calls for a grounding in realism. Whereas some environmental prose is explicitly real, other texts, in the case of apocalyptic tales, are not meant to be taken at face value. However, as I demonstrate in Chapter 5, apocalyptic novels such as Philip Wylie's *The End of a Dream,* Paul Auster's *The Country of Last Things,* and Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* all portray realistic concerns that communities face. And they are playing off the fears of what could someday be real scenarios.

Making it Real: Personalizing Disaster

To seriously and effectively integrate toxic discourse into twentieth-and-twenty-first-century ecocriticism and literary studies, and to keep the variety of environmentalist, conservationist, and grassroots organizations fighting for the planet, an environmental crisis must be perceived as a real threat to everyone, and to do that, environmental catastrophe must be made personal, thus returning the voice of toxic discourse back to the people experiencing environmental collapse. If we encounter an environmental catastrophe that affects us physically and psychologically, it becomes a very real threat—an invasion of our own personal space and home, which upsets the symbiotic relationship that human beings rely on with nature. Novels, short stories, essays, poetry, drama, and memoirs written about a specific place by an author from that place, experiencing that place, are likely to provide a more accurate and better contextualized commentary on the environmental crisis.

Perhaps the most useful tool to use here is the bioregionalist approach to environmental crisis—to think globally, act locally, in the words of that often cited bioregionalist motto. Carson's *Silent Spring* became the starting point for the modern environmental movement and also the starting point for the creation of a toxic discourse and consciousness.[12] The problem is that Carson's book, which served as a catalyst for modern environmentalism, seems to have done little for the serious discussion of a literary toxic discourse because of its often ignored status in literary studies. It is more often perceived as a book of biology and politics. Ecocritics mention it often, but they seldom cite specifics from it. Ironically, Carson's book marks the new turn in environmental writing—that of the contaminated community.[13]

Rachel Carson suggests a bioregional approach to understanding the contaminated community in "A Fable for Tomorrow," the first chapter of *Silent Spring,* thereby beginning her book with one of the older literary genres. The chapter forces readers to interact with the environmental problems that Carson sets up throughout the book. Carson encourages readers to think about environmental collapse on a personal and emotional level. Readers gain a sense of place and a clearly defined "home" in the first

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[12] Former United States Vice President Al Gore, who wrote an introduction to Carson's book, notes that the text came at a time when "environment" wasn't even a word used in public policy and conservation. Gore argues that without this book, the environmental movement would have been delayed or not have developed at all.

[13] Carson's book, partly because of the controversy that surrounded it, became a huge success. The general public became aware of environmental issues they had not considered before, but the government and industrial officials did not buy into the claims Carson made. Gore mentions that since the publication of *Silent Spring*, pesticide use on farms has doubled to 1.1 billion tons a year, and production of these chemicals has increased to 400 percent (xix). In a speech to the Garden Club of America, Carson argued that the environmental situation in which the country found themselves in 1962 would get worse, and Gore points out that since her speech, we have dealt with soaring rates of cancer and other diseases related to pesticide use (xx). It should also be noted that an August 1962 *New York Times* article titled "U. S. Sets Up Panel to Review The Side Effects of Pesticides" addresses President Kennedy's discussion of the book at a conference where he appointed a panel to examine its conclusions.

chapter. Carson wants readers to think of their own hometown, homeplace, and spaces near their home environments. Carson's narrative style in this first chapter allows readers to apply the problems she discusses in later chapters to their own lives.

Carson's text is clearly a gateway text for not only the establishment of an environmentalist movement but the interdisciplinary academic study of literature and the environment, specifically as it relates to understanding the ramifications of our own contaminated communities. "A Fable for Tomorrow" is noticeably different from the rest of the book. While Carson's book uses a scientific approach to understand chemical use in the environment, her first chapter is a narrative—a philosophical "what if" scenario, almost a chapter of science fiction. The chapter, extremely short and lacking any kind of scientific jargon, serves as a vignette, allows the reader to insert him or herself into the situation. The chapter, which describes a lonely, quiet, destitute town in the United States, paints the picture of everyday "small-town" America. There are no more birds, no more running streams, and no more life. The fact that the chapter opens with such a marked difference in writing style forces readers to question Carson's intent. Before engaging with the serious issues that Carson puts forth, she first invites readers to insert their own hometown—their own "small-town" America—to serve as a visual for what is left to come. "This town does not actually exist," Carson asserts, "but it might easily have a thousand counterparts in America or elsewhere in the world" (3). She points out that every component of her town—of the environmental catastrophe—does exist somewhere real, albeit separately. Her town is thus a compilation of realities. Carson ends with the question that frames her entire book: "What has already silenced the voices of spring in countless towns in America?"

The purpose, then, of Carson's first chapter is to create a very personal feel to the crisis. Now that a reader is envisioning his or her own community, what's to follow is much more personal, both psychologically and physically. If Carson's powerful "diatribe" on the insecticide industry is what it takes to get the country to evaluate the seriousness of environmental pollution, the first chapter and purpose of Carson's book—to get people thinking locally and at home—is a significant first step to incorporating home-focused texts as the crucial voice in environmental catastrophe narratives.

While Carson's text is not classified as "hometown" literature, since it is not evident that she is writing about a particular town or area that she, herself, has considered home, her opening chapter does lay the foundation for the definition of hometown literature and its role in literary criticism today.[14] While Carson is not depicting a "home" of her own, the symbolism put forth in her opening chapter serves as everyone's home. It brings the global environmental issues from a place far away and irrelevant to our own backyards, which are very close and very personal, and for Carson, that attitude is established immediately in the first chapter. "Home," according to Lisa Knopp, "is both a community and a safe beloved place to lay down your living or dead body for the night or for eternity" (qtd. in Cahalan 259).[15]

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[14] James M. Cahalan asserts that a great deal of literature is hometown literature and defines hometown authors as "ones who not only grew up in their hometowns, but wrote about them," in his article "Teaching Hometown Literature: A Pedagogy of Place." He also states that "a writer need not have been born in the hometown for that place to be the central place of his or her upbringing and writing" (250). He also notes that often authors' writings about other places remain colored by their earliest, youthful hometowns and other home places.

[15] It should be noted that establishing a definition of "hometown" also requires an understanding of the concept of "place." Tim Cresswell, in his book *Place: A Short Introduction*, defines "place" as a meaningful location, and beyond that, as a term that does not refer to a "thing in the world," but a "way of understanding the world" (11). Space, on the other hand, is more abstract. Space, Cresswell argues, is "a realm without meaning" (10).

Establishing Authorial Voice

In addition to making environmental threats personal, the authoritative voice of environmental concerns needs to be given to the community members directly exposed to the problems. The effective symbiosis established thus far needs to be considered a symbiotic relationship between the scientist and layperson as well. There needs to be some connection between the scientist observing and the layperson experiencing environmental collapse. Just because data indicates that there is no environmental threat, if community members don't feel at ease living in their own homes, then an environmental threat exists—regardless of claims to the contrary. Toxic discourse needs to be keen to the psychological aspects of people. The lack of evidence to suggest that environmental pollution causes illness is more devastating than any certainty. It becomes a fear of the unknown. If we don't feel safe in our home areas and environments, then whether or not there is scientific proof of harmful pollutants is irrelevant.

The question, however, remains complicated—how do we reach that shift in authoritative voice?

Carson, a Marine Biologist for the Fish and Wildlife Service, speaks with the authority of science, given the training of her job. What makes her message important is not so much the technical knowledge she has of her job but the way she expresses that knowledge to the lay person. Here it is the expert with the knowledge of chemicals who makes the cry for help. Carson does call to action the layperson that needs to know the plants and animals residing in his or her own home areas. There is a move to educate the public; however, if one's hometown, area, or place is perceived to be in danger of

environmental collapse, then it does not matter if the person is an expert scientist or a layperson.[16] Simply put, the personal has been invaded.

In a hometown literary text it is necessary to determine the authoritative voice of the narrative and to establish meaning based on that voice. In many ways, the hometown environmental narrative serves as a grassroots campaign. Grassroots environmentalism of the 1970s cites many of the issues associated with the third wave of ecocriticism and conservationism. Protests, marches, and demonstrations were aimed at the government as people became more aware of environmental hazards on a local level (Dunlap and Mertig 28). Grassroots environmentalism is generally associated with groups of people directly affected by perceived health hazards within their communities (28-29). Victims and families of victims play a large role in forming such groups. The groups are focused on writing about toxic dumps, radioactive material, pollution, pesticides, and nuclear plants—virtually everything that toxicity as a theme in literature aims to uncover.

Grassroots groups tend to be comprised of minorities and all "classes" of society. Grassroots groups are formed not so much for the scientific and technical information associated with environmental hazards but the wish to educate members about relevant scientific and political issues as well as to provide a forum for exchanging experiences. The primary concern of grassroots groups is to look at human health concerns rather than environmental esthetics, wilderness preservation, or other issues (31). The motivating factor is to protect families against threatening health-related issues. Larger national groups tend not to focus on local communities and tend to overlook the working class.

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[16] Carson addresses the thoughtless killing of plants and animals deemed as pests in the "Earth's Green Mantle" chapter of *Silent Spring.* Specifically, Carson highlights the symbiotic relationship between the weed and the soil as well as the landscape and the animals that strive to live off it. The book *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (Van Andruss et al.) includes a self-scoring test about the basic environmental perceptions of one's own place.

Groups such as the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society, for example, focus on the preservation of land and wildlife. Grassroots groups center on human health effects, as does the contemporary literature in need of a toxic discourse.

A Theoretical Hometown Approach: Wendell Berry and Scott Russell Sanders

As I have outlined in this chapter thus far, a successful toxic discourse will carefully consider the role of a person's lived experiences and home place as it directly relates to the environmental catastrophe being examined. While I address several neighborhoods and other meaningful places and circumstances that shape the lives of both fictional and non-fictional characters, I also maintain that authors and their characters approach an environmental dilemma from the perspective of either a hometown native—from here on referred to as a "hometown insider" —or one who has *adopted* an area as his or her home town, to whom I refer as a "hometown outsider." This perspective clearly dictates the level of psychological impact that an environmental catastrophe has on a person and community as a whole. Wendell Berry's *The Long-Legged House* and Scott Russell Sanders's *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* serve as the foundations of the definitions of both hometown "insiders" and "outsiders" used throughout this dissertation.

Both Berry and Sanders explore the psychological and philosophical meanings of human attachment to land and memories of the areas where we spent our childhoods. While Berry's commentary reflects that of a hometown insider remembering his attachment to his native boyhood home of Port Royal, Kentucky, Sanders's account focuses on the destruction of his hometown in eastern Ohio and the loss of two others, including one in Tennessee, and his attachment as a hometown outsider to his adopted

hometown of Bloomington, Indiana. Although these authors have very different interactions with the area they call home, they each share their observations of a disintegrating home area. On the Kentucky River, Berry says,

> It is illuminating and suitably humbling to a man to recognize the great power of the river. But after he has recognized its power he is next called upon to recognize its limits. It can neither swallow up nor carry off all the trash that people convenience themselves by dumping into it. It can't carry off harmlessly all the sewage and pesticides and industrial contaminates that we are putting into it now, much less all that we will be capable of putting into it in a few years. We haven't accepted—we can't really believe—that the most characteristic product of our age of scientific miracles is junk, but that is so. And we still think and behave as though we face an unspoiled continent, with thousands of acres of living space for every man. (106-07)

Berry's observation of people's attitudes toward the environment echoes Carson's earlier concerns. Sanders, as well, has a very similar experience. Aware of the filth along the Ohio River, he states that "When I consider the annihilation of forests and the disappearance of wildlife, I cannot agree that such brief profit justifies so much desolation" (82). He notes that the river has become a dump for runoff from slaughter houses and sewage from homes as well as waste from factories. He says, "This, too, is part of the river's history, the tar and chemicals, the oil slicks, the squandering within a few generations of an unforeseen, unearned bounty" (82). The major difference between Berry and Sanders, however, is that Berry reflects on a life-long connection to the

Kentucky River, whereas one of Sanders's boyhood home areas, in eastern Ohio, was plunged under water by a U. S. Army Corp of Engineers dam and reservoir, and the other two places where he spent his transient childhood are also physically inaccessible to him. The years Berry spent in California as a Stegner Fellow at Stanford and New York as an NYU professor meant that to return to Port Royal was a crucial choice for him and that he saw his home place in a way quite different than if he had never left it. This brings Berry and Sanders a bit closer together: Both of them see their hometowns, whether native or adopted, from the perspective of thinkers who have lived in other places.

A brief analysis of Berry's account establishes him as the definitive hometown insider; I use him as a reference point for each major author and character. In the chapter "The Long-Legged House," Berry describes his earliest memories of Curran Mathews and his log cabin in the woods on the Kentucky River. Berry describes the connection Mathews has with the place he builds; once the dimensions are scratched out on the ground, there is a commitment to that particular place. This connection is apparent later in Berry's life. Berry recalls the log cabin being washed downstream and settling on the bank amongst some trees after the flood of 1937. After that, the cabin, or camp, became a special place for Berry: "Very early, I think, I began to be bound to the place in a relation so rich and profound as to seem almost mystical, as though I knew it before birth and was born for it" (115). Then, Berry discusses his reasons for his connection to the cabin and the river. Primarily, the camp gives him a sense of freedom. It is open to "experiences not comprehended in the regularities of the other grown people. That is only to suggest the intensity and the nature of the bond; such feelings, coming from so far back in childhood, lie deeper than the reasons that are thought of afterward" (115).

For Berry, the floods that threatened the camp became the realization that what was familiar to him was in jeopardy. Berry calls the floods modern floods—man-made—caused by mountain erosion from thoughtless lumbering and farming. He says, "Men's demands upon nature were about to begin an amazing increase that would continue until now. The era when Curran Mathews conceived and built the Camp was coming to an end" (118). Later, Berry settles at the Camp and realizes that "we were against civilization, and wanted as little to do with it as possible" (121). Much of the connection Berry has to his home stems from the memories of childhood. Becoming an adult provides a disconnect because of the necessity to become part of civilization. However, the Camp is representative of Berry's home. It is the place where his life comes to him naturally, and he longs for it when at military school. He says that he must have known that he was "the creature of another place, and that my life was already given to another way" (126).

As a writer, Berry clearly defines what it means to have a homeplace. He says, "Whereas most American writers—and even most Americans—of my time are displaced persons, I am a placed person" (140).[17] He further suggests that being a "placed person" is to invariably experience an intimate connection with the "place." He says, "My connection with this place comes not only from the intimate familiarity that began in babyhood, but also from the even more profound and mysterious knowledge that is inherited, handed down in memories and names and gestures and feelings, and in tones and inflections of voice" (140). Berry's experiences and connectedness to his home

[17] In the introduction to *The Journey Home,* Edward Abbey says, "Like so many others in this century I found myself a displaced person shortly after birth and have been looking half my life for a place to take my stand. Now I think I've found it, I must defend it. My home is the American West. All of it" (xiii-xiv).

become the voice of his prose. On the history of the Camp, Berry states, "What has interested me in telling the history of the Camp is the possibility of showing how a place and a person can come to belong to each other—or, rather, how a person can come to belong to a place, for places really belong to nobody" (143).

Berry's narrative supports the idea of a symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment as well as the emotional attachment one develops for his or her home. In his final chapter, "A Native Hill," Berry asserts that his and his family's history is based on their lives in Port Royal. Berry argues that "All that any of us may know of ourselves is to be known in relation to this place" (171). Berry's attachment and identification with Port Royal on a personal level is the type of relationship that we need to consider carefully when engaging a toxic discourse. Berry notes that he and the place are inseparable because of the meaningful experiences he has had there.

Whereas Berry evaluates the importance of his original home on his identity, Sanders explores how an adopted homeplace influences one's identity. For Sanders, the West Branch of the Mahoning River in northeastern Ohio was home and the place that "remains for me a primal landscape, imprinted on my senses, a place by which I measure every other place" (4). Sanders explains that in the 1960s, a dam was built and the river died. "But the building of the dam, the obliteration of that valley, the displacement of people and beasts, these were public acts, the sort of acts we have been repeating from coast to coast as we devour the continent" (4). Sanders's comment clearly echoes the concerns of environmentalists since the beginning of the environmental movement; however, Sanders's discussion is, like Carson's "A Fable for Tomorrow," within the context of one's own home. Sanders argues that loyalty to the land "Arises from our

need to be at home on the earth. We marry ourselves to the creation of knowing and cherishing a particular place, just as we join ourselves to the human family by marrying a particular man or woman. If the marriage is deep, divorce is painful" (13).

Sanders, after settling in Bloomington, Indiana, bought a house with his wife and, twenty years later, reflects on how it functions as a home. He asks, "How has this box, this frame of possibilities, come to fit me so exactly? By what alchemy does a house become a home?" Sanders explains that memories create that bond. "After nearly two decades of intimacy, the house dwells in us as surely as we dwell in the house" (23). Sanders suggests that a home is where one wants to go, somewhere one has created by the work of one's own hands. It's a place where one feels safe. A house is merely a shell that protects a person from the elements. Sanders further suggests that knowing the landscape around us is much more useful in forming a home than any zip code. He says, "When we figure our addresses, we might do better to forget zip codes and consider where the rain goes after it falls outside our windows" (62). The terrain and landscape, in Sanders's bioregionalist view, are more accurate than any state line or city limit.

In an attempt to create a toxic discourse that brings hometown ecocatastrophe prose together with established ecocritical theories, it is necessary to reflect momentarily on a few words of wisdom from Terry Eagleton:

> Perhaps we should celebrate the plurality of critical methods, adopt a tolerantly ecumenical posture and rejoice in our freedom from the tyranny of any single procedure. Before we become too euphoric, however, we should notice that there are certain problems here too. For one thing, not all of these methods are mutually compatible. However generously

> liberal-minded we aim to be, trying to combine structuralism, phenomenology, and psychoanalysis is more likely to lead to a nervous breakdown than to a brilliant literary career. (172)

Given the many theories and ideas that I have explained and proposed in this introduction, it is necessary to take Eagleton's suggestion seriously. Specific theories and ideas are practiced in particular chapters as most appropriate and effective.

In Chapter 1, I begin with a global ecocritical reading of Edward Abbey's *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) to demonstrate how the environmental crisis as perceived by hometown community members is more of a fight for individual freedom than environmental preservation. Using characterization and satire as a focus, I discuss Abbey's four protagonists' reactions to the destruction of the Arizona and Utah desert at the hands of industrial companies. Enraged, Abbey's characters turn to their own form of grassroots activism—setting fire to billboards, destroying machinery, and engaging in violent combat. The chapter makes connections between those characters who reflect a Berry-styled "hometown insider," such as Hayduke and Seldom Seen Smith, and individuals such as Doc Sarvis and Bonnie Abbzug who, like Sanders, have adopted a place and function as a "hometown outsider."

The hometown insider and outsider thread is continued into Chapter 2, where I explore further the psychological stress associated with the environmental destruction of one's community. However, in this chapter I advance the toxic discourse beyond a global ecocritical perspective to one that is informed by risk theory and environmental justice. I use Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven* (1987) to investigate not only how the mining industry destroyed the physical environmental atmosphere of small Appalachian

communities as well as how it interfered with community members' abilities to stay connected to or adjust to their home area and have traditional families. Focusing on narration and point of view, I analyze how the novel's four main protagonists, as hometown insiders, create an authoritative account of the loss of family, community, and environment.

Nevada Barr's first environmental mystery novel, *Track of the Cat* (1993), is the focus of Chapter 3. In this chapter I again call on the theories of environmental justice to examine the conflict between ranchers who call the Guadalupe Mountains National Park in West Texas home and park rangers who "adopt" the area and try to prevent the hunting of mountain lions. This chapter considers the radical voices associated with grassroots activism and the equally radical relationships established by Barr's protagonists.

In Chapter 4, I focus more closely on hometown insiders while turning to two works of non-fiction, Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* (1993) and Lois Gibbs's *Love Canal: My Story* (1978). In this chapter, risk theory, environmental justice, and ecofeminism help to situate the role of two women, both Williams and Gibbs themselves, as they reveal their understanding of environmental pollution and its ramifications on the physical health of members of their communities.

Chapter 5, like the earlier chapters, addresses how communities respond to environmental pollution; however, this chapter looks at futuristic communities as they are portrayed in three apocalyptic novels: Philip Wylie's *The End of the Dream* (1972), Paul Auster's *The Country of Last Things* (1987), and Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* (1993). Specifically, I analyze several predictions made by contemporary authors experiencing environmental catastrophes. The chapter focuses on the role of community

mutual aid, the destruction of safe places to live, and the idea that there is indeed hope that Earth will rebound for future generations long after this generation's lifespan.

In my conclusion, I address the relevance and importance of a toxic discourse in the past decade. First, I focus on recent environmental concerns, including coal mine fires that threaten one Pennsylvania community, and the Marcellus Shale controversy, and I offer a brief overview of a few literary texts written in the past decade that were not discussed at length in this dissertation. Moreover, I conclude this study by addressing some of the limitations of a toxic discourse as it is presented here and areas still in need of investigation.

CHAPTER 1

"BEDROCK AND PARADOX": ANARCHY, UTOPIA, AND DISILLUSIONED HOMETOWN ACTIVISTS IN EDWARD ABBEY'S *THE MONKEY WRENCH GANG*[1]

> What is the sake of building a great city if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on? Earth First! How can we create a civilization fit for the dignity of free men and women if the globe itself is ravaged and polluted and defiled and insulted? The domination of nature leads to the domination of human beings.
>
> —Edward Abbey[2]

This remark by Edward Abbey in a speech in 1981 outlines the fundamental argument at the heart of post-1960s environmental fiction. Finding the most appropriate starting point for a conversation on toxicity in post-Carson environmental fiction, however, is an arduous task. Novels that surfaced in the 1970s, though not the focus of this chapter but important to make mention of—such as Wilma Dykeman's *Return the Innocent Earth* (1973), Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1974), and Kate Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976)—lend themselves to a relevant discussion of environmental apocalypse in light of Abbey's assertion that the domination of nature

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[1] "Bedrock and Paradox" is the title of Abbey's final chapter in *Desert Solitaire*. Abbey, in this concluding chapter, reflects on his six months in the desert, the tourists he has encountered, and the inevitability of his own return to "Megalomania, U. S. A."

[2] The quotation comes from a speech Edward Abbey delivered at a protest at Glen Canyon Dam in Utah on March 21, 1981, as quoted in Daniel J. Philippon's *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement.* In the documentary *A Voice in the Wilderness: Edward Abbey*, it is made clear that to Abbey Glen Canyon Dam is symbolic of all the destruction of the southwest desert. In Abbey's 1980 novel *Good News,* the Chief, a central villain determined to re-establish a demolished Phoenix, Arizona under the rule of dictatorship, illustrates would-be Abbey opponents when he says, "This shabby little planet we call Earth is not our home but our prison—our Elba—and its only function is to serve us, eventually, as a launching platform for the journey beyond" (185).

leads to the domination of human beings.[3] A toxic discourse on 1970s environmental fiction that includes the concerns and aims of local activism, in conjunction with those ideas that Rachel Carson presented in 1962 in *Silent Spring*, might be best suited to find its starting point in Edward Abbey's novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975).[4]

Published in the midst of a volatile environmental battle in which national environmental groups and more radical, local groups were butting heads with each other and industrial companies, Abbey's novel forcefully depicts the environmental depletion of the American desert and the psychological disintegration of those people fighting for its preservation. John Beck asserts that "much of the Southwest is an achieved apocalypse, a space laden with invisible toxic evils, and environmentalists draw heavily on the legacy of millenarian and romantic figures of the apocalyptic sublime in order to describe what goes on in places like the American deserts" (69). To this end, the novel focuses on the interaction of four environmental activists concerned about the desert's destruction and perhaps even more concerned with the destruction of their homes and families.[5] The timeliness of the novel's publication underscores Abbey's awareness of the importance of highlighting the negative psychological effects that the strained relationships between community members have on individuals within environmental

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[3] Callenbach's *Ecotopia* imagines the perfect self-sustaining environment made up of Northern California, Oregon, and Washington after they have separated from the rest of the United States. Dykeman's *Return the Innocent Earth* marries past and present families struggling with morals of technological growth and the effects on their family businesses. Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* is a science fiction novel that depicts a post-holocaust community that uses cloning as a way to protect itself and civilization.

[4] In *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement*, Daniel J. Philippon suggests that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* was the novel that "crystallized the latent desire of many young activists for a new kind of resistance to environmentally destructive activities" (240).

[5] Arthur Dekker, another one of Abbey's central characters in *Good News* (1980), begins the tale of a dystopian community affected by environmental apocalypse when he tells the story of his mother being burned in a fire set by a group of horsemen and motorcyclists (28).

movements. Scott Slovic states, "Instead of merely presenting an environmental ideology or even a group of fictional role models for would-be activists, Abbey is trying to prompt a more basic kind of consciousness among his readers, to provoke not a single-minded political movement but rather an awareness on the individual level of the need to question moral and aesthetic assumptions" (qtd. in Philippon 240-41). The fight against these assumptions, as seen in *The Monkey Wrench Gang,* leads to a series of events that leave Abbey's characters blurring the line between reality and fantasy.

Although Abbey's novel provides a serious commentary about the psychological effects that industrialization can have on both native and adopted hometown residents, it is essential to treat that serious commentary within the context of the novel's humor. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and its sequel *Hayduke Lives!* (1990) both serve as satirical commentaries that often leave their characters looking immature and juvenile. In the documentary *A Voice in the Wilderness,* Abbey's sister, Nancy, says that "Part of the outrage you hear with Ed is humor." Additionally, Abbey's friend and fellow author Charles Bowden links him to satirists Mark Twain and Kurt Vonnegut, and he says that Abbey used humor to deliver a message and stay sane. James I. McClintock asserts that Abbey's humorous tone "is to evoke a tolerance for human limitations while castigating the worst practices and injustices arising from greed and hypocrisy" (51-52). Abbey uses humor to acquaint his reader with the problems of environmental degradation without taking the monkeywrenchers' illegal acts too seriously.

The satire begins immediately in the prologue to *The Monkey Wrench Gang* where Abbey offers a humorous introduction to technology. The narrator quotes an official speaking at the opening of Glen Canyon Dam:

> This proud state of Utah [bleeeeeeep!] glad to have this opportunity [ronk!] take part in opening of this magnificent bridge [bleeeeeeet!] joining us to great state of Arizona, fastest growing [yiiiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnnnng!] to help promote and assure continued growth and economic [rawk! yawk! yiiiinnnng! niiiinnnnnnng!] could give me more pleasure, Governor, than this significant occasion [rawnk!] of our two states [blonk!] by that great dam. . . (2-3)

The scene that starts the novel clearly introduces readers to technology that is less than perfect, and in fact, technology that might be viewed as an obstruction to communication with its variety of stray noises and interruptions. However, Abbey shows more seriously that from the beginning of the novel, our reliance on technology to communicate is seriously plagued.

Later in the novel, the seriousness of a would-be ecosaboteur is softened to the level of a juvenile wish for disaster when Seldom Seen Smith begins to pray to God for an earthquake to destroy the bridge.

> How about a little old pre-cision type earthquake right under this dam? Okay? Any time. Right now for instance would suit me fine. [. . .] Okay, God, I see you don't want to do it just now. Well, all right, suit yourself, you're the boss, but we ain't got a hell of a lot of time. Make it pretty soon, goddammit. A-men. (34)

The scene provides humor in the way that Seldom Seen is praying for an act of God to help him in his endeavor to combat the industrialists, assuming that a higher power would be as upset about the environmental depletion as he is.

While many readers may see Abbey's novel as the catalyst for ecosabotage and grassroots activism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I argue that the novel humorously depicts four helpless, psychologically-troubled protagonists who serve as would-be hometown heroes fighting a war against an industrial movement that threatens their assumed rights to and ownership of the desert. At the same time, Abbey depicts equally psychologically-disturbed antagonists, led by Bishop Love, who also believe that the desert is theirs to use as they see fit. While the protagonists exhibit unrealistic goals of disabling the entire industrial movement in the American Southwest, they do realistically demonstrate the psychological interplay of those characters connected to a home area, both adopted and native. It seems that Abbey's humor in creating the absurdity of both protagonists and antagonists functions to address the legitimate anger people felt at the destruction of the desert while at the same time exploiting the over-the-top solutions people had to combat that destruction.

Before engaging in an in-depth discussion of Abbey's novel, I want to clarify how the concept of "home" and "hometown" are used in this chapter, and likewise, how I use the phrases "hometown insider" and "hometown outsider." First, I define "home" as a theoretical construct that describes one's emotional attachment to an environment or a place where he or she feels physically and mentally contented. Moreover, one's "hometown" may not be solely the physical location where a person was born but the area, whether from birth or adopted later, where a person feels most emotionally grounded.[6] Therefore, as I explained in the previous chapter, I refer to a person who lives

[6] In *Edward Abbey: A Life* (2001), James M. Cahalan addresses the origin myth that Edward Abbey, himself, helped perpetuate. Despite Abbey's own description of his birth in a farmhouse in the rural village of Home, Pennsylvania, Cahalan notes that Abbey was born to Mildred and Paul Abbey at the local hospital in the county seat, Indiana, Pennsylvania, ten miles south of the tiny, unincorporated village of

and fights for the place in which she or he was born as a "hometown insider" and a person who has *adopted* a particular place as a home without having been necessarily born there as a "hometown outsider."

My definitions of "home" and "hometown" take into consideration Tim Cresswell's discussion of space and place. Cresswell argues that a physical space becomes a place when emotional attachment to that specific location is recognized. For example, people have a sense of place about the locations they inhabited as children. The emotional attachment for places experienced in childhood may be established because of the contented feelings one has for such locations.[7] "It is commonplace in Western societies in the twenty first century," he argues, "to bemoan a loss of a sense of place as the forces of globalization have eroded local cultures and produced homogenized global spaces" (8). As familiar places disappear, we experience a sense of loss because, "home is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. Home, more than anywhere else, is seen as a center of meaning and a field of care" (24). Furthermore, Cresswell cites David Seamon, who suggests that "home is an intimate place of rest where a person can withdraw from the hustle of the world outside and have some degree of control over what happens within a limited space" (24). It makes sense, therefore, that authors who write about environmentally threatening situations move

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Home, before returning to their rented house in downtown Indiana. Cahalan also notes that the Abbeys moved around the county several times, and that Abbey lived in at least eight different places during the first fourteen years of his life. Abbey often listed the village of Home as his hometown because he liked the way it sounded on the jackets of book covers. Cahalan also notes that Abbey identified more with the "Appalachian uplands around Home than with the trade center of Indiana" (4). Cahalan illustrates how many of Abbey's writings about his adopted home in the Southwest desert refer to and echo his original home in Western Pennsylvania.

[7] I say "may be established" because one's home may not always be a positive place. James Cahalan argues that there is a big difference between authors who voluntarily leave their homes and write about them and those who are "involuntary exiles." "For exiles who have been displaced from their homes," Cahalan asserts, "home is only an impossible and therefore painful memory" (258).

forward the plot and conflict of their fiction by focusing on their main characters' interactions with the environment, and more importantly, on the geographical environment those characters call "home."

It seems, then, that Abbey's fictional monkeywrenchers echo Scott Russell Sanders's idea of home as based on connectedness to the land.[8] He says, "Returning to one's native ground, always tricky, becomes downright treacherous when the ground is at the bottom of a lake. Unwilling to dive through so much water, I can return to childhood, only by diving through memory" (5). Memory of what the desert used to be before the industrialists started taking over is what motivates Abbey's characters to target Glen Canyon Dam and Lake "Foul" (Powell). Seldom Seen says, "Now you know as well as me that if them goddamn Government men get this dam filled up with water it's gonna flood more canyons, suffocate more trees, drown more deer and generally ruin the neighborhood" (157). Like Sanders who cannot return "home," Hayduke cannot return to the home he left.

An individual's true home is much more equated with the physical landscape than a zip code—or a state line and other political boundaries—and when the characters witness the physical erosion of a landscape that provides or once provided those contented feelings, placelessness becomes the central psychological problem.[9] Edward

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[8] Not only do Abbey's characters echo Sanders's idea, but Abbey himself reflects this connectedness to the land as he adopted the Southwest as his home, like Sanders did with Bloomington.

[9] John Beck reminds us that in the development of cities in the nineteenth century, individuals suffered an "estrangement within the uniformity of the crowd, surrounded by overbearing buildings and reflected in endless windows and surfaces, the experience of home as "not-at-home" becomes multiplied." He then argues that such alienation becomes "associated with pathology, particularly with phobias associated with spatial fear, like agoraphobia and claustrophobia, where a distancing from reality is generated by reality itself. The feeling of exile from one's home even while one is at home, of an anxiety over and a lived experience of homelessness shadows the twentieth century" (74).

Relph, a humanistic geographer, argues that "We are surrounded by a general condition of creeping placelessness marked by an inability to have authentic relationships to place because the new placelessness does not allow people to become existential insiders" (qtd. in Cresswell 44-45). Edward Abbey writes in *Desert Solitaire,* "For myself I'll take Moab, Utah. I don't mean the town itself, of course, but the country which surrounds it—the canyonlands. The slickrock desert. The red dust and the burnt cliffs and the lonely sky—all that which lies beyond the end of the roads" (1). Adopting a home other than a childhood home, then, depends largely upon creating an intimate relationship with the physical environment, and when the environment is threatened, as Relph suggests, or flooded beyond safe access as both Sanders and Seldom Seen fear, authentic relationships with the land become difficult to establish and maintain.

Abbey's novel portrays characters that embrace the definition of home and *adopted* home that Sanders proposes, the notion of place and space that Cresswell discusses, and the threat of placelessness that Relph describes. Moreover, the characters in the novel reflect Abbey's own philosophy about defending the wilderness. In the documentary *A Voice in the Wilderness: Edward Abbey,* Abbey says, "I regard defending the wilderness something like defending your own home. I regard the wilderness as my home, my true ancestral home, and when it is being invaded by clear-cutters and strip-miners, I feel not only the right but the duty, the moral obligation to defend it by any means that I can." As the desert really encompasses many Southwestern locales, it is a bit more difficult to decipher who constitutes a "hometown insider" based on the dichotomy that I established earlier. For this argument I broaden the definition to distinguish that "hometown insiders" are those who associate home more with the desert

in general, *natives* of desert areas in the American Southwest. Two of the four protagonists—George Washington Hayduke and Seldom Seen Smith—act as hometown insiders, both tied to the Southwest desert and carrying out the most substantial acts of ecosabotage. Doc Sarvis and Bonnie Abbzug—both of whom act strictly on the notion that environmental depletion creates a moral imperative—are hometown outsiders, characters who are native to other areas but who serve as lookouts, financial backers, and transporters.

Abbey demonstrates how when the "hometown" boy is forced out of the freedom of his own home, he turns to a life of wild savagery, displaying post-traumatic types of behavior. It is important to note that Hayduke, a Vietnam vet, suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.[10] Other members of the group do not suffer from the same obsessive traits. The urgency of the detrimental psychological effects that industrialization of the American Southwest desert has on its community members is communicated by the progressive obsession Hayduke has for his dual identities—as Hayduke and Rudolph the Red—engaging in unnecessary violence, and believing the environmental attack is a direct attack on his personal character.[11] The juxtaposition of Hayduke against the rest of the monkeywrenchers adds significantly to Hayduke's psychological decline. "It became a question of subtle, sophisticated harassment

[10] Doug Peacock (Hayduke) credits Abbey with being a pioneer in accurately describing post-traumatic stress disorder, even though that term didn't yet exist in 1975.

[11] "Abbey thought he was escaping from the overrun East to a more pristine Southwest; instead, he relocated to what would become major sites of overdevelopment, while his native Appalachia languished far behind, with higher levels of unemployment forcing more people to leave. From his arrival in Albuquerque in 1948 until his death in Tucson in 1989, Abbey was a constant witness of this exponential postwar growth—a defining experience and nemesis for him. As he would repeatedly declare, 'Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell'" (qtd. in Cahalan, *Life* 38). Once Abbey's money had run out in the fall of 1948, he worked on an assembly line in a General Electric refrigerator factory with his brother Howard, in Erie, Pennsylvania and spent "six pointless months of hell" in western Pennsylvania in January 1954 (39).

techniques versus blatant and outrageous industrial sabotage. Hayduke favored the blatant, the outrageous, the others the other" (74). Hayduke's "blatant and outrageous" behavior is fostered by the personal invasion of his freedom.

Before the raid at Comb Wash in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey introduces his readers to Hayduke when the narrator announces that "George Washington Hayduke, Vietnam, Special Forces, had a grudge" (16). That grudge had everything to do with the condition of Hayduke's desert home after a two-year leave to serve as a Green Beret in Vietnam. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator reflects on Hayduke's vision of his hometown of Tucson and the desert as "clear and classical." However, upon Hayduke's return after two years away, he found his hometown "ringed [. . .] with a circle of Titan ICBM bases. The open desert was being scraped bare of all vegetation, all life, by giant D-9 bulldozers reminding him of the Rome plows leveling Vietnam" (16). The war images and references, in addition to the fact that Hayduke was recently at war, serve as a metaphor for the destruction of the desert and his hometown and also his willingness to fight for his "wild" uninhibited side in an attempt to regain his freedom, which is threatened by the industrialists. He is losing his home, his freedom, and his identity.

Hayduke's key to happiness is the freedom to do as he pleases, where he pleases, when he pleases. However, when he realizes that his freedom has been impinged upon by corporate America, he believes that he is fighting a war for all of humanity when, in fact, it seems that he is in a one-man war against all of humanity. I make this argument primarily because Hayduke is not necessarily placing his grudge against the industrial companies for environmental reasons at the forefront of his attack. Rather, he places the impact that the clearing of his home area has on his freedom above any other reason for

his war. Hayduke represents, albeit in a humorous and illogical way, the unwillingness of those people inhabiting untamed areas to give in and be tamed themselves. To illustrate this point, one need not look any further than one absurd act of revenge that Hayduke orchestrates at the beginning of the novel against a police officer, Hall, who put him in jail for drunkenness. Hayduke follows Hall home, and when Hall is inside, he steals the police cruiser, parks it on the train tracks, and watches in delight as the car is destroyed. An image worth noting is that the train, representing industrialization and progress, destroys authority, those powers seemingly responsible for a lot of the destruction in the desert. The narrator says, "The sweetness of it. The satisfaction of a job well done. He dreamt of home" (25). The police officer is a representation of authority, the same authority that compromises Hayduke's freedom.[12]

Abbey viewed the desert as the last true spiritual place, and he demonstrates how the removal of the desert leads Hayduke to deteriorate psychologically.[13] The narrator states,

> When the cities are gone, he thought, and all the ruckus has died away, when sunflowers push up through the concrete and asphalt of the forgotten interstate freeways, when the Kremlin and the Pentagon are turned into nursing homes for generals, presidents and other such shitheads, when the glass-aluminum skyscraper tombs of Phoenix Arizona barely show above the sand dunes, why then, why then by God maybe free men and wild

[12] Cahalan references this scene in his biography and relates it to Abbey's arrest in 1944 for vagrancy near the center of town in Flagstaff, Arizona where he was thrown in a drunk tank for a night. Unlike Hayduke's violent act of revenge, Abbey was given a one-dollar bail and told by the judge to never come back to Flagstaff (*Life* 30).

[13] Beck calls the desert a "ground of potentiality," suggesting that the desert serves as a void while at the same time serving as "the place for boundless free play." He also asserts that deserts "elicit responses of both terror and ecstasy, of disgust and liberation" (Beck 63-64).

> women on horses, free women and wild men, can roam the sagebrush canyonlands in freedom—goddammit! (107)

Initially, the desert, or his home, serves as a place where his anger is eased, but the desert is quickly disappearing and so is Hayduke's ability to remain rational. "I sat in that rotting jungle every night, playing with my chain, and all I could think about was home," he recollects, "and I don't mean Tucson. I had to think about something clean and decent or go crazy, so I thought about the canyons. I thought about the desert down along the Gulf coast. I thought about the mountains, from Flagstaff up to the Wind Rivers" (359). The narrator points out that Hayduke considers "a squalid plague of future slums constructed of green two-by-fours, dry-wall fiberboard and prefab roofs that blew off in the first good wind" (16). He also notes that the sky is a "dump for the gaseous garbage of the copper smelters, the filth that Kennecott, Anaconda, Phelps-Dodge, and American Smelting & Refining Co. were pumping into the public sky" (17). Clearly as Hayduke's psychological well-being erodes, Abbey is careful to make certain that Hayduke's environmental concerns are serious and legitimate.

Hayduke, arguably the most controversial member of the group, is most tied to the land, thus being the first and best example of a hometown insider. He survives off the land, knows how to engage in a symbiotic relationship with it, and clearly shows an intimate relationship with the land. In one instance, the narrator makes clear the suggested romantic relationship Hayduke has with nature and also the sense of ownership he has with the land. The narrator says that "The hot fury of the wind at 65 mph whistled past his open window, strummed his sleeve, kissed his ear as he drove on and on,

northeast toward the high country, the good country, God's country, Hayduke's country, by God. And it better stay that way. Or by God there'll be trouble" (18).

Yet another example where Hayduke finds comfort and attachment to the land is when he sleeps outside after the satisfaction of destroying Hall's police car:

> He slept well that night, out in the piney woods near Sunset Crater, twenty miles to the northeast, snug in his broad-shouldered mummy bag, his goosedown sack, light as a feather, warm as the womb. Under the diamond blaze of Orion, the shimmer of the Seven Sisters, while shooting stars trailed languid flames through the troposphere. The sweetness of it. The satisfaction of a job well done. He dreamt of home. Wherever that is. Of silken thighs. Wherever they may lead. Of a tree greener than thought in a canyon red as iron. (25)

The desert, for Abbey and his fictional characters, represents a broader sense of "home," the soldier's *homeland*. To establish the significance of the real war that is being fought in the novel, it is important to recognize that the desert, at least to Abbey and, to a large extent, Hayduke, is a spiritual place, unlike any other wilderness, where one can experience the attainment of freedom.

Given Abbey's and his characters' views of the significance of the desert, it is appropriate to take into consideration some possible rhetorical representations that the desert provides. Beck discusses five main rhetorical tropes that emerge from the idea that the desert is a vacant, sometimes spiritual place. First, acceptance of the desert's emptiness and uselessness lends itself to experimentation and testing, clearly illustrated in

the novel with the activities of the industrial companies and Hayduke himself.[14] Second, the desert represents apocalypse because of its "evidence of the ultimate wasteland." Beck's third rhetorical trope suggests that the desert is regarded as the limit to reason because its vastness and "tendency to alter habits of perception" make it difficult to understand. Hayduke demonstrates Beck's fourth trope as desert as a venue for escaping modernity, an "elemental alternative to the rational order of 'civilized' life, or, conversely, representative of the chaos of an unordered primal 'nature' that must be resisted and expunged." Finally, Beck suggests that the desert symbolizes contemporary capitalism, since it is a space without boundaries "unregulated by old practices and habits" (65-66).

In *Desert Solitaire*, published in 1968, seven years before *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey addressed the importance that the desert plays on his psyche while working as a park ranger at Arches National Monument near Moab, Utah. Early in his account, Abbey writes,

> The personification of the natural is exactly the tendency I wish to suppress in myself, to eliminate for good. I am here not only to evade for a while the clamor and filth and confusion of the cultural apparatus but also to confront, immediately and directly if it's possible, the bare bones of existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us. I want to be able to look at and into a juniper tree, a piece of quartz, a vulture, a spider, and see it as it is in itself, devoid of all humanly ascribed

[14] Frank Bergon's 1993 novel *The Temptations of St. Ed and Brother S* documents the struggle of two monks battling the U. S. Department of Energy, which plans to install the first ever nuclear waste dump in a remote mountain in the Nevada desert. The monks, conflicted with adhering to the traditional monasticism beliefs, find conflict in the faith of a technological society and that of a spiritual community.

> qualities, anti-Kantian, even the categories of scientific description. To meet God or Medusa face to face, even if it means risking everything human in myself. I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges with a non-human world and yet somehow survives still intact, individual, separate. Paradox and bedrock. (7)

The war on tourism and industrialization that Abbey fights in *Desert Solitaire* translates to *The Monkey Wrench Gang* in that the activists are fighting for the freedom to have a home, a place to commune with some higher power, or a place where humans are still humbled by nature's mere existence.[15] Abbey writes later in the book, "Love flowers best in openness and freedom" (31). The openness and freedom of the desert is the ideal sanctuary for both Abbey and his semi-fictional desert native, George Washington Hayduke.[16]

Hayduke, already immersed in a war sensibility, establishes a very clear philosophy and mission. Hayduke's philosophy seems to reflect that of Abbey. In his essay "Theory of Anarchy," Abbey defines anarchism as

> maximum democracy: the maximum possible dispersal of political power, economic power, and force-military power. An anarchist society consists of a voluntary association of self-reliant, self-supporting, autonomous

[15] Beck argues that the perception of the desert as worthless actually gives it value, since experiments that cannot be conducted elsewhere can be carried out there. So, the negative view of the desert is easily transformed as a "space to be filled, as a national laboratory, a place meaningless in itself and useful in its very expendability. The desert becomes a facilitator, a site, a place evacuated of any significance other than the instrumental" (67-68).

[16] Abbey asserts that the characters for *The Monkey Wrench Gang* were based partly on a few friends involved in environmental activist groups. Hayduke is generally based on Doug Peacock, an ex-Green Beret (Phillippon 246), who since Abbey's death in 1989 has followed in his footsteps not only as an environmental activist but as accomplished authors of such books as *The Grizzly Years: In Search of the American Wilderness* (1990) and *Walking It Off: A Veteran's Chronicle of War and Wilderness* (2005).

> communities. The anarchist community would consist [. . .] of a voluntary association of free and independent families, self-reliant and self-supporting but bound for kinship ties and a tradition of mutual aid. (qtd. in Philippon 230)[17]

For Hayduke, his fight on environmental destruction has nothing to do with the destruction of the wild or the compromising of people's health. It's all about freedom—his ability to do what he pleases on *his* land. To illustrate this point, he throws beer cans out the window of his jeep and insists on removing bridges because the people are driving their "tin cars into the holy land" (27). When he reminds himself, "Well you're doing it too [. . .]," he responds, "Yeah, but I'm on important business. Besides, I'm an elitist. Anyway, the road's here now, might as well use it. I paid my taxes too. . ." (27). For Hayduke, the fight against industrialization is about equality, not land preservation.[18] As long as Hayduke has the opportunity to pollute the roads (since the roads are already a form of litter anyway), then he will take the opportunity to contribute to the pollution.[19] In regards to freedom, the narrator says that Hayduke "was a menace to other drivers but

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[17] In *Good News,* the Chief says to the people gathered, "The goal, of course, is Washington D. C., which we shall re-establish as the nation's capital. The overall plan, gentlemen, quite simply, is to rebuild America, to make her once again the world's foremost industrial, military, and—if I may say so—spiritual power, an example to mankind of what human beings, properly organized and disciplined, can accomplish" (95). America will be established based on a hierarchy of power based on merit and ability. "Government of the people, yes. Government for the people, yes. But government *by* the people? Never again." (96) The Chief envisions a thoroughly technological state. "The conquest of Nature, once far advanced, now temporarily interrupted, will be resumed and completed" (96).

[18] As a Green Beret, Hayduke was charged with the mission of supposedly liberating those forces who were oppressed. The war that Abbey addresses, however, is not Vietnam. It's a civil war, and Hayduke demonstrates a commitment to liberating the hometown residents experiencing their loss of freedom to industrialists.

[19] In his essay "The Second Rape of the West" in *The Journey Home* (1977), Abbey states, "Of course I litter the public highway. Every chance I get. After all, it's not the beer cans that are ugly; it's the highway that is ugly. Beer cans are beautiful, and someday, when recycling becomes a serious enterprise, the government can put one million kids to work each summer picking up the cans I and others have thoughtfully stored along the roadways" (158-59).

justified himself in this way: If you don't drink, don't drive. If you drink, drive like hell. Why? Because freedom, not safety, is the highest good" (28). He clearly enjoys engaging in activities that defy authority, illustrated when he disobeys the speed limit and stops on a bridge where it says "no stopping."

Seldom Seen Smith, like Hayduke, does not rely on a street address or zip code for his home. His home is the environment, often seeming less of a visitor there than in his own homes. Smith, a jack Mormon, practices a unique form of plural marriage, with wives in three different Utah towns: Cedar City, Bountiful, and Green River. For Smith, the memories of his physical home in the wilderness lend themselves to the hatred he feels toward developments such as Glen Canyon Dam.[20]

> Like Hayduke his heart was full of a healthy hatred. Because Smith remembered something different. He remembered the golden river flowing to the sea. He remembered canyons called Hidden Passage and Salvation and Last Chance and Forbidden and Twilight and many many more, some that never had a name. He remembered the strange great amphitheaters called Music Temple and Cathedral in the Desert. All these things now lay beneath the dead water of the reservoir, slowly disappearing under layers of descending silt. (32)

Seldom Seen was a professional guide, wilderness outfitter, boatman, and packer. "Smith thought he lived a good life. His only complaint was that the U. S. Government, the Utah State Highway Department and a consortium of oil companies, mining companies and

[20] The narrator states, "Hayduke and Smith, jouncing down into the red desert, passed without stopping (for Smith could not bear the memories) the turnoff to the old road which formerly had led to the hamlet of Hite [. . .] Hite, once home for Seldom Seen and still official headquarters of his business, now lies underwater" (119).

public utilities were trying to destroy his livelihood, put him out of business and obstruct his view" (35). Seldom Seen is tied to the land because his livelihood comes from it.

Unlike Hayduke, Doc Sarvis, the unofficial financial backer of the monkeywrenchers, takes a different stance on environmental problems. Sarvis, as an outsider, is fighting for the environmental movement but more for moral reasons than any kind of personal attack. At one point in *The Monkey Wrench Gang,* Doc Sarvis outlines the real problem that local environmental activists were having with over industrialization in the American desert:

> All this fantastic effort—giant machines, road networks, strip mines, conveyor belt, pipelines, slurry lines, loading towers, railway and electric train, hundred-million-dollar coal-burning power plant; ten thousand miles of high-tension towers and high-voltage power lines; the devastation of the landscape, the destruction of Indian homes and Indian grazing lands, Indian shrines and Indian burial grounds; the poisoning of the last big clean-air reservoir in the forty-eight contiguous United States, the exhaustion of precious water supplies—all that ball- breaking labor and all that backbreaking expense and all that heartbreaking insult land and sky and human heart, for what? All that for what? Why, to light the lamps of Phoenix suburbs not yet built, to run the air conditioners of San Diego and Los Angeles, to illuminate shopping-center parking lots at two in the morning, to power aluminum plants, magnesium plants, vinyl-chloride factories and copper smelters, to charge the neon tubing that makes the meaning (all the meaning there is) of Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Tucson,

> Salt Lake City, the amalgamated *metropoli* of southern California, to keep alive that phosphorescent putrefying glory (all the glory there is left) called Down Town, Night Time, Wonderville, U.S.A. (173)

For Doc, the environmental problems he is interested in combating are very real: extensive industrialization is simply unnecessary.[21] Both Sarvis and Bonnie Abbzug make this statement from the beginning of the novel, as both characters destroy billboards along the Arizona highway. In the first chapter of the novel, readers are taken on a journey with both of these characters as they level several billboards that advertise products and companies associated with progress—sometimes by fire and other times by cutting them down by melting the metal with a torch. Doc and Bonnie are much less tied to the physical environment than are Seldom Seen and Hayduke. However, both characters exhibit a desire to stand up against the unnecessary destruction of the southwestern desert. When we meet Doc, he is on a "routine neighborhood beautification project," burning billboards along the highway. "With a five-gallon can of gasoline he sloshed about the legs and support members of the selected target, then applied a match" (9). Doc's outsider classification comes more from the fact that he "sensed a certain futility in his hobby. He carries on these days more from habit than conviction" (14).

Bonnie Abbzug, an outsider described as a "tough piece out of the Bronx" (12), moved to the Southwest and fell in love with the landscape. Her involvement with the monkey wrenching activities, however, is fostered by her relationship with Doc. She

[21] Doc's reasons for fighting the environmental problems parallel the reasons Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*: increased medical problems among their patients. Doc, when Seldom Seen speculates as to why a doctor with a lot of money would act the way the rest of the group acts, says, "it's seeing too much insulted tissue under the microscope. All those primitive blood cells multiplying like a plague. Platelets eaten up. Young men and women in the flower of their youth, like Hayduke there, or Bonnie, bleeding to death without a wound. Acute leukemia on the rise. Lung cancer. I think the evil is in the food, in the noise, in the crowding, in the stress, in the water, in the air. I've seen too much of it, Seldom. And it's going to get a lot worse, if we let *them* carry out their plans" (180).

joins "the good doctor on his nighttime highway beautification projects" as a diversion more than anything, the narrator asserts (43).

Bonnie and Doc's nighttime billboard fires are more than just an environmental justice commentary. While the narrator humorously points out that "everyone should have a hobby" at the end of the first paragraph of the novel where Bonnie and Doc's activities are highlighted, Abbey establishes the two as a comic duo who have romantic feelings toward one another. Bonnie is Doc's secretary whom he takes a liking to after the passing of his wife.[22] The narrator states that Bonnie, however, preferred the independence of "female bachelorhood," and notes that Bonnie has her own home which she built herself. The narrator says,

> Though she often stayed with the doctor in his home and accompanied him on his travels, she also retained her own quarters, in a humbler part of Albuquerque. Her "quarters" was a hemisphere of petrified polyurethane supported by a geodetic frame of cheap aluminum, the whole resting like an overgrown and pallid fungus on a lot with tomato patch in the wrong or southwestern sector of the city" (41).

The narrator makes it clear that Bonnie does not stick to any fad for long though she tries them all. She is an intelligent, educated, independent woman who has lived with and loved Doc off and on for two years.

Blurring Personalities, Philosophies, and Reality in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

Environmentalism in the post-Carson environmental movement fostered multiple philosophical conflicts among scientists, industrialists, governmental agencies, and

[22] In *Hayduke Lives!*, the sequel to *The Monkey Wrench Gang* published posthumously in 1990, Doc and Bonnie are married with a child, Reuben, and another on the way.

environmental groups. One movement in particular, Earth First!, much influenced by Abbey, began in 1980, five years after the publication of *The Monkey Wrench Gang.*[23] Abbey's passion for fighting for the desert and his awareness of the tension environmentalism promoted is especially evident in several of his novels, including *Good News* (1980) and *Hayduke Lives!* (1990). In these novels, Abbey likens the war on industrialization for the preservation of the environment and home communities to the most recent war involving the United States at that time: Vietnam. Abbey uses the post-Vietnam atmosphere to invoke a heightened emotional response to the war on environmental destruction. The war occurring between citizens of communities and industrial workers that defined the post-Carson environmental movement created, in many ways, the same emotional response as any major military war.[24]

The urgency of environmental warfare is established early in *The Monkey Wrench Gang.* Nowhere in the novel do we find a "war" scene more striking than in the chapter "The Raid at Comb Wash." Abbey sets up this first "formal" sabotage on the industrial

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[23] After the publication of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* in 1975, ecological resistance grew. In 1978 and 1979 a group of Minnesota farmers called the "Bolt Weevils" successfully disabled fourteen electrical towers that were part of a high-voltage power line being built across the prairie. Oregon residents slashed tires of spray vehicles to rebel against the use of herbicides. Mark Dubois, founder of Friends of the River, chained himself to a cliff along California's Stanislaus River to stop construction of the New Melones Dam (Philippon 248). Rik Scarce states that *The Monkey Wrench Gang's* "primary importance was probably in forming the ideas and values that Earth First! espouses" (251). According to Philippon, who admits that the actual origins of the Earth First! movement is shrouded in folklore and mystery, explains how a group of environmental activists became irritated when a 1979 U. S. Forest Service's report came out, claiming that less than one-fourth of the roadless areas in the Southwest should be protected with wilderness status. (The activists were Dave Foreman, an Albuquerque native serving as the Wilderness Society's chief lobbyist in Washington, D .C. ; Bart Koehler, working for the Wilderness Society in Wyoming; Howie Wolke, the Wyoming representative for Friends of the Earth; Mike Roselle, who helped Wolke organize support for wilderness issues; and Ron Kezar, conservation chair of the Sierra Club in Texas. All other "wilderness" areas were to be developed (250).

[24] According to Philippon, inspiration for *The Monkey Wrench Gang* came from a number of individuals and activist groups labeled "ecosaboteurs" in the early 1970s—such as James F. Phillips, a middle-school science teacher who plugged drainage pipes, capped factory smokestacks, and dumped industrial waste from a U. S. Steel plant into the office of the company's chief executive; the "Billboard Bandits," Michigan environmentalists who removed road signs with chainsaws; and groups that called themselves "Eco-Commandoes" and "Eco-Raiders" (247)

companies as reminiscent of a more traditional military war read about in history books. In this chapter, Abbey's leading characters experience their first false reality as they are depicted as more than mere monkey wrenching activists; they are soldiers that are going into battle against those individuals responsible for the desert's over-industrialization. As Hayduke, the former Vietnam Green Beret, assumes the role of the soldier, he naturally feels the need to have camouflage netting, and he constantly watches the men working the machinery through his field glasses. Hayduke becomes a soldier in a foxhole, calculating his next offensive attack. Moreover, the roles and positions of his fellow monkeywrenchers—Doc Sarvis, Bonnie Abbzug, and Seldom Seen Smith—lying on their stomachs, peering at the "iron dinosaurs," makes the gang of four seem like a small army waiting for enemy fire. The war images intensify when the enemy attack takes casualties. The narrator states, "The crawler-tractors pushed them [pinyon pines and junipers] all over with non-chalant ease and shoved them aside, smashed and bleeding, into heaps of brush, where they would be left to die and decompose" (79). Clearly, Abbey concentrates on establishing a typical war scene: the soldiers in the foxhole, the troops on the ground ready for offense, and the inevitable casualties associated with such attacks.[25]

[25] Five years following the publication of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey told a story of a destroyed Phoenix, Arizona in his futuristic novel, *Good News*. The narrator begins the novel by setting a scene reminiscent of war. "At night the layer of smoke and fog and industrial gases cut off all view of the stars, reflecting the vast illuminations of the cities, which extended for hundreds of miles in all directions. The streets were jammed with clamorous machines, crowded with endless hordes of silent humans, most of them wearing air-filtering masks; one saw only the eyes of others, and all eyes were wary, alert with fear, or blank, withdrawn into the inner space of abstraction. A terrible restlessness infected every movement, every gesture" (2). Finis Dunaway's essay "Gas Masks, Pogo, and the Ecological Indian: Earth Day and the Visual Politics of American Environmentalism" suggests that the error of our ways will lead to the poisoning of humanity, which seems to be Abbey's prediction of things to come at the turn of the decade (1980).

The raid at Comb Wash is a pivotal event in the novel. As the first formal act of sabotage, the group takes seriously the war in which they are involved—often making it a personal attack on themselves rather than one on the environment—and at the same time we see the making of an environmental activist group. Abbey shows his readers that there is indeed a full-fledged war occurring in the American desert, casualties and all. However, each member of the group has a very different philosophy about his or her role in the war on environmental pollution and industrialization.[26] The war on environmental collapse is much like a traditional war—with soldiers of differing backgrounds and philosophies fighting together for the good of their country, and in this case, the good of the desert.

During the 1970s and 1980s, considering the freedom that the American desert symbolized, grassroots activism began to evolve. Abbey is obviously showing the growth of grassroots activism in a post-Carson era illustrating the struggle victims of home erosion had with their identities and also the struggle grassroots activism had within communities.[27] The destruction of one's home becomes a personal vendetta, not a civil war between city and country as historian Samuel Hayes noted as occurring in the 1800s and early 1900s in his book *Explorations in Environmental History*, but rather a civil war between the hometown resident and the threat of progress at the expense of a community's freedom. However, the real toxic discourse as it relates to Abbey's novels mentioned above is that Hayduke, unlike the rest of his cohorts, has an unrealistic

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[26] Daniel Philippon suggests that contemporary nature writing reflects the main point of Abbey's protest: "The ability to recognize that environmental issues are tied to a wide range of related concerns, both personal and political" (223).

[27] In *Good News*, the Chief clarifies his vision of nature: "The function of Nature? To serve the needs of humanity and humanity serves the aims of society as a whole" (96).

expectation of what the local fight against the destruction of the desert will resolve.[28] Philippon asserts that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* appealed to the founders of Earth First! for three reasons: First, the gang was a utopian group, composed of individuals unwilling to compromise in pursuit of their ideals; second, it was a grassroots group, committed to local issues and local knowledge; and third, it was a direct action group, more interested in monkey wrenching than bargaining with the enemy (252). While parts of Philippon's assertion are true, there are parts of his opinion that become more complicated.

Utopian Vision and the Problem of Possession

The motto of Earth First! and the actions of the Monkey Wrench Gang further support my argument that the novel's chief role is to depict the desperate hometown citizen in the most emotional war that could be fought: the war against the invasion of one's home place. Daniel Philippon says that the utopian character of Earth First! is seen in its motto, "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth." In 1986, the chairman of the Sierra Club criticized the group's unwillingness to compromise and referred to the members as "just utopian" (252). First, Hayduke is the only member of the four that exhibits a utopian vision. Secondly, all of the members of the gang compromise in one fashion or another. Scott Russell Sanders writes:

> One's native ground is the place where, since before you had words for such knowledge, you have known the smells, the seasons, the birds and beasts, the human voices, the houses, the ways of working, the lay of the

[28] Abbey begins *Hayduke Lives!* (1990) with a chapter entitled "Burial" that describes the strength the industrialists have gained over the years in the American desert. The chapter depicts a turtle slowly walking to its destination only to be swept away and buried alive by a bulldozer, "Something huge and yellow, blunt-nosed glass-eyed grill-faced, with a mandible of shining steel, belching black jolts of smoke from a single nostril of seared metal, looms suddenly gigantically behind the old desert turtle" (5). The chapter reestablishes the severity of the destruction of the desert and sets the scene for two later chapters, "Earth First! Rallies" and "Earth First! Rendezvous," both of which depict the conflict between industrialists and environmental activists.

> land, and the quality of light. It is the landscape you learn before you retreat inside the illusion of your skin. You may love the place if you flourished there, or hate the place if you suffered there. But love it or hate it, you cannot shake free. Even if you move to the antipodes, even if you become intimate with new landscapes, you still bear the impression of that first ground. (12)

The nostalgia conjured up by Hayduke and Seldom Seen provokes them to act on emotion rather than logic, thus leading them to an unrealistic utopian method of solving the environmental crisis: the elimination of the problem completely.[29] Sanders addresses the role of nostalgia when it comes to defining a home and says that "these walls and floors and scruffy flower beds are saturated with our memories and sweat. Everywhere I look I see the imprint of hands, everywhere I turn I hear the babble of voices, I smell sawdust or bread, I recall bruises and laughter. After nearly two decades of intimacy, the house dwells in us as surely as we dwell in the house" (23). Sanders continues on by saying that his parents continually fixed up dilapidated houses, "convincing me that a place isn't truly yours until you rebuild it with your own hands" (24).

True ownership, a problem associated with human beings' relationship with nature, is philosophically not possible, but Hayduke assumes ownership of the desert because it is what he calls home. One of the problems with the fight that Abbey's monkeywrenchers engage in is that their expectations of a clear-cut resolution, giving full

[29] At the end of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Doc, Seldom Seen, and Bonnie are taken into custody after abandoning their illegal monkeywrenching behavior to help an ailing Bishop Love. Hayduke, however, fakes his own death to escape authorities. In *Hayduke Lives!*, Hayduke continues his sabotage of industrial projects by disguising himself as a variety of different people to gain access to industrial companies. In one instance, he disguises himself as a cleaning lady who dumps the contents of "a bucket brimming with a sulfurous-yellow, slick, foaming sludge" all over Syn-Fuel executives at a meeting (33).

freedom to inhabitants of the desert and rights to their land, is simply unrealistic, and in this case, purely warped by a utopian vision. This utopian vision begins with Hayduke's assumption that the desert is somehow *his* land. Abbey brings up the idea of possession in *Desert Solitaire*:

> Standing there, gaping at this monstrous and inhuman spectacle of rock and cloud and sky and space, I feel a ridiculous greed and possessiveness come over me. I want to know it all, possess it all, embrace the entire scene intimately, deeply, totally, as a man desires a woman. An insane wish? Perhaps not—at least there's nothing else, no one human, to dispute possession with me. (6)

While Abbey may not feel the sense of having to fight for possession of the desert as he relies on the psychological and philosophical state of ownership, Hayduke very much feels obligated to fight for the possession of his home. The real battle, however, is not with the industrialists. The literal ownership and possession of the desert, beyond a philosophical possession or psychological state of mind, is largely impossible.

E. M. Forster presented a relevant point of view regarding land ownership that I would like to apply here. In his essay "My Wood," he discusses the effects property has upon character. Forster notes that property makes him feel heavy: "Property produces men of weight, and it was a man of weight who failed to get into the Kingdom of Heaven" (108).[30] Forster suggests, by using reference to the parable, that land "ownership" violates the spiritual connection we have with nature.

[30] This quotation alludes to the famous one in *The New Testament*, Matthew 19:24, where it says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

Furthermore, Forster argues that property makes us feel like we should have more and that property ownership makes us feel that we ought to do something to it. Forster remarks, "Our life on earth is, and ought to be, material and carnal. But we have not yet learned to manage our materialism and carnality properly; they are still entangled with the desire for ownership, where (in the words of Dante) 'Possession is one with loss' (110). Forster's point of needing to balance the materials we own with our own natural relationship with the land is perhaps where both Hayduke and industrialists have been lead awry.

The behavior of Abbey's monkeywrenchers points to utopian expectations. While Hayduke's utopian views dominate the actions of the gang, Doc, Seldom Smith, and Bonnie are actually fairly realistic in their expectations. They are clearly against any kind of violence, and they often serve minor roles in any kind of destructive behavior. Typically these characters watch for authorities, provide escape for those engaging in physical sabotage, or, as is the case with Doc, providing the finances for the materials needed to sabotage the machinery.

Although Earth First! embraces the idea of "no compromise", compromise can be found throughout the novel. Hayduke, unlike the other three members of his group, is still fighting for his beliefs by faking his own death at the hands of the mastermind of the area's industrial progress, J. Bishop Love. Hayduke's quest for utopia leads to his unwillingness to compromise with authorities. The other members of the gang turn themselves into authorities, one at a time, illustrating that while they fought for the protection of the desert, their expectations were less than utopian and their compassion for humanity took precedence.

Hayduke, however, is not completely unwilling to compromise; he compromises in other ways. For example, in the beginning of the novel, unlike his fellow activists, he is adamant about not letting women into "his" group. Hayduke's relationship and escalating sexual tension with Bonnie shows his animalistic behavior and need for control. From the onset of the formation of the Monkey Wrench Gang, Hayduke has called for the exclusion of women from the group. However, Hayduke reluctantly gives in and allows Bonnie to be part of the sabotage activities. After an altercation, "Bonnie bathed Hayduke with tender hands and when his penis rose up in majesty, as it surely did, she caressed it with loving fingers, praised it with generous words. He was recovering rapidly. Hayduke knew, despite his battered stupor, that he had been chosen. Nothing he could do about it now. Beaten but grateful, he surrendered" (221). He also allows himself to give in to Bonnie, engaging in a love affair with her.

The exchange that Abbey allows his reader to witness between the members of the gang promotes a sense of dysfunction amongst the group. In particular, the sexual tension between Bonnie and Hayduke provides some comic relief midst a volatile war on the industrialists. Bonnie's observations of Hayduke as an "ape" or Seldom Seen and Hayduke as a "pair of clowns" and "queer as abalones" while they roughhouse highlights the juvenile behavior of the group (194). While Bonnie looks for a candidate to father her child, she concludes that Darwin's theory of evolution may have been right.

Abbey achieves two ends with his novel: First, he highlights the attitudes of agencies determined to turn the desert into a useful place, and he illustrates the interactions between hometown residents and the memories of their home place in light of environmental collapse. While Abbey's novel, as I have suggested, underscores

Sanders's argument that memory and connectedness to the land are intertwined, I argue that the memories one has of a home that has been unnecessarily destroyed in the name of industrial development results in negative psychological effects. Each of Abbey's characters brings a different level of attachment to the desert, but all fight to resist the continued domination of nature and thus the continued domination of human beings.

At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that Abbey's protagonists are psychologically-troubled hometown heroes who fight for their assumed rights to the desert wilderness. Additionally, I've categorized the four protagonists into two specific groups—a Berry-styled "hometown insider" and a Sanders-styled "hometown outsider"— who struggle with the loss of the area that they call home, though given the desert setting, these characters may not fit perfectly into one category or the other. Whereas Abbey's novel demonstrates both the humorous and adventurous acts of sabotage in which these protagonists engage, there is obviously a level of seriousness that emerges from these acts.

What happens when a person or group of people have families already established on the land and are forced from their homes because of industrialization? What happens to this toxic discourse when we are unable to create a home and have those memories of which Berry and Sanders strongly endorse? Unlike Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang,* other texts, such as Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven,* with its depiction of the coal industry in Appalachia, incorporate a much more serious tone that addresses helpless protagonists who are at the mercy of industry. In particular, the inability to create a safe home and the denial of the right to a family takes precedence in many ecocatastrophe novels following the 1970s.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION: RISK, NARRATIVE, AND THE TOXICITY OF THE HOMEPLACE IN DENISE GIARDINA'S *STORMING HEAVEN*

> Human-caused environmental threats are, increasingly, an essential part of the "environment" people live in; human-caused environmental woes are people's new fatalities.
>
> —Frederick Buell

In *Staying Put,* Scott Russell Sanders describes a Swedish family uprooted from their homeland. The old man died and the children moved to farm on land that was not adequate for farming. He says, "All down the valley it was the same, people forced to move by a blizzard of government paper, occasionally by the sheriff, in a few instances by the arrival of bulldozers at their front door" (5). Thus far, Abbey has contributed a commentary on what happens when one returns "home" to find his or her homeplace destroyed by bulldozers and other excavating machinery. But what happens when, as Sanders suggests, the government paper and bulldozers are knocking down one's door and forcing individuals from their homes?

The human-caused environmental woes that Denise Giardina portrays in her 1987 novel *Storming Heaven* are much different than most readers would expect to encounter in contemporary American fiction. Unlike Abbey's novel, which focuses on the destruction of the Southwestern desert, Giardina's novel is set in West Virginia and Kentucky (other parts of Abbey's native Appalachia) at the turn of the twentieth century, and it focuses more on the dangers of industry to public health. The conflict between small-town landowners and the coal-mining industry is laying the foundation for larger environmental problems. The most obvious threat of pollution and contamination comes

in the form of destroyed landscape due to the cutting of timber and pollution of water from the wastes produced by the mines. The environmental woes in Giardina's novel, however, are not necessarily centralized to the ruin of the environment by the coal companies. Rather, the coal-mining industry's forceful acquisition of the land causes West Virginia and Kentucky communities—and the families that call these communities home—to collapse.

The collapse of these communities is due in part to declining economic conditions in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Part of the economic hardship of nineteenth-century Appalachia can be seen in the railroad industry. John Alexander Williams argues that Appalachia's railroad history can be divided into four periods between the Civil War and World War II (231). First, following the Civil War, railroad managers sought to repair damaged railways, and much of the debt incurred by state governments was caused by the costly repairs required for adequate rail systems. Second, after the railroad construction, rail companies focused on "strategic objectives," where railways competed for "rights-of-way, alliances, and acquisitions that would connect existing termini to distant ones or at least prevent rival railroads from siphoning away long-haul traffic at regional 'gateways,' points of origin or destination for traffic between the Atlantic or Gulf seaboards and the river ports of the interior" (231). Some of the railroad's economic growth was hindered by the Panic of 1873, which further "eroded the financial strength of southern railroads and led to even more privatization in the management of state-financed railroads" (232). The third period, which is perhaps more germane to Giardina's novel, focuses less on the transport of items produced by farms and more on railways that contribute to the coal- mining industry. Because of the shift from farms to

coal-mining, timber, and textile industries, communities and towns began to erode because business areas and county seats were moving to more convenient locations. Many railroads in the south, however, went bankrupt during the 1890s, causing several of the rails to consolidate.

In addition to the constantly changing face of the rail companies, Appalachia's coal-mining industry became increasingly controversial. Many families moved to the urban Midwest as "economic refugees" because of the "hardships they encountered when their farm system declined, and the hardships they faced during the capitalist-industrialist transformation of the mountain region" (Billings and Blee 20). Many other community members turned to dangerous forms of work to make a living, often by necessity rather than choice. Williams states, "The remote and thinly populated character of the Appalachian coalfields virtually dictated the building of company towns to house the workforce, while the marginal position of many operators increased their temptation to lower overhead costs at the mines by exploiting these captive communities" (259). Giardina addresses the exploitation of one such community at the beginning of her novel and traces the disruption this exploitation has on a family and their home. By the 1920s, "some 80 percent of West Virginia miners lived in company towns," Williams asserts. In 1922, the U. S. Coal Commission found "generally unwholesome living conditions existing in most of them, with the worst examples in central and southern Appalachia" (259-60).

Giardina grew up in Black Wolfe coal camp in Bluefield, West Virginia, where her father did bookwork for the coal company. He later moved the family to Charleston because the coal company sold and abandoned its mines. For her, industrialization—in

this case, the coal-mining industry of the early 1900s and its deadly effects on traditional family life—was still a vivid memory and relevant crisis in fiction published during the same era and after Giardina's novel (Conway 139).[1] Lawrence Buell claims that "In the mid-1980s, toxicity was still only starting to assert itself as a personal reality for the mythical average American." He continues, "A novelist of middle-class manners would have had to contend with the embedded sense of distance between the stuff of headline news about toxic events and the predictable but only apparent stability and safety of bourgeois life in middle-class American towns and suburbs" (664). While Giardina's "toxic" event is not that of popular 1970s or 1980s science fiction, she capitalizes on the less than fantastic subtleties that the toxic event suggests—establishment and eventual growth of the coal-mine industry results in loss of land, loss of relationships, loss of family importance—and the direct impact on the future of community life. The coal-mine wars of the 1920s are particularly relevant to Giardina, whose novel centers on a handful of characters who lose their families, their identities, and their own lives.[2]

Giardina's novel primarily emphasizes family sacrifice during the coal-mining industry's takeover, and she, like Abbey in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, focuses on developing four main characters: C. J. Marcum, an activist and later a mayor who

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[1] Giardina's 1992 novel *The Unquiet Earth* is set in the mining towns of West Virginia, like *Storming Heaven,* and focuses on characters who struggle to deal with the effects of the Great Depression on the coal-mining industry and the failing and controversial union movement. Linda Hogan's novel *Mean Spirit* (1990) depicts Native American families in Oklahoma during the 1920s who were being murdered by greedy businessmen for their land and the wealth of the oil beneath it. Paul Auster's 1987 novel *In the Country of Last Things* includes a startling revelation of a futuristic unnamed town that experiences the effects of environmental and industrial pollution. In Auster's community, people are homeless, and victims of unpunished crimes looking to death as the only means of relief.

[2] The novel is based on the historical events of Matewan and the 1920 labor strike (Conway 138). John Alexander Williams explains on May 19, 1920, Baldwin-Felts agents, natives of Galax, Virginia, were involved in a shootout with a local pro-union group, including the miners' most "prominent hero" Sid Hatfield. Both Felts brothers were killed as well as the town mayor, Cabell Testerman (271). Sid Hatfield survived the battle, but in 1921 he was shot and killed by a Baldwin-Felts man claiming self-defense.

represents a transition between the old voice of the original community members and the new voice of the younger citizens and coal-mine companies; Rondal Lloyd, a young, rebellious union organizer; Carrie Bishop, a hometown girl whose dream of a traditional family life is complicated by the impact of the coal industry; and Rosa Angelelli, a Sicilian immigrant yearning for her freedom.[3] While these protagonists are not the only substantial characters in the novel, they are the voices of those community members silenced by the invasion of the coal-mine companies.

Because each of Giardina's protagonists serve as first-person narrators, each telling the stories of the coal-mining industry from his or her own unique perspective, the voices of the oppressed are clearly heard. While Giardina uses environmental threat as a central metaphor for the weakening of the family unit in her novel, some theorists doubt the effectiveness of the literary trope. Lawrence Buell, for example, calls into question the use of environmental toxicity as metaphor, claiming that protagonist-centered texts prevent environmental crises from becoming much more than a plot function. Ursula Heise contends that contemporary novelists use chemical substances as a trope or metaphor blurring the boundaries between body and environment, public and domestic space, and harmful and beneficial technologies (748). My aim in studying home-focused texts encompasses both Buell's and Heise's theories. By examining the "blurring" of public and private space, and thus the blurring of "place" of the hometown insider, due to

[3] These characters represent victims of all classes and social status within a community. Some contemporary novels such as Linda Hogan's *Mean Spirit* is, as Jennifer Brice suggests, a depiction of the "white man" against Native Americans. Hogan shows a juxtaposition of community: first, the Osage Indians, of varying wealth and social status—the humble, simple, yet wealthy John Stink who helps the family of the murdered oil-wealthy Grace Blanket— at one with the land, and second, Tar Town, as Brice describes as "a decaying waste dump inhabited by Indians whose land has been stolen from them" (129). When the white men take over the land for oil, Native Americans are viewed and treated as second-class citizens, their real wealth is limited to the land to which they have spiritual connections.

the encroaching coal companies on home communities and considering the metaphoric value of each character's first-person narration, a toxic discourse that transcends using environmental toxicity as a simple plot function can be created.

First, I use risk theory to show that the events in Giardina's novel extend vastly beyond the plot encased between a front and back cover; Giardina's careful consideration of narration in this novel foreshadows the fear of Appalachia natives and grassroots activists occurring eighty years later at the time the novel was written. Nicholas Freudenberg and Carol Steinsapir note that members of the grassroots groups often use protests and sit-ins to bring attention to their cause and request action.[4] Interestingly, they point out that a number of women and minorities comprise these groups and that they often have little "organizing" experience (30).[5] The rebellion that we hear about from each character, from their "tent" communities as they await a union, illustrates that the community banded together for what was right for their families.

Second, as I mentioned in my introduction, environmental justice theorists advocate for the understanding of gender and class when it comes to contemporary environmental concerns, and Giardina thoroughly and successfully depicts multiple "classes" of society suffering from a common pollutant. The chief toxicity in this novel is connected to the coal mines' contributions to the loss of "home," both home as physical place and home as family structure. This type of toxicity, as the novel suggests,

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[4] Freudenberg's and Steinsapir's chapter "Not in Our Backyards: The Grassroots Environmental Movement," in *American Environmentalism: The U. S. Environmental Movement, 1970-1990,* discusses the origins, characteristics, and relevance of traditional environmental organizations, and the accomplishments of grassroots activism in the 1970s and 1980s.

[5] Freudenberg and Steinsapir use Lois Gibbs' book *Love Canal* (1978) as a point of reference. However, Giardina's fictional characters also show a community with little "organizing" experience and they risk the lives of themselves and their loved ones by engaging in a strike until the coal companies are willing to accept the implementation of a coal workers' union following numerous safety risks.

has the ability to bring a community together.[6] Grassroots organizations form because of the need to gain more than just the scientific and technical information about environmental hazards. People in these groups wish to educate members about relevant scientific and political issues as well as provide a forum for exchanging experiences and developing new strategies. Additionally, these people want to advocate jointly for new policies and programs at the state level (30). From C. J. Marcum's interest in socialism and influence over the younger generation, to Rondal Lloyd's fight for a unionized coal organization, and to Rosa's entrapment in a coal camp, the novel demonstrates the political factors that are polluting the families in these coal-mining communities and the grassroots activism that is bringing all of these "classes" together decades later.

Grassroots movements generally promote a strong belief in the right of citizens to participate in environmental decisions. This idea stems from advocacy for the public's right to know and to have input on the process for cleaning up environmental contamination. These movements also link the struggles to clean up the environment with a larger effort to correct social injustices and redistribute political power. Lawrence Buell states that the chief tactic of the environmental justice movement has been "to promote a self-conscious, informed sense of local self-identification, victimhood, and grassroots resistance encapsulated by the image of 'communities' or 'neighborhoods' nationwide combating 'unwanted industrial encroachment and outside penetration.'" These terms imply population groups with a common sense of place and social identity disrupted by toxic menace (652-53). An increased interest in the early foundations of grassroots activism as portrayed in contemporary literature speaks to a legitimate concern

[6] Freudberg and Steinsapir note that people comprising grassroots activist groups are from all "classes" of society.

over the toxicity that small communities faced within their families, rather than serving as just a source of plot for contemporary novels.

Each of Giardina's narrators represents a specific slice of the population that was affected by the coal-mine wars: the authoritative link to the past who keeps readers aware of the central conflict, the rebel who tries to make a new way for future coal-miners, the representation of family life and domestic upheaval, and the immigrant who is promised freedom but is denied.

Old World Beliefs and Familiarity on the Verge of Extinction

The extinction of the "old world beliefs" that Giardina addresses in her novel is partially caused by the perception that the people of Appalachia are poverty-stricken and largely uneducated. According to Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee, in 1990 roughly 25% of Appalachia was impoverished (19). Appalachian natives are commonly viewed as people who "stubbornly [clung] to a set of outmoded values and attitudes that blunted mountain people's ability to succeed in a "modern" economy but buffered their feelings of failure" (20). It may also be argued that part of the stereotype of the Appalachian native stems from the idea that Appalachian communities are somehow isolated from major urban areas, especially as it pertains to Appalachia's reputation as an economically poor area. Billings and Blee point out, however, that "exploitation, not isolation, was the source of Appalachia's chronic poverty" (20). The authors argue that "culture of poverty" theory is wrong in that it stereotypes the people. The theory depicts these people and the region as static.[7] Some blame the poverty on the fact that much of the land was purchased by non-local investors.

[7]Katie Algeo cites John Fox Jr., author of a popular 1917 novel, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine,* as an Appalachian "outsider" who created many of the popular images of Appalachia. She argues that many

This chapter, through analysis of the importance of first-person narration and symbolic characterization in *Storming Heaven,* shows that a logical application of risk theory centers on a person's or a character's "lived experience," or the psychological (dis)comfort of "home." Risk theory also allows for the victim of an environmental catastrophe or threat to serve as an authority on that dilemma, as Giardina sets up in her novel by using the victims to narrate their stories. "Risk theory deals not just with technological and other dangers in a narrow technical sense," Heise asserts, "but defines its object of study within cultural contexts and social systems without which the notion of risk itself cannot be conceived" (762).

As Lawrence Buell points out, contemporary literature treats environmental crisis as a regular and unavoidable feature of everyday life. Environmental crisis becomes a regular and unavoidable feature of everyday life, and in Giardina's novel, the aforementioned theories allow readers to see the loss of parental rights and subsequently the loss of the ability to have a family at all. The novel shows how community members lose their identities and how hometown insiders become outcasts in their own hometowns.[8] Carrie Bishop, early in the novel, perhaps sums up the fear of being pushed out of her familiar home:

> His words were terrible to me. I walked along until we reached the mouth of Scary. Then I stopped. It was the boundary of the Homeplace, a mystical boundary. I feared to cross, feared I would be cast out as Albion

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writers depict Appalachia as an inaccessible, rugged environment that relies heavily on the past and its histories; "Where the nation was progressive and industrial, Appalachia was backward and agricultural. Where other regions were rapidly urbanizing, Appalachia was rural" (30-31).

[8] Lawrence Buell argues that environmental justice activists have furthered the effort to create a sense of community of the disempowered. When any member or group in a community suffers, the whole community suffers.

> was with no place of my own. I waved goodbye, my arm heavy as lead. Albion was lost to me. I loved him, but it was not enough to hold him. I first began to understand what I have learned since, that there are forces in this world, principalities and powers, that wrench away the things that are loved, people and land, and return only to exile. (48)

The first toxicity that the community in the novel suffers is that all of its tradition and old world beliefs are jeopardized by the invasion of the coal companies. To set up this threat, Giardina positions C. J. Marcum as the authoritative voice of the novel.[9] Marcum, carefully situated as the first character readers meet, offers an overview of the threat his community is facing and, serves as a bit of a historical storyteller who develops a more personal narration of the struggles he and his family endured during the initial takeover by the coal companies. Marcum's reliability as a narrator is heightened by his ability to not be wrapped up in the emotion of losing his family; he simply reports the information to his readers, thus allowing him to become a reliable narrator. As the novel progresses, however, C. J.'s voice begins to wane. Giardina devotes fewer chapters to his autobiographical assessment of the new community and allows the newer, younger voices of the community to become much more prevalent. It is not until his death in a violent gunfire exchange that C. J.'s voice is gone altogether. When he dies, so too does the voice of the old world beliefs of a community. As Cecelia Conway asserts, C. J. serves as the link across three generations—the link between his Uncle Dillon Lloyd who knows the way of the old mountain towns and Rondal, who is being born on the "eve of

[9] Lawrence Buell addresses authority in toxic discourse. For Rachel Carson, science seems to pervade as the authority figure; however, in contemporary toxic discourse, victims are permitted to reverse roles and claim authority.

industrialization" (140).[10] C. J.'s character symbolizes the community members' voices, which progressively become silenced as his more level-headed chapters decrease throughout the book until the voices are lost completely among the new generation of coal-mine companies and their victims.

Responsible for setting the novel's exposition, C. J. is the chief source of historical information necessary to the understanding of the central conflict facing his community—the coal-mine companies taking land away from established community members. There is no other motive behind the information that he provides other than to inform, and since he is first to "speak" in the novel, readers must rely on what he says in order to get a sense of the threat that the community faces. C. J. serves as the liaison between the reader and the historical portrait necessary to be drawn of the town's difficulties.

The first chapter begins in 1890, two years before the coal companies took over the land, and C. J. discusses the threat of the rail companies' acquisition of land in the area. He says, "My papaw, Henry Marcum, had refused to sign the paper giving the minerals to the railroad. He hadn't knowed what the minerals was, but when he heard they was on his land, he wanted to keep them. Still he was scared, like most people" (4-5). Immediately, readers are introduced to C. J.'s father, who plays the role of the everyday townsman in the novel, not really aware of what he owns but not ready to part with whatever it is he has. Henry Marcum plays no other role in the novel other than this brief mention to illustrate one of many townspeople who are not ready to willingly give up his land. Unfortunately, free will and a right to ownership was not part of the deal.

[10] Conway argues that Dillon is the representation of the mountain Appalachian citizens, in tune with his cultural heritage, as he designates the newborn Rondal as a banjo picking mountain native. Of course, Dillon is outcast and rarely appears in the novel.

C. J. continues that when his father told the business men about the deed he held at the courthouse, "they laughed at him. *Junior patent,* they kept saying. *Senior patent is what we own. That takes precedence. Ask any judge"* (5). C. J. remarks that the rail-men were true to their word but that two years later the rail companies sold the minerals to the coal-mines, and they took over the land.

While he uses personal examples to demonstrate the community members' unwillingness to resign land to the companies, C. J. provides a brief history of how the land takeover was happening to other people he knew in town. As far as the land acquisition goes, we learn from C. J. that families lost their homes and land to the coal-mining companies. Some of the community is told that they can have jobs cutting timber, building houses, and working the mines. Other families moved to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas to buy farms. At first, community members were asked to sign over their land to make room for the railroads. However, C. J. tells us that when the rail companies sold to the mining companies, families were threatened to leave. In one instance, Vernie Lloyd, the wife of a local farmer, signed the paperwork to get the men to go away thus she and her family needed to vacate their cabin. Three years later the Lloyd family returned because their newly acquired land was purchased by another coal company. The reader takes C. J.'s historiography at face value.

C. J.'s authoritative voice is also born out of his "orphan-like" existence. C. J. is his own authority in that his real parents died when he was very young. He tells us that his father died of pneumonia before his birth, and his mother died in childbirth. His adopted father is shot, and C. J. suggests that his death was because of his refusal to sign

land over to the coal companies. He eventually ends up living on his father's cousin's farm.

> On Ermel's farm it was easy to think it, most of the time. But when I would pause in the field, lean against my hoe, and the wind would stir and bear a shriek, thin and ghostlike, from up Pliny—the death cry of some huge tree, fallen to make mine timbers and houses for American Coal—then my dream of sanctuary on the farm seemed a mockery and a reproach. (9)

C. J.'s authority builds out of his orphanage, largely because of the responsibility he assumes at the devastation of the coal-mines.

C. J.'s character provides a contrast to the younger characters who serve as the voice of the coal-miners and the community members that oppose them. While he is at times a revolutionary, serving as role model for characters like Rondal Lloyd, he increasingly becomes the voice of the past trying to adapt to the voices of the future.[11] He steps away from his comfort zone and becomes involved in the socialist movement, though he really knows nothing about it.

C. J.'s narrative represents a transition in a small mid-western community's traditional thought. He symbolizes both the educated and the working-class, but he can't commit to either. He is adamant that Rondal should become a doctor, but at the same time he wants Rondal to organize a union for the coal-miners. He treats Rondal like his own son, and he tries to influence him to study medicine and accept blacks and foreigners. C. J. emphasizes the need for education and supports it as a necessity.

[11] Marcum becomes a self-proclaimed socialist, co-founding the *Annadel Free Press* with Doctor Booker. He discusses reading Marx and not understanding it. He symbolizes a move to the unknown without knowing what it's about.

Education and hard labor, however, are placed at odds in Rondal's chapters. When Rondal announces to C. J. that he will not be travelling to Huntington to pursue medical training, "his face fell, his shoulders slumped and he looked as crushed as I had known he would" (71). When C. J. asks why Rondal will not be a doctor, Isom says "He'll take on airs ifn he goes down there" (71). Rondal fears that an education will change him and the way people view him. Rondal says,

> There was nothing I could have said to hurt C. J. Marcum any more than to tell him that he carried no influence with coal miners, that he was not one of them. If I hadn't been drinking, I would never have said it. But it was true. It was ironic, for C. J. had been on Blackberry all his life, before the companies came in. But it made no difference. To the miners, he was an outsider because he didn't share their life. He was a businessman; he had money. (73)

As the voice of the past fades away, C. J. increasingly becomes an orphan from the community.

Running Away from "Home": A Familial Social Outcast

While C. J. Marcum represents the silencing of the established community voice, he also seems to represent the onset of a new risk facing the community: the fear of becoming an outcast in one's own home community. The significance of Rondal Lloyd's character is twofold: first, he symbolizes the breakdown in family relationships and the scarcity of men within the traditional family role, and second, he represents the voice of the new generation fighting industrialization.

As described by C. J. at the beginning of the novel, coal companies were looking for land to mine and on which to set up their companies. In addition to taking the land, however, many companies also took husbands, wives, and children with them to carry out the dangerous day-to-day mining duties. Rondal's commentary situates the problem of land takeover very clearly. First, property no longer belongs to the family, as many family members are forced off of their property or brainwashed to sign it over. Second, land used for family survival, such as farms and gardens, are destroyed by the pollution generated by the mines. Rondal sets his situation when he says, "We lived in Winco, West Virginia, once our homeplace. American Coal Company owned our house. Richmond and Western Railroad owned our land" (13). Land takeover isn't the only problem here. The families' welfare for survival is at stake as well. Rondal continues, "The railroad track, its ties oozing tar, ran through Mommy's vegetable garden" (13). He also points out that "The creek water was black with mine drainage and raw sewage, and acid stained the rocks orange" (13). Families have even lost their holy ground and cannot even visit those who have passed away. The coal-mines have even taken over the dead. "One day we climbed to the cemetery but were stopped by a gate and barbed wire fence strung across the road, and a sign which read, NO TRESPASSING. PROPERTY OF AMERICAN COAL. We never went to the cemetery again" (14).

While the pollution of land has been a central topic of the 1970s environmental movement, Giardina focuses more on the disruption the takeover has had on family structure. In addition to taking and polluting the land, the coal-mine companies are dividing families, which makes for a more psychological environmental risk. In most cases, because land is being taken over by coal companies, families are turning toward

working the coal-mines. The consequence, however, is that family members are taken away from their families to work long hours in the mines. In addition, the work is dangerous, and as Giardina shows, many families are victims of losing loved ones in mine explosions.

The children are injured, either from the work itself or from being beaten by the boss which results in mothers becoming unsure of how to get close to their children. In one instance, Vernie, Rondal and Talcott's mother, says, "What am I supposed to do? I'm a-scairt to hug my own babies for fear of hurting them. I seen bruises all over Talcott's back where that boss man hit on him. Aint no mother supposed to let such things happen to her younguns" (24). Unfortunately, Vernie and other mothers don't have the option of not letting such things happen. The family needs money, and the mine workers are continually becoming more and more brainwashed.

Some families were brainwashed by the coal companies and believed that their only option to attain wealth was by working endless hours in the mines. The brainwashing contributed a great deal to the erosion of family unity. Rondal's relationship with his father is largely marked by his interactions with him underground in the mines, but working the mines negatively impacts Rondal's relationship with his mother. "It was Mommy I missed now. I only saw her on Sundays, except for a few moments in the early morning and late at night," he says (25). Of course, the brainwashing was evident even before Rondal's own mine experiences. Earlier in the novel, Rondal's Uncle Dillon refused to become part of the coal-mining industry. During a conversation with his Uncle Dillon, who has left the family, Dillon says, "They live like sheep. They like to be ordered around. You pull them outen the fire, they'll jump right

back in again. I cant abide em" (195). Rondal says nothing in response. He thinks, "It was a good thing to live on the land, to respect it and to hate anything that would tear it down. But Dillon was hoarding the land like a miser his gold, and he had nothing to give anyone. It seemed to me he was no longer among the living" (195).

As disabling as the coal-mines have been to the families in the novel, the infringement on a family's ability to discipline children and serve as chief authoritative voice is most startling. The novel demonstrates that families no longer hold "disciplinary rights" to their children. Rondal says, "The boss man paced back and forth, a stick in his hand, ready to strike the shoulders of any boy who missed a piece of slate" (21). Because Rondal's time to pursue a formal education is taken away, he takes to reading the articles on the newspaper that line the cabin walls, and in one instance, the lantern he uses sets the wall on fire, which he quickly extinguishes. Rondal expects his mother to scold him, and he asks her, "You going to switch me?" She replies, "You done gone in the mines. Aint no switch going to faze you none. Your daddy done made a man outen you. I cant do nothing with you now" (25).

Adapting to a New Domesticity

One of the chief "risks" to emerge out of the shake-up of family life was a household's domestic arrangement. Men working for the coal companies were forced to spend long, dangerous hours in the mines; as a result, women had to take on the work outside of the home.[12] Children, too, worked in the mines, which lead to limited time for

[12] Ildiko Asztalos Morell and Berit Brandth study how globalization and dependency and availability of markets have led to a reduced number of farm families as well as a need for alternative ways to maintain a farm family in European countries. Their findings, however, parallel the issues of globalization and industrialization occurring in the United States. The traditional patriarchal farm family consisted of clear divisions of labor between the sexes: men held the power to lead farm families by assuming succession and ownership of the property and women, as farm wives, carried out unpaid house work and general help on the farm.

formal education. Frederick Buell asserts that in modern times, people "dwell in rising environmental and environmental-social risk and that they are pressed to try to domesticate themselves within this condition" (204). Families were forced to adapt to these circumstances as best they could. Buell notes that people have been looking out for their own interests and trying to remedy situations themselves. Carrie Bishop's character further demonstrates how the traditional family structure is polluted by the coal-mining industry. She illustrates how community members are exiled and cast out as outsiders and how those left to carry the responsibilities of the home are forced to domesticate themselves. As Cecelia Conway says, "She encourages an empowering sense of mountain place, and Carrie absorbs a sacred rather than materialistic sense of the mountain homeplace" (142).

Carrie's interaction with and later marriage to Albion Freeman shows how the mines control relationships and how community members become outsiders. The first interaction with Carrie introduces readers to a more striking incidence of being an outsider when we are introduced to Albion Freeman. Albion stays with the Bishop family and recovers from pneumonia while his father is forced to travel to Ohio to sell goods. Carrie and Albion become close, but because Albion's father must regularly travel, the relationship has very little time to develop. For Albion in particular, being an outsider becomes a regular occurrence. Carrie asks Albion how he lost his homeplace, and he responds by explaining that the railroad took it. His family plans to return to West Virginia once they have enough money.

Several years later, Albion, as an adult, returns as a preacher, further complicating the many sacrificed relationships in the novel. Upon his return, Carrie says,

> Still I was uneasy, and told myself I must study him some more. I was not sure what he felt for the Homeplace, how he would act when the companies came for it. He did not even own his own place at Kingdom Come, but spoke of God owning it. When American Coal or Imperial Collieries stripped it away from him, would he turn the other cheek? (140-41)

Carrie's skepticism is fostered by a number of occurrences: her inability to establish a relationship and family with Rondal and her fear of losing the homeplace. Nonetheless, Carrie moves forward with her dream of having a family, and she eventually accepts the risk. "We had been married at the Homeplace on a warm spring day when all the earth smelled sweet," she states. "Though I knew we would be moving to the coal fields, I had dreamed of a neat little house with boxes of red flowers on the porch" (163).

Carrie's marriage to Albion, however, does not come without the coal-mines' power to brainwash. Unlike many of the other characters, Albion believes he finds his niche in the coal-mines. Carrie elaborates on a discussion she has with Albion over dinner, where he makes the coal-mining experience serve himself in a religious:

> Hit's a powerful noise when the powder blows. But when we cleared the coal out, I knelt there a minute and I thought, 'They aint never been a human being stood in this place before.' Hit was like discovering a new part of God, like being able to touch something precious. And to feel the mountain all round, to be closer to its heart than I ever did think was possible—. (164)

The superintendent called Albion a Godsend when he began Bible study and prayer sessions for the miners which might uplift their spirits and make them work harder.

Working harder and finding a religious purpose for working the mines, unfortunately, lead to an infringement on the definition of the traditional family. Carrie's narration reflects her many sacrifices, including the likelihood of having a family. She says, "In all our years of marriage I had never been pregnant. We both wanted a baby. Inside the tent, we often pushed our cots together and made love gingerly so as not to tip over onto the ground. But Albion always withdrew before we were done, frightened to have me expecting a child while we lived in such a state" (202-03). After Isom and Albion are arrested and return from jail, Carrie says, "On our first night back in the camp we managed to make love despite three layers of clothing. His face was gray in the moonlight, and cold to the touch. It was like loving a ghost, a memory" (210).

Carrie's interaction with her brother Miles further shows complications created by the coal-mine industry. Miles embraces education, and he goes off to Boston to learn how to operate a coal-mine. He plans to become the superintendent of a coalmine owned by relatives of one of his professors. He says, "Who better to oversee a coal mine than someone who had grown up in the area, someone who understood the men he would supervise?" (60). Miles talks his father into selling trees to the coal-mine since it would be profitable during a time of year that the farm wouldn't be.

Carrie moves to Pond Creek, where her brother Miles lives at a coal-camp. For Carrie, life as an independent woman was not the norm. Miles looked after her as if a guardian, telling her that living alone was not for her. A hint of domesticity comes into her life at the coal-camp when she says,

> They had high ceilings, long narrow windows, rich oak floors and walls of gray wainscoting. I hung green and blue curtains, bought a green bedspread and blue rugs. I also purchased a gray metal electric lamp from the company store, and painted pink flowers around the base. These were the first things I had bought with my own money, and I was very proud. (91)

Carrie sometimes stayed the night with Miles because sleeping under the same roof as kinfolks comforted her.

Carrie feels trapped at the coal-camps because all she does is cook, wipe away coal dust, and worry about where the money will come from (165). In the coal-camps, Carrie is deprived of the domestic life for which she yearns. She says, "In good weather I especially missed the Homeplace. I was used to taking walks in the evenings, searching out berries or poke, or fetching cows. Vulcan kept me penned in" (94). Her time at Vulcan evokes memories of a former domesticity and the fear of losing her own home. She says, "I feared we would lose the Homeplace someday. I tried not to think about it myself. It was bad enough to dread a long life without the love of Rondal and hope of children. But if there was no place of my own to be, no ground where my bones could be laid beside my kin's, would I not be the most miserable creature in God's world?" (129).

Immigrant Dreams and Nightmares

A different perspective on the coal-mine issues are raised by an immigrant, Rosa Angelelli. While Rosa is a minor character, her narration, albeit limited to very short chapters, represents the voices of those who have come to the United States in order to find better opportunities for their families. Rosa's character serves two purposes: first,

her narration symbolizes the insignificance of immigrant viewpoints, and second, her narration shows how destructive the coal–mine industry becomes to freedom. Carrie explains how the strikebreaker families initially got involved in the coal-mines—"immigrants from the cities who believed they would make their fortunes digging coal." They could also have been farming families from Kentucky. She says, "Their families would be the poor ones, and they would have heard there was money in the mines. They didn't know about how the companies had taken the land, for it hadn't happened to them yet" (201).

Rosa longs for her home through the symbol of the butterflies. Not much is known at first about Rosa, other than she is an immigrant from Sicily. She comes to West Virginia with Mario, who digs coal for Senore Davidson. The passage about the butterflies, which remind Rosa of home, is especially important, however. In her home country she remembers weeping for a butterfly after she had broken its wings by accident. She contrasts this image with Senore Davidson's butterfly collection that he keeps in a case. "I polish the cases. The butterflies are prisoners, the pins hold them down" (49). When she reads the names of the passing trains, she is reminded of home. "I like the name of Felco because it sounds Sicilian. I think of home. The olive trees, the orange trees, Mama. The towns in West Virginia are all the same—the houses are white and they have eyes. Their windows are black, eyes that do not sleep, that need rest" (50). She continues, "The butterflies speak to me. Their mouths are very small, but still I hear them speak. Take care not to break the wings, they say. They sound like mama" (68).

Part of Rosa's disconnect with her "home" also stems from a relationship that is based on money. This chapter reveals the marriage between Rosa and Mario, who has

come to the coal-mines for wealth. The marriage is not special, indicated by the everyday, nonchalant language that Giardina uses and the short chapters that are dedicated to Rosa. The following exchange not only shows the relationship between Rosa and Mario, but it also illustrates the stress the coal-mining industry places on families:

> He drinks wine. He doesn't like me to drink it, but I pour a little into my cup when he is gone. The Tally wine is sweet. Sometimes we have the Spanish wine, sour as an olive. The water is bad here. The house is so cold. The wine warms me. But Mario measures how much is in the bottles and he hits me. Do you think I am made of dollars? And what shall I do with a woman who is *ubbriaca?* Mario whips my babies. Francesco says he will not go in the mine. Lazy, Mario says. He ties him to the fence, pours the slops down his back, sets the pig on him. Francesco bleeds and bleeds, my sheets are bloody. How? says the doctor. He slip and fall down the slate pile, I say. Cut his back. (50-51)

Giardina's novel clearly provides a necessary commentary on the complications resulting from industrialization. As I established in Chapter 1, industrialization negatively affects the environment and those who called that environment home, particularly when the land is compromised in the name of material wealth. However, as Abbey achieved in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Giardina, too, is successful in presenting carefully crafted characters that have specific reactions to the destruction of their homes. In this case, with only minor exceptions, families who have called these small communities home for generations are forced from their property. And if families do

decide to stay in the community, they are expected to work the very dangerous coal-mines. The real toxicity here, in addition to the destruction of the environment, is the destruction of family-life and the deprivation of one's right to have families.

The injustices that both Abbey and Giardina address as they relate to the loss of one's homeplace create another component of a toxic discourse. As I emphasized in my introduction, environmental justice has become an important critical approach since the 1990s. In particular, toxicity is emerging as a literary focus, and the anxieties about environmental degradation have the power to shape public policy. Authors such as Nevada Barr, Terry Tempest Williams, and Lois Gibbs further the complications that Abbey and Giardina have already presented. What happens when environmental contamination results in gender or class discrimination? And, beyond the psychological effects, what happens when one's physical health is compromised because of environmental pollution?

CHAPTER 3

EMPOWERING THE DISEMPOWERED: ENVIRONMENTAL (IN)JUSTICE IN NEVADA BARR'S *TRACK OF THE CAT*

During a 1996 visit to Professor James Cahalan's course at Indiana University of Pennsylvania on national parks, Nevada Barr, author and law enforcement officer in several national parks over the years, stated, "All the women that I have known were movers, and shakers, and doers. They were not people who came in and fluffed up pillows in the second act. I craved movies, television shows, books where women got to do something. They got to move the action. They weren't just flavor of the week bimbos who got rescued over and over again." During her visit to IUP, Barr reflected on her family lineage as a long line of women who can be classified as movers, shakers, and doers. Barr's grandmother was a "fighting Quaker Democrat" who travelled spreading Christianity, her mother was a pilot and mechanic, and her sister was a captain for U. S. Airways. Barr's quest to be a mover and shaker herself is evident not only in her multiple experiences in environmental law enforcement, but in her 1993 mystery novel, *Track of the Cat.*

Track of the Cat is the first of Barr's sixteen mystery novels that follow fictional park ranger Anna Pigeon, whom Barr asserts is based on herself and her own experiences as a park ranger, on adventures in a variety of natural settings. Like Abbey, Barr has worked in many national parks—but Barr's perspective is as strongly female as Abbey's was male. Whereas Barr's first novel is set in Guadalupe Mountains National Park, her second novel takes Anna Pigeon to Isle Royale National Park in Lake Superior, Michigan. Anna Pigeon then travels to Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado in Barr's 1995 novel *Ill Wind. Blind Descent* (1998) follows Anna to Carlsbad Caverns National

Park in New Mexico. Her novel *Hunting Season* (2002) is set in the Natchez Trace Parkway in Mississippi.

Many works of contemporary fiction that address issues of environmental degradation have protagonists and antagonists that serve as the underserved voiceless contenders of an environmental fight. Unlike the mainstream preservationists, environmental justice movements have been led by non-elites, women, and minorities. In this novel, the grassroots movement is led by a woman. In addition, Barr's voice is that of a non-elite person.

The significance of Barr's novels and *Track of the Cat* in particular, is that they empower the disempowered. Here, Barr situates Pigeon as an underdog establishing her own voice in a predominantly male-centered environment. Pigeon, along with many of her coworkers in the Guadalupe Mountains National Park, is representative of the "hometown outsider" that I established in the chapter on Edward Abbey. Anna Pigeon, like Abbey's Bonnie Abbzug and Doc Sarvis, reflects Sanders's definition of embracing a home as her own (the national park). The problem, however, is that in her attempt to protect her adopted hometown, she is met with resistance from ranchers who call the park their home. Additionally, Anna's attempt to right the environmental wrongs as she sees them is met with gender inequality. In this chapter, I use an environmental justice critical approach to analyze the predominantly male hierarchical structure of the national park system which Anna calls home. I then demonstrate how Barr creates minority voices within the park system that challenge the conventional white, American, male hierarchical structure. Then I conclude by showing how Barr's characters serve as

representatives of radical grassroots activism, which the environmental justice movement has fostered.

Hierarchical Structure and the Conflict of Mountain Lions at Guadalupe Mountains National Park

Hierarchy within communities is inevitable. There are always those who take the position of being the "empowered," those given the power to make decisions for the community as a whole, and those who take the position, by default, as the "disempowered," or those who have little influence in the decisions within a community. A 2001 newspaper article in the *San Antonio Express* demonstrates such a conflict. The article documents a debate between environmentalists, animal rights activists, and ranchers in and around Guadalupe County in southwestern Texas. While all members of the conflict consider the area "home," policies for the best management of their "home" have provoked a heated debate. In 1995, Guadalupe County officials adopted a policy that offers a fifteen dollar bounty for dead coyotes. The policy was created in response to ranchers losing livestock, something that obviously affected their families' financial well-being. John Hadidian, opponent of the bounty and director of the Urban Wildlife Program for the Humane Society of the United States, remarked, "This kind of indiscriminate and blanket killing of predators is an anachronism that goes against all logic of the principles of wildlife management" (qtd. in Croteau). The bounty initially was justified when an outbreak of rabies in coyotes threatened the county.[1] Ranchers in Guadalupe County feel differently. Ranchers have felt the effects of coyotes killing

[1] Dropping baits that contained rabies vaccination curtailed the rabies threat before it reached the county; however, the bounty program is still funded each year. David Gaillard, a program associate for the Montana-based Predator Conservation Alliance, asserts that nonlethal control of coyotes such as coyote-proof fencing, night penning, and guard dogs and guard donkeys have been effective.

livestock and pets. However, they see that coyotes have been of less threat to them and their families since the bounty took effect. The debate between two factions is clearly set, but who has the say about whether the bounty stays or goes?

While this debate seems far removed from literary analysis at first glance, that is not the case. Just two years before the 1995 bounty, Nevada Barr published her novel *Track of the Cat.* Barr's novel addresses the conflict between ranchers and park rangers in Guadalupe Mountains National Park.[2] While the concept of killing wild animals for money and protection of livestock is at the heart of the novel, mountain lions are the target of killing rather than coyotes. In much the same way as the destruction of the coyote, Barr's central characters fight over the destruction of the mountain lions that roam the park. The conflict in Barr's novel, however, is made controversial.

Nevada Barr, herself, has come to appreciate the natural environment. Barr spent vacations visiting national parks. Her husband was a seasonal park ranger, and Barr states that she wanted to give back to the environment, and the best way she could do that since she did not have the money to conduct research was to work in the parks. At Isle Royale, Barr assisted a biologist who studied the disappearance of wolves by trapping them. Barr states that she got caught up with the idea that the wild was one of "the last places something truly mysterious could happen," and that the wilderness had "the potential for loss of control, magic, and unexpected things to happen." At Isle Royale, Barr learned to build a new mythology to give back the awe and magic of the wilderness. Barr spent six months in law enforcement at Isle Royale, which she uses as the setting of

[2] Anna Pigeon notes that the area had had colonies of prairie dogs that had been exterminated by ranchers. She says, "Now and then there was talk of reintroducing them into the park but so far no superintendent had been willing to antagonize the local landowners over such an unglamorous species" (50).

two of her Anna Pigeon novels, *A Superior Death* (1994) and *Winter Study* (2008), where she sums up her experiences as waiting around for something to happen, then being scared when it did happen, and then waiting again for another couple of months for something else to happen.

The next summer, Barr moved on to Guadalupe Mountains National Park, which provided the setting for her novel *Track of the Cat*. Barr notes that Guadalupe is a back-country patrol, very different from the water patrol she was involved in at Isle Royale. Regarding Guadalupe, Barr states that the people she met there ranged from "the divine to the ridiculous," and that those at Guadalupe generally were starting their careers or had failed elsewhere.

As a law-enforcement ranger and Barr's protagonist, Anna Pigeon sums up the novel's over-arching theme: "You can beat the law, [. . .] [b]ut you can't beat the desert" (217). To unfold this theme, Barr's novel itself reflects the conflict established between those who live off the land and those who wish to adopt and protect it. The connection is established in several ways. First, Barr has written a mystery novel, which by standard definition indicates that there will be some kind of murder or illegal activity.[3] The murder victims symbolize community members who have been silenced in their fight for their understanding of environmental justice. These characters also represent minorities in the environmental war who in some ways threaten those making money off the killing of animals because of what they know about illegal activity. The people responsible for

[3] John Beck discusses the mystery and fascination held by the southwestern deserts in the eighteenth century. Today, he argues, that mystery is still prevalent. He notes that today mention of the American desert conjures up "speculation about crashed spacecraft, secret scientific experiments, government coverups, occult Indian ceremonies, and drug smuggling and other varieties of organized criminal activity." He concludes that stories about the desert have changed, but the perceptions of the desert as void and useless have remained, thus allowing the desert to "become the place of infinite metaphorical multiplicity" (64).

the murders in the novel are those who try to conceal illegal activity and somehow either have governmental support or outsmart the government for their own profit gain. Barr also depicts grassroots activism by establishing bizarre background relationships among the characters in the novel.

What does Barr have to gain by establishing her mystery novel as a metaphorical commentary on grassroots activism in small communities? Her novel empowers the disempowered. When any member or group in a community suffers, the whole community suffers. Lawrence Buell argues that environmental justice activists have furthered the effort to create a sense of community of the disempowered. The disempowered, defined here as those who lack the power to end environmental injustice, come together as grassroots activists. Barr creates that sense of community to which Buell alludes. When Sheila Drury, a Dog Canyon Ranger for just seven months, is found dead in the back country, her death immediately places all other park rangers in danger. First, Drury's death does not seem accidental, though dismissed as such, and Anna seeks to get to the bottom of the situation.[4] At one point, Anna almost loses her life in what seems to be a blind sabotage as she rides the backcountry looking for clues in Drury's death.[5] Next, Craig Eastern, a professor and visiting naturalist, dies suspiciously by snakebite after potentially learning too much about the lions' illegal killings.

Lawrence Buell wrote in 1998 that "The 1990s may be witnessing a trend toward ecojustice activism building bridges with traditional environmentalist causes" (643). He

[4] While Drury's autopsy report indicates that she died of a lion attack, Anna Pigeon is suspicious that the report is not legitimate.

[5] As portrayed in the novel, most of Guadalupe National Park is back country with very dangerous terrain to navigate. While there are trails for tourists, the area needing patrol is extremely difficult to navigate.

continued, “What most seems to distinguish ecopopulism is the activism of non-elites, the emphasis on community, and the reconception of environmentalism as an instrument of social justice” (643). This point underscores the entire approach of using home-focused environmental fiction as an alternative grassroots and radical form of environmentalism. Buell points to the media quickening the emergence of environmental justice and concludes, “Threat to human life and well-being offers a more cogent basis for global accord on environment as a priority than does traditional preservationism” (645).

The narrator indicates that there had been bad blood between the park and the local ranchers for quite some time. The ranchers, whose land borders the Guadalupe Mountains National Park, had used the high country for grazing cattle, hunted on the land, and used water from the springs. In 1972, access to the area was suddenly made off-limits. “Though they had been quick enough to accept the sale money when the government bought it,” the narrator says, “some ranchers refused to accept that it was no longer their private preserve” (50). Barr confirms in her presentation that there was quite a bit of animosity between ranchers and the park as the park is viewed as having taken or purchased much of the local land. Barr points out that many of the land purchases had taken place generations earlier, but ranchers presently sought to retain rights to the land and the hunting of mountain lions. Jerry Paulsen’s ranch is depicted early in the novel to set up the conflict. “Paulsen was dead serious about private ownership. STAY OFF JERRY PAULSEN’S LAND was xeroxed on every page of the Boundary Patrol Report Forms to remind rangers riding fenceline” (49-50).

The Disempowered: Silenced Hometowners

Like most traditional mystery, crime, and detective novelists, Barr presents her readers with a body and the discovery of that body. In the opening chapter of the novel, readers are introduced to a serious situation: Sheila Drury is found dead by fellow ranger Anna Pigeon in the rugged terrain of the Guadalupe Park. Lured to the scene of Drury's corpse by feeding scavengers, Anna is appalled at what she sees. Instead of the remains of a deer or some other lion kill, she sees an "iridescent green and black backpack, heavy with water and whatever was inside, twisted almost belly up" noting that the buzzards didn't even have "to dig for the tastiest parts" as "her entrails, plucked loose by greedy talons, decorat[ed] her face, tangl[ed] in her brown hair" (7-8). Thus far, Barr is true to her novel's genre; however, her novel quickly turns to a commentary on the silencing of the disempowered members of a community.

The discovery of the gruesome scene in the opening chapter sets up a mystery and the representation of a human being intent on preserving the wilderness silenced by her murder. While the body is situated in such a way as to make it look like the death occurred accidentally, Anna, unconvinced of the ruling about Drury's death and the autopsy results, starts to investigate the murder herself. The investigation of Drury's death that Anna engages in empowers her to lead a grassroots campaign of sorts, assuming a role that is potentially dangerous to her well-being. She takes the investigation into her hands early in the novel when the narrator says:

> CLUES: that's what the law enforcement specialists at FLETC, the school in Georgia, had taught her to look for. CLUES: bloody fingerprints, cars parked in strange places, white powder trickling out of trunks. In the more

> populous parks like Glen Canyon and Yosemite, or those close to urban areas as were Joshua Tree or Smoky Mountains, crime was more prevalent. In fleeing Manhattan and her memories, Anna had kept to out-of-the-way places. So far all she'd had to deal with in the line of duty were dogs-off-leash and Boy Scouts camping out of bounds. Still and all, she was a federally Commissioned Law Enforcement Officer. She would look for CLUES. (11)

The clues she finds, however, do more than solve a mystery. Those clues establish Drury's character as indicative of the voices that larger groups are attempting to silence.

The evidence, paired with the official handling of the investigation, suggests that there are more people who know about Drury's death and that there is a clear cover-up in place. Anna originally notices discrepancies in the autopsy report and the photos she took of Drury's body at the scene. Anna, as leader of the underground investigation, manages to detect that the paw prints at the scene of the corpse suggest that whatever attacked Drury had four front paws, as the back paws did not match typical cat prints. Further, Anna notes that the puncture wound is much deeper than a typical lion's tooth. Also, Drury's body had no scratches from the thick grass and thorns where it was found. Anna also observes that the body's location was far from the usual area that Drury patrolled, bringing into question how Drury got there in the first place.[6] Anna notes that she is surprised at how little time Benjamin Jakey, a sheriff out of El Paso, has taken to conduct an official investigation. "The deputy shot a couple rolls of film and told Anna they wouldn't need hers" (20). Here, the deputy, a representation of a higher

[6] It is suggested that the body is intentionally placed where it is by Jerry Paulsen's helicopter, thus explaining why Drury's body was dry and had no scratches.

"empowered" organization, dismisses evidence of the seemingly "disempowered" community member who oversteps the boundaries of her job.

There are two lines of analysis that need to be followed here. First, why would someone want to kill Sheila Drury, a park ranger, and second, how does this murder parallel local communities around the United States where the "disempowered" are being harmed by governmental cover-ups? Readers find out that Drury was intent on setting up an RV park and introducing prairie dogs to the park, which would disturb the ranchers' cattle and perhaps even their ability to make money. The narrator offers the following information about Sheila Drury by the conclusion of the first chapter: "The woman had entered on duty in December the year before. In the seven months since she had caused quite a stir. There'd been a lot of repercussions when she had proposed building recreational vehicle sites at Dog, and she'd raised a lot of fuss and furor over a plan to reintroduce prairie dogs into the area" (11). Obviously, Drury had posed a threat to many of the people against bringing humans and automobiles to the national parks and also had become an enemy of ranchers, who would likely be opposed to prairie dogs given the threat they pose to cattle.

By leading members of the public and those most closely associated with the park to believe that Drury was killed by a lion, the ranchers' killing of lions would be supported by the government. The narrator states,

> Ranchers around the Guadalupe's swore the park was a breeding ground for the "varmints" and that cattle were being slaughtered by the cats, but Anna had never so much as glimpsed a mountain lion in the two years she'd been a Law Enforcement ranger at Guadalupe. And she spent more

> than half her time wandering the high country, sitting under the ponderosa pines, walking the white limestone trails, lying under the limitless Texas sky. Never had she seen a cougar and, if wishing and waiting could've made it so, prides of the great padding beasts would've crossed her path. (3-4)

Drury's death becomes a catalyst for the killing of lions in the park. Her death, staged to look like a lion attack, will promote the hunting of the lions for people's safety. This is symbolic since it empowers the people of power to conduct activity at the expense of the disempowered. Because of the supposed way that Drury was killed, the cats in the park will be hunted and killed. "Now the lions would be hunted down and killed. Now every trigger-happy Texan would blast away at every tawny shadow that flickered in the brush. The government's bounty quotas on predators of domestic livestock would go up. Lions would die and die" (14). The ranchers are hunting lions illegally, and with the support of the government to kill lions in the future, members of the community are being hurt. Anna's role as unofficial sleuth is symbolic of leading a grassroots campaign. After Anna pleads with the rangers to call off the killing of the lions, she learns that a lioness was killed. The park's Public Information Officer released information on the cat, suggesting that the cat that was killed was the one that killed Drury, namely because it was nursing one or two kittens. The narrator notes that the kittens were never found, again suggesting that there may have never been kittens of any kind involved. It's a campaign to fight for the lions in the park, but also a fight that Anna realizes is for the safety and welfare of herself and fellow rangers. As Sheila's body is taken away, the narrator says, "No more Sheila Drury. And, one day, no more Anna Pigeon" (20).

Another character who becomes a symbolic silencing of anti-governmental voices is a visiting naturalist to the Guadalupe Park, Craig Eastern.[7] Much like Drury's murder, Craig's death becomes a mystery to Anna. Craig, immediately identified as an eccentric man with little use for human beings, spent most of his time alone in his quarters with his snakes, which he kept as his pets. Barr indicates that Craig's character was based on a real person she knew at Guadalupe who was deemed "clinically insane" and would do anything to save the parks. The narrator indicates that Craig's death was obviously the result of multiple snakebites. The narrator says, "It appeared he had kicked over the two specimen buckets as he slept, knocking the lids off. The snakes, frightened, confused, had begun to strike. Craig's thrashing attempts to escape had only excited them to further attacks" (162). The way Craig dies seems unusual at best to Anna. While the murder is set to look like snakes had escaped their cages while Craig slept, Anna begins to think about foul play.

Craig's eccentric ways and extreme love of wilderness, however, are exploited to keep him from fighting the ranchers and to cover up the murder. The narrator tells readers early in the novel that Craig is formally trained in the ways of the environment and that his eccentric academic ways gets him into to trouble. When he knows too much about the lion-killing operation, he is murdered but done so to look like an accident.[8] The narrator states:

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[7] Barr suggests that Eastern is part of an Earth-First!-styled group.

[8] Craig Eastern claims that he sees UFOs in the night sky above Guadalupe Mountain National Park. The sighting of these "UFOs" adds to Craig's eccentric characterization. When Craig sets out on a multi-day hike through the park to look for the lights again, he is murdered. Later in the novel, it is suggested that the lights that Craig had seen was actually rancher Jerry Paulsen's helicopter as he dropped fellow ranchers and their weapons into the dark park to kill mountain lions.

> Craig Eastern's situation was a little different. He was a herpetologist on a two-year detail from the University of Texas at El Paso. Anna had been surprised Paul had brought Craig up Middle McKittrick. A shaky, easily alarmed man in his early thirties. Eastern was more at home with rattlesnakes, lizards, and toads then he was with people. He viewed most of humanity askance. The world was being destroyed by humans. The Guadalupe Mountains were the last bastion of untrammeled earth. (18)

Craig's dislike for humanity is held against him as fingers point to him as Drury's murderer. His eccentric ways provide for a rationale to kill. The narrator tells readers that Craig was adamantly against Drury's proposal to develop recreational vehicle sites in Dog Canyon. Craig is a man who is a "fanatic about keeping the park underdeveloped. It was more than just the inescapable animosity one felt when forced to see what the human race was doing to the planet. With Craig it was personal, a betrayal of him as well as Texas and the world" (38). Anna's persistence in finding the murderer leads her to suspect Craig. "Craig talked a lot about shooting visitors. But all naturalists talked about shooting visitors. It was a way of letting off steam" (38).

In a conversation with Harland Roberts, Craig's eccentric characteristics are further exploited. When Anna says that Craig is a strange man, Harland responds, "Craig Eastern is crazy." He continues, "Seriously. He's mentally ill. This is not for public consumption. You're out alone a lot. You take care of yourself" (37). In retrospect, this comment from Harland, who later turns out to be the murderer, first starts to pinpoint Craig as a person of interest in the death of Drury, but it also sets up an opening for the

later events with Anna, making it look obvious that Craig poses a threat to her and her life. If Craig and Anna were to work together, it gives them too much power.

Later in the novel, when Anna brings up the threat that Harland suggested, Harland tells Anna what he wants the public to think of Craig:

> Craig suffers from paranoid delusions. He's been institutionalized twice for it. He's on medications but he has had violent episodes in the past. You know how he feels about human beings in general, how protective he is of the land. But maybe you didn't know that he particularly fears women. Especially women he is sexually attracted to. He feels women use sexual politics to outdistance him. (100)

On her hike into the switchbacks of the Tejas, Anna stumbles upon Craig Eastern, who offers Anna a greeting while "his dark eyes glowed, his lips curved in a sweet smile exposing small, even, very white teeth. One cheek dimpled" (102). Anna goes on to think that "at that moment Eastern couldn't have looked less like an anti-social psychotic or more like an appealing boy" (102). After asking about the UFO sighting, however, Craig becomes defensive, immediately allowing his "appealing boy" persona to melt away. At this point Craig makes it clear what he thinks of Harland, Drury and the higher-ups when discussing climbing the ladder within the park agency.

> Don't climb, Anna. They're hypocrites: Corinne, that damn Christina, Roberts, Karl with his good-old-boy act. Especially Corinne. She'd pave the whole park if she thought it'd get her the nod from the Regional Office. She's using Guadalupe to get a superintendency somewhere. She'd kill every cougar in Texas for a line on her resume. (104)

As Craig leaves he says, “They’ll sell out the park [. . .] like they sold out Big Bend, Big Thicket. It’s just a matter of time. There’s not many places left to run to. They’re selling out the world” (105).

While Anna believes that Craig is not necessarily the safest person to be around, she also realizes the intent of his fight. The narrator says,

> Craig was passionate, dedicated. And insane. It didn’t take a great stretch of the imagination to picture him killing to keep the developers out of the park, the bulldozers and concrete mixers out of Dog Canyon. Not only would he be fighting against the destruction of the fragile canyon when the RV sites were put in, but against the ongoing degradation of the area as the great roaring, gas-guzzling beasts rolled in with their baggage of humanity. (148)

The more Anna investigates the potentially illegal activity in which the ranchers engage to protect their land and “rights” to the mountain lions the more readers find Anna and her cohorts victims of environmental prejudice. Anna concludes that “his ‘accident,’ like hers, had been carefully orchestrated by the same hand. The hand that had sent Anna reeling off McKittrick Ridge” (163). Anna’s accident is slowly revealed to be a murder attempt. She is pursuing the deaths of Drury and Eastern, and she is putting herself in harm’s way. As Anna walks down the trail, she nearly falls to her death. “Periwinkle blue sky, sparkling white thunderheads beginning to form, heat and insect buzz, formed a dream around Anna as she walked down the rocky incline, boots sure and flat on the stone. Then the stone was gone, sky and cliff face reeling. She had stepped from the trail into nothing” (108). After trying to save herself, she hears the gravel above her crunch,

and she yells for help, believing someone is coming. Instead, a cantaloupe-sized rock rolled down the slope, striking Anna behind the ear. Anna comes to the conclusion that someone had tried to kill her. "Someone had built a tiger trap and she had fallen into it. They had dug a ditch on the outside of the trail wide enough it wouldn't be stepped over. A mat of sticks had been woven to cover the hole and pebbles glued to the mat to make it look like the rest of the trail's surface" (143). She then realizes that "someone had tried to kill her. The thought frightened her. And it pissed her off" (144).

The Climax and the Empowering of the Disempowered

Anna's perceptions of Harland Roberts, from the very beginning of the novel, pinpoint him as symbolic of the governmental boys' club. She says,

> He had a talent for knocking her a little off balance. Talking with him she felt younger, more vulnerable, less sure of herself. Harland was of an age where men seldom looked at women as peers, co-workers. Always, however well concealed behind training or good manners, was the pervasive concept of women as the Weaker Sex. (38)

Barr notes that Harland was not based on any one person she knew; however, her goal was to create a character that was attractive to Anna.

Anna solves the murders when she realizes Harland is responsible for them. She realizes that Harland stole the radio frequency from the Resource Management Office to use it to pinpoint the exact location of the lions. When Anna asks Harland what he gets for the kill, he responds, "Seventy-five hundred dollars. For that they get dinner at Paulsen's, the hunt, a guaranteed kill, the lion's head, and—the best part—they get the story. . ." (211). Jerry Paulsen and Harland Roberts are working together to trap and kill

the lions, thus explaining that the "UFO" lights Craig Eastern saw earlier in the novel were from Jerry Paulsen's helicopter. Craig Eastern, like Sheila Drury, knows too much and is killed. However, when Anna discovers that Roberts and Paulsen are guilty, Harland attempts to kill Anna.

A True Grassroots Organization

At the beginning of this chapter, I pointed to Anna Pigeon and her colleagues as examples of grassroots activists. George Towers argues that first and foremost, "grassroots environmentalists are rooted in the scale of everyday experience" (23). The grassroots environmental movement morphs into the environmental justice movement with more of an emphasis on "distributive and procedural justice." Towers asks how and why citizens' fighting against unwanted land uses becomes environmental justice.

Towers argues that the grassroots environmental movement successfully uncovers discrimination by corporations as it relates to environmental procedures. "Studies in the 1980s and early 1990s indicated distributional environmental inequity. That is, while many noxious land uses are sited in European American communities, a disproportionate number are sited in minority neighborhoods" (qtd. in Towers 23). Minority groups have accused corporations of environmental racism because their neighborhoods have been targeted as sites of environmental toxicity.

Additionally, Towers cites some of the historical industrial growth as a cause of the environmental justice agenda.

> The civil rights movement, protest against the Vietnam War, and the feminist movement modeled social justice perspectives. Simultaneously, advanced production technologies produced more toxic wastes and the

> public became more aware of the dangers of environmental contamination. Finally, the federal government contributed to the conception of environmental injustice by endorsing environmentalism in the 1970s through the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and environmental law, then infuriating environmentalists in the 1980s by hobbling the EPA and deregulating the environment. (25)

A true grassroots organization is often distinguished by the connections made by members from all social, educational, and political arenas. Ultimately, grassroots activism and organizations bring environmental concerns to minorities and working-class citizens. Some of the relationships formed in the novel appear bizarre at best, but Barr forges these relationships to represent true grassroots activism. Voices from many characters of varying backgrounds come together for a common cause: mountain lion protection.

If readers consider the odd loyalties created in the novel and Barr's intentional lack of development of any one specific relationship, it becomes more apparent that these relationships serve as a cross-sectional representation of the general public. The relationship between Sheila Drury and Christina Walters plays no real pivotal role other than to function as a representation of the bonding of women; the relationship between Anna and Rogelio gets very little in the way of plot, except to establish that a Mexican immigrant is part of Anna's "inner circle"; Anna's relationship with her more mature sister, a psychiatrist in New York City, is developed only via phone conversations and sustains Anna's connection to the urban world; and Anna's relationship with Karl, a lower-class laborer, serves as a target for her suspicions.

The narrator introduces readers to Christina Walters, the clerk-typist, by describing her as "good-looking with a brand of prettiness that was rare to the Park Service" (46). She had a "traditional urban femininity," the narrator states. When Anna and Sheila Drury's mother collect Sheila's belongings after her death, the role of photographs becomes important. Anna notices that someone has gone through photos looking for something when she stumbles across a roll of film that divulges the relationship between Sheila and Christina. The pictures depict "a naked woman laughing, her hair soft around her shoulders, posed on the slickrock in Middle McKittrick about a mile downstream from where the body had been found. Christina Walters, her white breasts full and round, catching the sun, her knees coyly together, invitingly apart" (59). The last of the photos depicts Sheila and Christina making love, "the tight brown wire of Ranger Drury's body close against the soft cream of the other woman's" (59). Upon Anna and Christina's first meeting, Anna learns more about the romantic relationship between Sheila and Christina.

In Christina Walters, Barr creates an everyday character with ordinary life problems, far removed from the conflicts associated with the national park. Christina, unwilling to accept her identity as a lesbian, looks to hide the photos. Her main fear is that her ex-husband, Erik, will use the news to take Christina's four-year-old daughter Alison away from her. The marriage ended when Christina had an affair with another woman. She suggests she felt incomplete since Erik was constantly at work, having "an affair with his corner office and his mahogany desk at an investment banking firm in San Francisco" (69).

Anna's relationship with her boyfriend Rogelio does little to provide any kind of romance in the novel. Instead, the relationship serves to make a connection between Anna, a woman leading an unofficial grassroots campaign, and an immigrant who disapproves of the illegal hunting of mountain lions. In regards to Border Patrol's views of "outsiders" entering Texas, Anna says,

> They don't have much of a problem with middle-class white men with Illinois plates sneaking into Texas. The El Paso Border station was more concerned with illegal aliens than drugs. And something in his proud assumption of wickedness made her want to deflate him now and again. Eco-defenders had altogether too much fun fighting the good fight. (21)

In many ways, the relationship established between Anna and Rogelio paints Anna as a powerful, independent woman, an appropriate image for a leader of a grassroots campaign. When Rogelio arrives at the hospital following Anna's fall, he emphasizes that she is "one hell of a strong woman" once he realizes that she has no intentions of giving up her pursuit of the murderer responsible for Drury's death. The climax of the relationship between Anna and Rogelio occurs when Anna travels to Mexico to recover and he proposes marriage. Anna's unwillingness to marry Rogelio becomes a representation of Anna's independence as well as her commitment to stay "married" to her chief cause, the protection of the Guadalupe Park and the mountain lions that make it their home.

Karl Johnson, a laborer in the park, is one of Anna's suspects in the Drury murder case. As Anna investigates Karl, she realizes that he is not only innocent of the crimes but an avid supporter of protecting the park:

> Karl felt he had been cheated out of the ranger position in Dog Canyon, believed he had been betrayed, that something he had earned and deserved had been snatched away. The National Park Service had very few women in middle or higher management. Women held the lower-paying clerical and seasonal jobs. Word had come down from on high to promote women and people of color whenever possible. The Good Old Boy contingent thought Karl was just another victim of the plot against white males. Maybe Karl thought so, too. (93)

Despite Anna's collection of "evidence" from Karl's truck—mud on the door of the passenger side and blood on the interior seats—she dismisses his involvement in the murder but later learns that the blood is from an animal he had rescued and taken to his secret sanctuary.

The "disempowered" members of a community, represented here as the characters who have formed the most unlikely relationships, have come together to create a true grassroots activism. The "environmental elite," represented by the ranchers involved in illegal activity, are diminished. Lawrence Buell points out that the more elite environmental organizations based their philosophy on the traditional preservationism and environmentalism practiced by Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. Environmental Justice takes more of an anthropocentric view by focusing on positive outcomes for the community rather than a strictly ecocentric focus. However, Buell makes a case for linking the two philosophies together—stating that both perceive the biological environment as not as pristine as it might be, thereby making sense that environmental justice enlist pastoral support (648). Nevada Barr gives these grassroots activists an

authoritative voice, while all but silencing the powerful preservationists. The narrator says, "Someone had stalked and killed Sheila Drury. Now Anna stalked them, dug through their secrets. Murder required so many secrets and secrets were isolating things" (92). It is the isolation that ultimately leads to the disempowering of community members and fuels the activism that follows.

This chapter serves as an opportunity to reflect on how the environmental problems and their effects on one's homeplace, as I first established in my chapters on Abbey and Giardina, develop into a much more serious toxic discourse about environmental justice. Whereas Barr focuses on establishing a powerful female protagonist and a powerful grassroots activist group, Terry Tempest Williams and Lois Gibbs present readers with a much different environmental situation. For Williams and Gibbs, environmental toxicity and the destruction of the homeplace focuses entirely on those individuals who have been or are being forced from their homes because of health problems.

CHAPTER 4

WRITING FOR THEIR LIVES: NONFICTION AND THE FEMINIZATION OF HOMETOWN CONTAMINATION IN TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS'S *REFUGE* AND LOIS GIBBS'S *LOVE CANAL: MY STORY*

> In solving any difficult problem, you have to be prepared to fight long and hard, sometimes at great personal cost; but it can be done. It *must* be done if we are to survive as a democratic society—indeed, if we are to survive at all. (Gibbs 20)

As I discussed in my introduction and demonstrated in the previous chapter, environmental justice has become an important movement in literary criticism as well as within ecocriticism. In particular, within the last decade scholars have been calling for more careful attention paid to gender and class as it pertains to environmental justice. One particular argument for including women at the forefront of the environmental justice movement focuses on pregnant and nursing women or those who plan to bear children and their heightened risk of being poisoned by environmental toxins. Susan Buckingham and Rakibe Kulcur argue that "This links to environmental justice in that [. . .] there should be a much more fundamental argument for challenging any substance release that cannot be proved to be harmless to the most vulnerable" (665).

Buckingham and Kulcur focus on the household, where women come into contact with poisonous materials. The household becomes a place that "illustrates the invisibility of the domestic scale to many academics" (Buckingham and Kulcur 664). As recently as 2007, data from the United Nations Development Programme reveal that "cooking, cleaning, provisioning, food growing, waste disposal, caring for the sick, frail, young and

otherwise dependent continues to be mostly done by women, despite the steadily increasing presence of women in the paid workforce" (qtd. in Buckingham and Kulcur 667). Although poor communities are more exposed to environmental problems relative to richer communities, within any given community it tends to be women who experience environmental problems disproportionate to their poverty alone (667).

Responsibility for environmental contamination on the part of large corporations was dismissed and reattributed to mothers who were to blame for their children's health issues and it was implied that "poor women or women of color have bad housekeeping practices" (667).[1] As Buckingham and Kulcur point out, there is irony in the idea of women fighting for the elimination of pollution and that fight resulting in authorities turning the problems back onto the mother's inability to keep their children safe and healthy. Buckingham and Kulcur clearly situate this issue within the framework of an ecofeminist perspective when they say that there is a "failure of masculinist environmentalisms to address the gendering of experience and responsibility in the domestic sphere" (668).

Lois Gibbs's approach to surviving a difficult problem embodies the views and beliefs of many individuals suffering the physical and mental anguish associated with environmental catastrophe. However, that long, hard fight is not always recorded on paper. While there are many cases of individuals facing hardships due to toxicity of the environment, Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* (1992) and Lois Gibbs's *Love Canal: My Story* (1978) serve as valuable representations of the problems many people have faced in

[1] Linda Hogan's novel *Solar Storms* focuses on the James Bay hydroelectric project that destroyed Cree and Inuit homelands in Canada and depicts the struggles of native peoples to block construction of dams. Barbara Neely's novel *Blanch Cleans Up* depicts the problem of lead poisoning of African American children in Boston.

the United States following Rachel Carson's call to action, *Silent Spring* (1962), and the growth of environmentalism since the first Earth Day in April 1970. Hal Rothman notes,

> During the 1970s the combined forces of government and public outcry created a plethora of environmental legislation that embodied both new and older types of concerns. The Clean Air Act, the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency, and other similar legislation and policy decisions reflected the renewed interest of an American public concerned with pollution, the quality of life in urban areas, and the long-term health of the nation's physical environment. (109)

Rothman's point seems evident in both Williams's and Gibbs's accounts of environmental pollution.

What do Williams, an author and naturalist, and Gibbs, a housewife turned activist, have in common besides the fact that each of them have written about toxic environmental threats? First, each has contributed works of nonfiction that document personal attacks that governmental and industrial agencies have made against innocent community members' homes.[2] Second, both authors have created texts that demonstrate how environmental pollution has victimized women and thus threatened their ability to raise families in a safe environment. Scott Russell Sanders says, "The intimacy is crucial: the understanding of how to dwell in a place arises out of a sustained conversation between people and land. When there is no conversation, when we act

[2] Erin Robinson, a member of the Department of Sociology at SUNY Buffalo, in her thorough study of the Love Canal catastrophe examines the way "frame analysis" can be used to help understand community response to environmental disaster. Frame analysis or "frames" are used to identify who is affected by environmental disasters and who is to blame for those disasters. The frames that Robinson uses in her study are those of local newspapers, community activists, government and industry. I am using the "frame" of the community activist in this study since the focus of this study is on narratives written by individuals who believe they have been victimized in some way.

without listening, when we impose our desires without regard for the qualities or needs of our place, then landscape may be cursed rather than blessed by our presence" (116).

Refuge works on several different levels. Williams advocates being one with the land and having an appreciation for the environment around us as part of a spiritual connection. In a 1997 interview, she stated, "I think it's about passion, whether it's passion for birds or passion for the connectedness of things, the embodiment of landscape, even our own bodies; whole, no separation" (Bartkevicius et al. 7). The text is important because it documents the emotional ups and downs of two major events that allow readers to see what Williams means by this wholeness: the illness and death of her mother and the disappearance of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, which served as a "safe haven" for Williams both in childhood and as an adult, during her mother's physical decline. The book, and thus the story that Williams tells, meshes both events as parallel struggles in her life. First, the narrative structure of the book serves as a realistic portrayal of Williams's life. Second, the text offers a radical voice in the fight against environmental toxicity, especially as it relates to the female positioning of the fight against pollution. When Williams discussed the conception of her book, she explained,

> I came home and got out a childhood easel that Mimi, my grandmother, had given me. It was the biggest paper I had, I found two black magic markers and with one hand wrote: "Bird Refuge," and with the other hand wrote, "Mother," then circled them, then wrote "Great Salt Lake," under Bird Refuge and "Cancer" under Mother. I realized that the only thing holding them together was the narrator, so I drew two lines and wrote "narrator" and circled it, stood back and realized I had created an image of

> the female reproductive system. At that point, I understood what I was really acknowledging; it wasn't the scientific mind or the poetic mind, but the feminine mind that I wanted to embrace. That was the language that I wanted to liberate. I had a visual map I could now trust. (Bartkevicius et al. 9)

The text, then, serves as a feminist commentary on how environmental pollution extends beyond the destruction of humanity and wildlife in general. In the first chapter of *Refuge* Williams refers to a conversation she had with Sandy Lopez, her friend: "We spoke of rage. Of women and landscape. How our bodies and the body of the earth have been mined" (10).[3] The narrative underscores the attack on the feminine, the place of women in the environmental fight, and the place of Williams herself.

Like *Refuge,* Gibbs's story serves as a true retelling of events as they unfolded in her home area of Niagara Falls. In 1892, William T. Love set out to build a six or seven mile canal connecting the upper and lower Niagara Rivers, with the goal of producing cheap electricity from the 280 foot drop. Financial backing for the project fell through due to the development of new, more efficient technology. Between 1940 and 1953 the site became a toxic dump site for the Hooker Electrochemical Company, the city of Niagara Falls, and the United States Army. Soon after Hooker closed the dump in 1953, the canal was filled with dirt and sold to the Department of Education. A school was built on the grounds, and children have reportedly become ill. It wasn't until 1978 that the government investigated complaints in and around the canal area.

Love Canal was chosen for this study for several reasons: it was the first environmental disaster to receive widespread media coverage; it was the first

[3] Williams' conversation with Lopez echoes ecofeminism's core ideology.

contaminated community to be remediated and resettled, and it was a landmark case in the development of environmental legislation. Love Canal was also the first major environmental disaster to involve the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a major decision-making authority since its creation in 1970 (145).

The people of the community, according to Gibbs, are legitimately involved in the contamination, but her text demonstrates how working-class individuals in rural America believe that they are ignored in the face of disaster. Like *Refuge,* the text is a radical voice exposing a feminist environmentalism or ecofeminism. While many people suffer from the toxicity of Love Canal, the text spends a great deal of time focusing on women's responses and illnesses as they relate to childbirth, and we would be remiss not to address that the frame of reference from which the story is told, unlike Williams's, is that of a working-class mother and housewife living in a largely working-class community.

In its most literal sense, Williams's *Refuge* serves as an account of her own beloved "sanctuary" slowly eroding due to the rapidly rising Great Salt Lake in Utah. The bird refuge is obviously a place of solitude and comfort for Williams, but she witnesses the slow deterioration and disappearance of the refuge, noting the remains of dead birds she finds and her observations that some inhabitants of the refuge are just simply no longer there.[4]

The refuge for Williams is "home"—a place of comfort that extends beyond her childhood memories into her adult life.[5] The notion of home and identity is established in

[4] In "Burrowing Owls" Williams notes that the flooding of desert lands has led to the disappearance of prairie dogs, ferrets, and burrowing owls.

[5] Williams states that each of us "intuits a homeland, a landscape we naturally comprehend" (Bartkevicius et al. 2). She discusses how upon arriving in Iowa, she compared the landscape in the Midwest to that of her home in Utah. While she notes differences in landscape, sunlight, and communities in general, she suggests that home is where we "are." She says, "for example, going out to Cone's Marsh just an hour or

the first chapter of *Refuge*. Her self-identification with the refuge is carried out throughout the entire book; however, her identity with the refuge is established from her commentary on the burrowing owls. She says, "There are those birds you gauge your life by. The burrowing owls five miles from the entrance to the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge are mine" (8).

The importance of Williams's comment is compounded by the scene she presents in the first chapter of her book. As Williams and her friend are travelling into the refuge to visit the burrowing owls' mound, she discusses how she and her grandmother discovered them in 1960 and returned every year since the discovery to pay their "respects." She notes that generations of owls had been raised there and that they have survived the flooding. However, upon arriving at the mound's location, she noticed it was missing. Instead of the anticipated mound, Williams and her friend found a small cinderblock building with a sign that read "Canadian Goose Gun Club" and a fence with a handwritten note telling visitors to keep out (11). At that moment a couple of men in a pick-up truck pulled up alongside Williams and her friend. When the men ask what they were looking for, the women don't respond. The men say:

> We didn't kill 'em. Those boys from the highway department came and graveled the place. Two bits, they did it. I mean, you gotta admit those ground owls are messy little bastards. They'll shit all over hell if ya let 'em. And try and sleep with 'em hollering at ya all night long. They had to go. Anyway, we got bets with the county they'll pop up someplace around here next year. (12)

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so from Iowa City, one can see great blue herons, cinnamon teals, and white pelicans even in the Heartland. On the shores of Great Salt Lake, you can see these same species. These magnificent birds call us home wherever that may be. The ground beneath our feet is not so different" (2).

On another day, Williams returned to the site of the destroyed owl mound, hoping to find the mound in place and owls inhabiting the site once again. The same pickup truck arrived; the men disparagingly asked Williams if she was still looking for the owls.

> Suddenly in perfect detail, I pictured the burrowing owls' mound—that clay- covered fist rising from the alkaline flats. The exact one these beergut-over-beltbuckled men had leveled. I walked calmly over to their truck and leaned my stomach against their door. I held up my fist a few inches from the driver's face and slowly lifted my middle finger to the sky. "This is for you—from the owls and me." (12-13)

The scene is an important one. First, Williams's identification with the owls gives her a sense of identity within the natural world of the refuge. It establishes not only a "place" that Williams discusses, but a "sense of place" that becomes her. Second, the men's blasé attitude toward the destruction of wildlife becomes a personal attack on Williams, who has compared herself to the owls.[6]

This scene has, however, been criticized for perpetuating a negative form of activism against the working-class. Joshua Dolezal, for example, raises an interesting point regarding Williams's behavior in this scene. While praising Williams's work as sophisticated, he criticizes Williams for taking such a commonplace stance against the working-class.[7] He says, "The image of Williams flashing the 'bird' at hunters in defense of a wildlife refuge is, sadly, a vivid illustration of the impasse that literary activists have

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[6] Wendell Berry addresses a similar problem in *The Long-Legged House*. Berry criticizes men from the city who come to the river bank "looking for something to kill," preferably some small creature they would never have the time to know alive (105). Berry's speaker says, "The diggers among our artifacts will find us to have been honorable lovers of death, having been willing to pay exorbitantly for it" (105). He says, "Eternity is always present in the animal mind; only men deal in beginnings and ends" (105).

[7] In this case, Williams and her friend are classified as middle-class naturalists, while the men in the pick-up truck are working-class citizens.

suffered from and contributed to in the American West" (3). Instead, Dolezal proposes that groups work together to find alternatives to the environmental problems threatening wildlife:

> Empowering the laborer by collaborating with him to envision economic alternatives to his present livelihood has tended to strike literary activists as a perilous step toward preserving the ostensible enemy. The sooner the wrangler quits the landscape and takes his wrangling elsewhere, according to the revolutionary way of thinking, the better for the landscape and for the cause of bioregionalism in the zero sum struggle for the West. (5)

While Dolezal's point is relevant for the sake of literary activism in general, if we are to view Williams's text on a deeper level as a mirror image of her own life and thus through the frame of the victimized activist, then a deeper reading than just "us" versus "them" needs to be employed. Williams's actions in this scene foreshadow a necessary ecofeminist analysis, the overtaking of land by men, regardless of their class.

The text begins with Williams's confrontation with the hunters over the owls. The text continues as a realistic portrayal of Williams's life when she elaborates on the connectedness, beyond the owls described in the first chapter, of her family to the land. She notes that she was raised in a spiritual world, with a Mormon belief that life existed before Earth and will exist after Earth and that every being existed spiritually before physical existence on Earth: "Our attachment to the land was our attachment to each other" (15).[8] Williams says, "The birds and I share a natural history. It is a matter of rootedness, of living inside a place for so long that the mind and the imagination fuse"

[8] Williams briefly explains her Mormon culture in the opening of the book. She notes the importance of history and genealogy to Mormons, and she explains the roots of her family's heritage to the American West. Moreover, she emphasizes that her family knows history and that their history is tied to the land.

(21). Each chapter demonstrates how, through Williams's viewpoint, those connections are articulated, thus advancing the problem Williams writes about beyond the simple "us" versus "them" that Dolezal accuses her of perpetuating.

> And so it was a spiritual experience being in nature, it was a safe experience because we were largely with family, it was an intellectual experience because we were learning the names of things, were learning what was related to what, and what we might see, and it was fun. It never stopped being fun for me, so it's a simple response. And it was most always in a context of love and respect for the land and for each other." (7-8)

Each chapter is enveloped by the conditions of the refuge, and Williams reports the level of the Great Salt Lake in each one. She states, "I could not separate the Bird Refuge from my family. Devastation respects no boundaries. The landscape of my childhood and the landscape of my family, the two things I had always regarded as bedrock, were now subject to change. Quicksand" (40). As the flooding of the bird refuge continues, she views the activity as parallel to the events she is encountering in her personal life:

> When we're in relation, whether it is with a human being, with an animal, or with the desert, I think there is an exchange of the erotic impulse.[9] We are engaged, we are vulnerable, we are both giving and receiving, we are

[9] In the 1997 interview Jocelyn Bartkevicius asks Williams if her writing has become more tactile, thus extending beyond the visual sense of place in nature to the erotic. Williams explains that "our culture has chosen to define erotic in very narrow terms, terms that largely describe pornography or voyeurism, the opposite of a relationship that asks for reciprocity" (Bartkevicius et al. 3). Williams explains that she wanted to create a relationship on the page and that when there is a relationship with a human being, animal, or desert there is an erotic impulse.

> fully present in that moment, and we are able to heighten our capacity for passion which I think is the full range of emotion, both the joy and sorrow that one feels when in wild country. To speak about Eros in a particular landscape is to acknowledge our capacity to love Other. (Bartkevicius et al. 3-4)

There is a clear correlation between Williams's experiences at the refuge and Wendell Berry's observation of the flooding of his homeplace. Berry's speaker in "The Rise" in *The Long-Legged House* suggests the mystery of a "changing" landscape as he reflects on his canoe trip down the rising Kentucky River. He says,

> To me that, more than anything else, is the excitement of a rise: the unexpectedness, always, of the change it makes. What was difficult becomes easy. What was easy becomes difficult. By water, what was distant becomes near. By land, what was near becomes distant. At the water line, when a rise is on, the world is changing. (95)

The speaker, despite the majestic nature of the flooding, also suggests that there is something horrifying about the experiences of seeing the river rise. He says, "contained and borne in the singular large movements are hundreds of smaller ones: eddies and whirlpools, turning this way and that, cross-currents rushing out from the shores into the channel" (99). What the speaker finds most horrifying is the fact that it is "not subject," meaning that we are very aware of the rising river and attracted to it, but it has no knowledge of us. It is, like all other natural forces, beyond our control. "We can make use of it," he says. "We can ride on its back in boats. But it won't stop to let us get on and off. It is not a passenger train. And if we make a mistake, or risk ourselves too far to

it, why then it will suffer a little wrinkle on its surface, and go on as before" (100). And, the speaker summarizes the mysterious effects the rise has on a person when he says, "That horror is never fully revealed, but only sensed piecemeal in events, all different, all shaking, yet all together falling short of the full revelation. The next will be as unexpected as the last" (100).

Williams's book, however, is more than just a journal of observations. Her account documents, perhaps more importantly, her mother's battle with cancer and her family's fight to keep her mother's spirits high. I assert that *Refuge* tells the story of the parallels between environmental and human deterioration. Williams explains that *Refuge* reflects two stories that she was living, "which in many ways were the two minds I was inhabiting," she says. She continues,

> There were times when I thought I was completely schizophrenic, that I was living in two worlds. What pulls the scientific mind and literary minds together? Through the Navajo apprenticeship, I realized it was story, but I was looking at story from a distanced, exterior point of view. With *Refuge*, there was no distance whatsoever, and there were moments when I thought I was going mad. (Bartkevicius et al. 9)

The bird refuge is disappearing because of the effects of toxicity. The slow rise of "disease" takes away the refuge, while at the same time, and interspersed with commentary about her mother's illness, the destruction of the refuge is juxtaposed with the destruction of her mother. Williams defines cancer in her chapter "Snowy Egrets," thus establishing its correlation with the demise of the Great Salt Lake. Williams discusses the denotation and connotation of the term "cancer" as she increasingly moves

towards understanding her mother's physical decline. She says that the term cancer "kills us with its name first, because we have allowed it to become synonymous with death." Then she defines the term according to the Oxford English Dictionary as "anything that frets, corrodes, corrupts, or consumes slowly and secretly" (qtd. in 43). She then explains how cancer becomes a disease of shame, one that encourages secrets and lies so as to protect all of those involved. She writes,

> The pulse of Great Salt Lake, surging along Antelope Island's shores, becomes the force wearing against my mother's body. And when I watch flocks of phalaropes wing their way toward quiet bays on the island, I recall watching Mother sleep, imagining the dreams were encircling her, wondering what she knows that I must learn for myself. The light changes, Antelope Island is blue. Mother awakened and I looked away. Antelope Island is no longer accessible to me. It is my mother's body floating in uncertainty. (64)

In the beginning of the chapter "Ravens," Williams notes that her mother began radiation treatment for her cancer. This chapter in particular emphasizes the connection between the environmental crisis at Great Salt Lake and Williams's mother. Later in the afternoon following the radiation treatment, Williams convinces her mother to go swimming in the lake: "We drifted for hours. Merging with salt water and sky so completely, we were resolved, dissolved, in peace" (78). In the next paragraph, a parallel to Williams's mother's radiation is made, as if to allude to the Great Salt Lake's own radiation treatment. Williams explains that the Southern Pacific Railroad Causeway was breached and sent water from the south arm of the lake into Gunnison Bay. The governor

anticipates that the disparate water levels of the south and north arm of the lake will equalize (78). Therefore, we see firsthand the relationship between her mother's treatment and the lake's treatment. In each case, the disease that is causing the pollution is expected to equalize or taper.

There is another level to this metaphor that Williams creates. Williams provides a commentary not only on the disease that is consuming her mother and the lake, but a look at the mother-child relationship. Regarding our relationships with our mothers, Williams begins her chapter "Barn Swallows" by asking,

> What is it about the relationship of a mother that can heal or hurt us? Her womb is the first landscape we inhabit. It is here we learn to respond—to move, to listen, to be nourished and grow. In her body we grow to be human as our tails disappear and our gills turn to lungs. Our maternal environment is perfectly safe—dark, warm, and wet. It is a residency inside the Feminine. (50)

The passage indicates our sense of place and belonging to the womb until we are fully able to function as humans outside of the womb. The image sets up a comparison of the natural environment. Earth as mother functions in very much the same way. However, the Earth or, as applied in Williams's text, the lake which serves as mother for so many species is beginning to succumb to environmental pollution. We have a connection with our mothers as a place of safety and nourishing. For Williams, that place is dying, and for the wildlife, that sense of refuge is dying as well.

The above passage is followed by an image of birth, and Williams notes that "our first death is our own birth." She concludes the chapter with "Suffering shows us what

we are attached to—perhaps the umbilical cord between Mother and me has never been cut. Dying doesn't cause suffering. Resistance to dying does" (53). Later, Williams states,

> The hostility of this landscape teaches me how to be quiet and unobtrusive, how to find grace among spiders with a poisonous bite. I sat on a lone boulder in the midst of the curlews. By now, they had grown accustomed to me. This too, I found encouraging—that in the face of stressful intrusions, we can eventually settle in. One begins to almost trust the intruder as a presence that demands greater intent toward life. (147)

In the chapter "Western Tanager," Williams makes a connection between her mother's illness getting worse and the deteriorating conditions of the Great Salt Lake. In this chapter we see Williams's mother finally accept her cancer. She says that the cancer is "almost like a friend" and that the "cancer is very much a part of me" (156). At the same time, The Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge offices close. Williams notes, "We have pretty well abandoned the sixty-five-thousand acre refuge fourteen miles west of Brigham City, because it is impossible to second-guess the Great Salt Lake" (156). The correlation between Williams's mother's acceptance of her cancer and the abandonment of the refuge suggests that acceptance of the impossibility of getting better is evident. She states, "I really believe our lack of intimacy with the land has initiated a lack of intimacy with each other. So how do we cross these borders? How do we keep things fluid, not fixed, so we can begin to explore both our body and the body of the earth? No separation. Eros: nature, even our own" (4).

Love Canal

Lois Gibbs's narrative about the Love Canal events occurring in Niagara Falls is not a typical work of non-fiction covered in a college classroom. The text has historically served as a personal retelling of one woman's and an entire community's fight to convince the government that citizens were becoming ill in that area and needed assistance. The narrative, however, shares many qualities of a traditional work of non-fiction. The text is about an environmental catastrophe, but it equally portrays the emotional ups and downs of ordinary American families in what Gibbs would classify a typical American community. The picture of Lois Gibbs's neighborhood before Love Canal is reminiscent of Rachel Carson's everyday American town in her chapter "A Fable for Tomorrow" in *Silent Spring*. The American small town of Gibbs's Niagara Falls neighborhood consists of "neat bungalows, many painted white, with neatly clipped hedges or freshly painted fences" (8). She continues, "In the summertime, you would have seen men painting their houses or adding an extra room, women taking care of gardens, and children riding bicycles and tricycles on the sidewalks or playing in the backyards" (8). These observations, of course, are from years past. In the setting of the narrative, the late 1970s, she talks of seeing homes boarded up and abandoned. Lawns and gardens are uncut and overgrown. The town is disintegrating—physically, emotionally, and mentally. While *Love Canal* has received virtually no attention in the literary world, its powerful narrative of a group of well-crafted "characters" lends itself to the contribution of ecocatastrophic literature.[10] The story of Love Canal, as told by Lois

[10] Print, television, and radio coverage of contamination discovery as well citizen's organizations that formed to resolve the problem have influenced community groups in other contaminated communities across the country to emerge and take action (Robinson 140).

Gibbs and not unlike Williams's *Refuge,* is as much a story about herself and the terrified families she writes about as it is a story of a community living with the threat of environmental pollution.

While Williams's *Refuge* takes a much more philosophical stance on pollution and the effects of that pollution on the individual and community, Gibbs's work relies much more heavily on scientific discovery. Relying on scientific inquiry, however, fosters the controversy in Gibbs's story. Robinson asserts, "Individuals have been socialized to trust science for valid, factual information. Citizens who suspect environmental contamination often turn to government and scientific experts to offer explanations about the dangers of contamination" (141). She notes that turning to science often creates debate rather than certainty in regards to environmental problems. She argues that the uncertainty surrounding environmental risk and the science in place to assess such risk creates multiple viewpoints of the problem and uncertainty of "who the victims of the problem were, who was responsible for the act of contamination, and who was responsible for cleanup and property" (141).[11] The Love Canal community reacts in a variety of ways. While there are those opposed to Gibbs and her followers, many people follow in fear that the health of their families is in jeopardy, largely based on the way scientific reports are interpreted.

In a well-written introduction to Gibbs's book, Murray Levine, then director of the Clinical/Community Psychology Program at SUNY Buffalo, points out exactly what Gibbs was trying to do with her narrative and grassroots activism. Moreover, Levine's

[11] The study that Robinson conducts relies on "frames." These frames help organize the many perspectives that exist from contradictory scientific reports. Conflicting information presented to community members from multiple sources creates a situation in which different perceptions emerged and were shaped by competing interpretations.

overview of Gibbs's tale fits directly with the parameters of this study. Levine covers three reasons for telling Gibbs's story. First, Levine contends that Gibbs is a typical American woman. She has a husband, two children, a modest home, and a high-school education, and lives in a residential neighborhood where "their house and their street could be set for a movie about the typical American family" (xiv).[12] Yet, as a shy, stay-at-home mother, with minimal interest in politics, she organized and served as president of a neighborhood association and became the voice for thousands of families in Niagara Falls.[13] As Levine says, Gibbs's story deserves to be told because her story is one of a courageous, yet seemingly ordinary woman who, "in response to crisis and challenge, transcended herself and became far more than she had been" (xiv). Perhaps more pertinent to scholarly inquiry, her story highlights the governmental-citizen relationships that exist in her community as well as the relationship between experts and those whose lives are influenced by their decisions. Levine cites the third reason for Gibbs's story is that it is the story of "the inner meanings and feelings of *humans* in relationship to the moral illnesses of those cynics and their professional robots who speak the inhuman language of benefit-cost ratios, who speak of the threat of congenital deformities or cancers as acceptable risks" (xvi).[14] Gibbs's text, then, becomes a retelling of events and

[12] This is the "frame" from which Gibbs sees Love Canal—from the point of view of an everyday housewife and mother.

[13] Shortly after researching and interviewing people of Love Canal, Gibbs attended meetings in Albany, was invited to the White House in Washington, D. C., appeared on local and national news coverage, and appeared on *Donahue* and other national talk shows.

[14] Gibbs notes that over 200 different compounds have been identified in and around the canal. At least twelve known carcinogens, one of which is Benzene, cited for causing leukemia in people and the other is Dioxin, which the health commissioner characterized as "The most toxic substance ever synthesized by man" (qtd. in Gibbs 4).

actions of "characters" in a setting plagued by environmental pollution, leading to a perceived threat to personal well-being.

The research that Robinson has done on communities and responsibility for environmental crisis might help explain the Love Canal community as we see it in Gibbs's narrative. Primarily, Robinson's research investigates the question of how communities faced with an environmental disaster find and interpret information on that disaster. How do communities make reasonable decisions about the health and well-being of their families? (145). The bottom line here is that Gibbs and others in her situation felt threatened, and that threat is enough for action. Lois Gibbs remarked:

> [The] only way we ever received help was when we made it politically advantageous. We all grow up with the belief that if there is a problem, especially a public health problem, that the government will respond [. . .] [I]f you want to get out and you want to be relocated . . . they [homeowners] are going to have to behave in ways that they wouldn't normally feel proud of [such as protesting, fighting, being aggressive towards public officials] (qtd. in Robinson 157).

Gibbs's above assessment is the "frame" from which the activists see the environmental problem at Love Canal.

Gibbs's opening chapter, "The Problem at Love Canal," sets the scene for a particularly disturbing, personal toxic attack. To help readers understand the situation that is at the heart of her story, Gibbs shares the fact that she and other members of the community wrote to thousands of people from all over the world who expressed support and interest. After an overview of the role and identity of the Love Canal Homeowners

Association and the history of the events at Love Canal, Gibbs points out the major health-related problems that have disrupted this community.[15] She says, "Our Association with the help of other scientists, conducted a health survey of our community. We were forced to do our own study because the governmental agencies would not conduct a good objective scientific study" (5). The definition of a "good objective scientific study" is left to the discretion of the group requesting the action. The group's results were astounding. There was a 50-75% chance of miscarriage while living in Love Canal, and a 56% birth defect rate in the five years leading up to Gibbs's research. Also, there was an increase in cases of epilepsy, nervous breakdowns, suicide attempts, hyperactivity in children, a greater chance of contracting urinary disorders, kidney and bladder problems, asthma, and other respiratory problems. Most alarming, however, is that in a sample of fifteen pregnancies in Love Canal women, there were only two normal births. The rest resulted in miscarriages, stillborn births, or birth defected babies (6).[16] In a text that serves as a call to action, the statistics certainly play their part well.

However, as a literary narrative, the opening chapter solidifies Gibbs as a protagonist, a dynamic narrator with human emotions and a clear agenda. What makes Gibbs's story particularly relevant to this study is the "position" Gibbs's group plays within her statement. Gibbs's opening chapter provides a clear exposition and group of characters without intending to write a literary work. Within the same chapter, Gibbs discusses how the fear and physical reaction to the chemicals affected her own family.

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[15] The Love Canal Homeowners Association was a group of community activists demanding governmental intervention in the Love Canal environmental disaster. Members of the group regularly appeared on television shows and other media outlets in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

[16] A 2009 study aimed to describe the mortality experience of former Love Canal residents from 1979 to 1996 suggested that death resulting from excessive exposure to toxins found at Love Canal could not be determined (Gensburg 209).

This is where the story transforms itself from a narration about the events that occurred chronologically to a story about a family suffering the effects of toxicity.

Gibbs's first inclination that something was amiss at Love Canal was when her six-year-old son, Michael, developed health problems. He developed asthma and seizures. After a letter from the physician, the school board still denied Gibbs's request to have her son transferred to another school (xv). Upon the decline to transfer her son to another school, Gibbs began going door-to-door to petition the school's operation.

At this point in the story, the "plot" thickens. As Gibbs takes to knocking on doors for signatures to take to Albany, she learns more of the true story. Not only is the 99th Street School a problem, but the entire community is sick. At one home, Gibbs encountered a family with a young daughter who had arthritis, another daughter who had had a miscarriage, and a young father who suffered a heart attack. A closer neighbor had suffered migraines and was hospitalized for them, while her daughter suffered from kidney problems and bleeding. Another woman suffered from gastro-intestinal problems. A man another door down was dying from lung cancer.[17] There are more alarming reports of people not allowing children and pets outside to play in the yard because of the risk of being burned by potentially harmful, invisible chemicals. Children and pets were suffering from burns after playing outside.

A Feminist Commentary

There is little question that both Williams's and Gibbs's texts are representative of the events that were going on in their own personal lives. Both texts, however, divulge another level of "toxicity": the philosophical toxicity of the feminine.

[17] Gibbs notes one woman who lives on 97th Street who asked her not to make waves. She had been working hard talking to politicians and didn't want Gibbs to disrupt what had already been accomplished.

In the opening of *Refuge,* Williams echoes an ecofeminist perspective when she states that disrespect of nature "has everything to do with intimacy." She continues, "Men define intimacy through their bodies. It is physical. They define intimacy with the land in the same way" (10). Williams's friend suggests that men have forgotten what they are connected to, that somehow the "subjugation of women and nature may be a loss of intimacy within themselves" (10). Given Williams's and her friend's stance on the intimacy of men and nature, a whole line of analysis addressing the personal attack on their gender is necessary and justified.

Williams states in her epilogue that she belongs to a "Clan of One-Breasted Women" (281). In this chapter she indicates that many of her family members have suffered from cancer; her mother, grandmothers, and six aunts have had mastectomies. She notes that seven are dead. Williams points out that she, too, has had problems, having two biopsies for breast cancer and a small tumor between her ribs diagnosed as borderline malignant. Williams makes a striking point, however. She notes that statistics indicate that breast cancer is hereditary, largely dependent on fatty diets, childlessness, and becoming pregnant after the age of thirty (281). However, Williams makes a startling claim that living in Utah might be the "greatest hazard of all." She notes that "nothing is familiar to me anymore. I just returned home from the hospital, having had a small cyst removed from my right breast. Second time. It was benign. But I suffered uncertainty of not knowing for days. My scars portend my lineage. I look at Mother and I see myself. Is cancer my path, too?" (97).

She continues to describe her knowledge of her grandmother's cancer issues as well. The chapter "White Pelicans" begins with a commentary on the disappearance of

several native birds. The food sources, shelters, and safe habitats for birds are disappearing with the flood. What is significant in this chapter is that Williams identifies with the displacement with which the birds are confronted. She ends the beginning commentary by saying, "The birds of Bear River have been displaced; so have I" (97). She then leads into her own health issues, as noted above.

The attack on her gender becomes clearer when Williams recalls having dinner with her father a year after her mother's death where she remembers a "dream" that she had of seeing "this flash of light in the night in the desert." She recollects that it "had so permeated my being that I could not venture south without seeing it again, on the horizon, illuminating buttes and mesas" (282-83). However, when Williams's father confirms that what she saw was "the bomb," she recalls, "We pulled over and suddenly, rising from the desert floor, we saw it, clearly, this golden-stemmed cloud, the mushroom. The sky seemed to vibrate with an eerie pink glow. Within a few minutes, a light ash was raining on the car." Her father tells her that the bomb was a common occurrence in the fifties.[18] Williams says, "It was at this moment that I realized the deceit I had been living under. Children growing up in the American Southwest, drinking contaminated milk from contaminated cows, even from the contaminated breasts of their mothers, my mother—members, years later, of the Clan of One-Breasted Women" (283). Toxicity, then, has extended beyond the welfare of the family. It now rests in the welfare of a mother to nurture her offspring.

[18] Much of the desert Southwest is today part of the American military's "national sacrifice zone," the crucible of U.S. superpower status, the place where, since Pearl Harbor, hot and cold wars have been tested, monitored, enacted, or denied (Beck 68).

For Williams, the realization of the above-ground atomic testing in Nevada from January 1951 to July 1962 ties her narrative together. Williams asserts that the winds were "blowing north covering 'low-use segments of the population' with fallout leaving sheep dead in their tracks" (283). She asserts that "Public health was secondary to national security" and that in spite of potential detrimental effects on people's health, "it has been found that the tests may be conducted with adequate assurance of safety under conditions prevailing at the bombing reservations" (qtd. in Williams 284).[19] The tests conducted by military and governmental officials are suggested to be a disrespect of abandoned wilderness and low population areas. Largely composed of men, the bombing tests have had profound effects on nearby communities, especially mothers who pass the unwanted toxins on to their children in breast milk.

This situation is viewed as dominance of one "class" or "gender" over another. Williams states that "the price of obedience has become too high" (286). She continues, "The fear and inability to question authority that ultimately killed rural communities in Utah during atmospheric testing of atomic weapons is the same fear I saw in my mother's body. Sheep. Dead sheep. The evidence is buried" (286).[20] Historian Valerie Kuletz, daughter of a weapons scientist, vividly describes the kind of landscape created by fifty years of military experimentation:

> Whenever I travel the backroads of the Southwest, I am keenly aware of the "signs" of power in the landscape. Such signs include high-wire

[19] Williams briefly discusses the August 30, 1979 suit filed, *Irene Allen v. The United States of America* where Allen's case, which was one of twenty-four test cases, sought compensation from the United States government for cancers caused by nuclear testing in Nevada.

[20] Lois Gibbs's comment regarding doing what the government wants earlier in this chapter suggests that Williams is not the only one to struggle with this concept.

> fences, radar antennae, massive satellite communications dishes tilted up toward the stars, sonic booms, stealth aircraft, well-maintained roads in the middle of "nowhere" leading to various "installations," earth-shaking explosions, military trucks and personnel, unmarked trucks carrying "explosives," jet trails across the bright blue sky, guard towers, fencing and more fencing, and everywhere government signs that read "DO NOT ENTER." These forces composed of high technology, big science, and military occupation impose powerful boundaries upon the land itself, as well as the people who live near them. (qtd. in Beck 69-70)

Williams says that she can't prove that her family members developed cancer from nuclear fallout, but she can't prove they didn't. She says that "Tolerating blind obedience in the name of patriotism or religion ultimately takes our lives" (286).

The attack on the feminine goes further. Gibbs's narrative focuses on the treatment of the layperson, also symbolized as the power of the predominantly male governmental agency. Residents were forced to accept cryptic warnings against vegetables, basements, and backyards. The Health Department could not say if the neighborhood was safe, but members of the department handed out individual air sample results with numbers the lay person could not understand. Gibbs quotes Lois Heisner:

> My daughter already has birth defects. She already has horrible illnesses. She is already sick. What are you going to do for her? She's already over three. Does that mean she has to stay and die? We have chemicals in our basement. You took an air reading. I've got this air reading and I don't even know what it means. Does it mean our lives are in jeopardy? (36)

Williams and Gibbs are not the first authors to have addressed the effects of environmental toxins on human health. Before these texts, Rachel Carson's chapter "One in Every Four" in *Silent Spring* outlines the possibilities associated with cancer and chemicals in the environment. Specifically, Carson—who was herself dying of cancer when she testified before Congress in 1962—addresses several studies conducted on cancer patients. The chapter opens up the "cancer issue" as a new area of study. Scholar Jim Tarter asserts that very few people are willing to address the cancer-environment question: "Our entire culture is in denial about the link between our toxified environment and cancer" (214). Tarter reflects on his own battle with cancer and that of his sister, Karen, and many of his family members. After reading Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer and the Environment* (1997), Tarter understood the need to address gender as a branch of environmental justice. Tarter asserts that "The new historical perspective available from cancer registries makes clear that the main causes of cancer are environmental, not genetic" (219).

By the 1980s awareness of the effects of progress on the environment was evident. Events in the late 1970s brought the toxicity issues to a heightened awareness. Parts of industrialized areas of Louisiana and east Texas were labeled "Cancer Alley" after the rates of cancer among residents soared as full-scale development of chemical and refining facilities occurred (136). In 1976 a mysterious disease killed a number of delegates at an American Legion meeting in Philadelphia, and a few years later highly toxic PCBs in a cooling agent were created in a building fire in Buffalo, New York.

Love Canal was only one instance of toxicity in the United States. The James River in Virginia contained a dangerous chemical known as ketone. The "Valley of the

Drums" in Kentucky was a landfill that housed more than seventeen thousand corroding drums of hazardous waste that contaminated drinking water. Beyond the psychological effects of environmental catastrophe as presented by Abbey and Giardina, the physical and political effects presented by Barr and those ideas presented by Williams and Gibbs in this chapter may lead readers to ponder what is next for our beloved communities.

The apocalyptic novel—a genre dependent upon tales of tragedy and foreboding predictions of the future of humankind and the environment—builds on the pollution and catastrophes already addressed by Carson, Abbey, Giardina, Barr, Williams, and Gibbs. If we fail to seriously consider the warnings these authors offer, what will our hometown communities be like twenty or fifty years in the future

CHAPTER 5

MUTUAL AID IN THE APOCALYPTIC MILLENNIUM: PHILIP WYLIE, PAUL AUSTER, AND OCTAVIA BUTLER

> Civilization is to groups what intelligence is to individuals. It is a means of combining the intelligence of many to achieve ongoing group adaptation. Civilization, like intelligence, may serve well, serve adequately, or fail to serve its adaptive function. When civilization fails to serve, it must disintegrate unless it is acted upon by unifying internal or external forces.
>
> —from Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*[1]

To Lauren Olamina, Octavia Butler's main protagonist and narrator in her 1993 novel *Parable of the Sower,* creating and sustaining a community are central components of survival. Part of her beliefs established in a fictional religion she calls Earthseed are shaped by her exposure to the destruction of her home, family, and entire community. This destruction, caused by ongoing economic problems and wastefulness of natural resources in suburbia, result in communities not achieving the ongoing adaptation necessary for survival. Lauren's assessment at the end of the above quotation that civilizations must disintegrate if not acted upon by internal and external forces is at the heart of Butler's novel as well as two other popular apocalyptic novels of the twentieth century, Philip Wylie's *The End of the Dream* (1972) and Paul Auster's *The Country of Last Things* (1987). In all three novels, the concept of destruction before renewal and the

[1] The quotation is included as one of the "doctrines" of Earthseed, a fictional religious belief created by the narrator and main protagonist of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. Many of the chapters in the text begin with some of the narrator's philosophical beliefs which underscore the purpose of Earthseed. This quotation is included in the chapter of the book beginning with details of the year (101).

necessity of community mutual aid is established and explored as small-town America crumbles into extinction beneath human-induced environmental toxicity.

Communities in the United States threatened by environmental collapse have been addressed by a variety of genres and authors of contemporary prose, as illustrated in this dissertation. Despite the calls for action and cries for help that many contemporary writers of ecocatastrophe literature have made, authors such as Butler, Wylie, and Auster predict that suffering and hardship are inevitable for the generations living in the early to mid-twenty-first century—hardship and suffering that must be experienced before communities on Earth can ever reach a mutual respectable relationship with their natural environment. Apocalyptic literature has garnered much attention over the past several decades for its gloomy, often far-fetched predictions of limited natural resources, overpopulation, disease, violence, and economic hardship, among many other themes. However, reading apocalyptic literature from an ecocritical perspective makes the "far-fetched" events of which Butler, Wylie, and Auster write uncomfortably real.

Within the world of the toxic discourse and the apocalyptic vision, however, a silver lining must exist. Jerry Phillips quotes Lewis Mumford as saying that "the highest office of the writer is to wrest from a barbarous world, in which catastrophe looms large, the positive sense of a 'better world,' even an ideal world that is somehow immanent in the deadly facts of our social world" (299). It seems, then, that Butler, Wylie, and Auster all demonstrate Mumford's assertion. Each author depicts a world of catastrophe, disaster brought on by the faults of the human condition, but equally true is the fact that within each novel each author provides readers with a glimpse of hope. Moreover, the

hope that is established in each novel relies heavily on the positive interaction of community members coming together in a time of catastrophe.

Protecting one's home and the environment begins with community solidarity, as emphasized in many post-1970 works of prose. While these novels predict a grim state of humanity and the environment in the time period which they exist, each text provides commentary on the necessity of the destruction of the world as we know it in order for future generations to have a stronger relationship with their environment. Wylie, Auster, and Butler demonstrate this concept by reflecting on the environmental contamination of communities to the point that those areas cannot recover, at least not in the short-term. The environment promises to rebound but long after those generations responsible for its collapse have ceased to exist.

Cautionary Tales of Contaminated Communities

The Earth will not be destroyed by human beings, at least not permanently. Human beings will promote environmental catastrophe, which will in turn destroy human beings. John Brunner's preface to Philip Wylie's *The End of the Dream* begins with a prediction that archaeologists will come to Earth from a different planet to erect a monument to mark our passing. The prediction includes an aptly put inscription: "Here lies a species capable of thinking, but too lazy to think anything right through" (5).[2] Wylie's prediction underscores the overall theme found in many contemporary

[2] In some ways, the prediction is reminiscent of Ray Bradbury's vision of the future in his mid-twentieth century book *Martian Chronicles.* Most of the stories are set in the twenty-first century, and after depleting all natural resources on Earth, earthlings are forced to move to Mars, where resources are plentiful. Upon their arrival on Mars and assuming the same environmental attitudes that led to their demise, space travelers pose a threat to communities on Mars. Interestingly, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* addresses travel to Mars in the year 2024, the same timeline Bradbury creates. The narrator says, "One of the astronauts on the latest Mars mission has been killed." She continues, "People here in the neighborhood are saying she had no business going to Mars, anyway. All that money wasted on another crazy space trip when so many people here on earth can't afford water, food, or shelter" (17).

apocalyptic novels: ecocatastrophe and human extinction is occurring because of the neglected consequences of environmental threats, the same threats that Rachel Carson warned us about in 1962.

In Wylie's novel, civilization as we know it has changed and the end of the world is in sight. His story begins on June 6, 2023 according to the "old calendar" in a fictional Faraway, New York, located in a "virgin" timber area of the Adirondacks, according to the "Old Geography."[3] Catastrophe has struck, in a number of ways as our narrator tells us, but "Faraway had been the last northern refuge of the ivory bill and was, still, one of the few places in the Adirondacks populated by otters, fishers, and martins" (8). The narrator tells readers of a great "camp" belonging to one of the main characters, Miles Smythe, located on Lake Enigma. Many of Miles's family members built places of their own along the shores of Lake Enigma. Once Miles and his sister inherit the land, Miles and his friend Willard Gulliver anticipate the ruin of civilization and begin to prepare Faraway as a retreat for family and wilderness "with the makings—or remaking—of a viable society" (8-9). Miles says,

> God damn! You know what? It's not *only* blackouts! It's just about everything! People think of nature and the planet and science and themselves just the kook way old Corddy thinks! Somebody has got to start straightening them out. I mean, we're crazy. Our water's filthy, air's hard to suck in, we're covering terra firma with poison and paving over or scraping off the soil. Our whole species—is flying on a bum gauge.

[3] The narrator indicates that the New Calendar is made up of thirteen months of twenty-eight days and an added day yearly and two in each fourth year. The extra month follows December and is called Aurora by those still following a calendar (9).

> Some guy should start a reorientation course and, damn it, Will, *I'm that guy!* And *you're* going to help me. (42) [4]

By 2010 a miniature society in the Adirondacks is established with more people arriving at the retreat five years later. The ultimate prediction that Wylie suggests is that of the threat of extinction of the human race and limited environments in which these people can survive.

With the population severely diminishing by 2010, communities need to look for a new form of governance.[5] When disaster does occur, Faraway becomes the capital of what had been the United States and Canada. The narrator tells us that, "One person existed in 2023 for every hundred-plus alive at the century's turn" (10). With a population of only four thousand, an all-time high for Faraway, the need for a central government was needed.

> It had taken a ninety per cent extermination, in a series of incalculably grim calamities, to shatter man's deluded attitude toward his special nation and its political and economic system and, above all, to erase man's near indelible idea that he existed above and outside nature and could do with and to nature as he pleased. (10-11)

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[4] "Corddy" refers to Miles's and Will's introductory sociology instructor Elroy Corddy at Fifth Avenue Special School in Manhattan. Corddy uses a New York City blackout as a sociological theme, suggesting that in the face of disaster humanity would pull together and help each other out instead of turning to chaos and crime.

[5] Harry Harrison's novel *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966) depicts a futuristic New York City suffering from overpopulation rather than extinction. In his prologue, Harrison argues that in 1950, 9.5% of the world's population "was consuming 50 percent of the world's raw materials." Harrison also predicts that within fifteen years of that date, the United States will be consuming 83% of Earth's raw materials, and "by the end of the century, should our population continue to increase at the same rate, this country will need more than 100 percent of the planet's resources to maintain our current living standards," which Harrison notes is a mathematical impossibility.

Wylie predicts that when the world's population is on the verge of extinction, human beings will finally realize that they are not above nature. This warning emphasizes the need for a symbiotic relationship with nature that has ultimately been ignored.

Whereas Wylie's novel presents a picture of a slowly eroding Earth and the human fight to prevent the end of the world, Paul Auster's novel *In the Country of Last Things* presents readers with a city that has ultimately lost everything, and people within that city are worried more about day-to-day survival than about the environmental condition that has led to hardship. The novel's central protagonist, Anna Blume, arrives in an unnamed city to look for her brother. The city is plagued by homelessness and suicidal citizens. The narrator says, "In general, people hold to the belief that however bad things were yesterday, they were better than things are today" (10). She asserts that "if you mean to survive here, then you must be able to give in on matters of principle" (17).[6] Later she admits that "we have all become monsters, but there is almost no one without some remnant inside him of life as it once was" (20). In this city, people have given up. "For no matter how hard they struggle, they know they are bound to lose. And at that point it is surely a pointless thing to struggle at all" (20). Auster's novel predicts the decline of civility in human behavior as the ultimate price to pay for environmental contamination.

When the narrator arrives at the city by boat to look for her brother William, she notices that nothing exists. Buildings, roads, and everything else have vanished and the city is comprised of rocks and rubble. The government walled off and burned the area when an unknown epidemic threatened the area. Yet, she notes that the environment is

[6] Anna describes her job as an object hunter while she is in the city. She was nearly raped at one point, stole food from an old man who attempted to rob her, and "snatched the porridge right out of his hands and didn't even feel sorry about it" (43-44).

much like home. The sky, clouds, storms, and calms are the same. Then, she notices that the city is a paradox: she says, "The nights, for example, are never quite what they are at home" (21). They have a lack of stillness. She says, "Slowly and steadily, the city seems to be consuming itself, even as it remains" (21-22). That consumption is symbolic of the way people exist in their communities, slowly eating away at the natural resources while surviving. Moreover, it also suggests that in order to adapt to an ever changing "home," one must sacrifice his or her civility.

Octavia Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower,* set in 2024, depicts a young narrator, Lauren Olamina, whose family lives within a walled community in a suburb of Los Angeles. "The neighborhood wall is massive, looming presence nearby," she says. "I see it as a crouching animal, perhaps about to spring, more threatening than protective," she continues (5). As the walled community becomes increasingly violent, residents consider moving to a safer area. The narrator notes that a company called Kagimoto, Stamm, Frampton, and Company—KSF—is taking over the running of a small coastal city called Olivar. She says, "It has a little industry, much hilly, vacant land and a short, crumbling coastline. Its people, like some here in our Robledo neighborhood, earn salaries that would once have made them prosperous and comfortable" (118). While the town crumbles into the ocean and is just a shell of what it used to be, it still promises a literate, well-off community. She says that "the people of Olivar aren't frightened, impoverished victims. They're able to look after themselves, their rights and their property. They're educated people who don't want to live in the spreading chaos of the rest of Los Angeles County" (120). While some community members believe moving to Olivar will solve the problems they are experiencing in the

walled community, some people, including Lauren's father, believe that staying within the wall surrounding, the familiar place they call "home," is for the better. She says, "He's read about nineteenth and early twentieth century company towns, and he says no matter how great Olivar looks, all we'll get from it in the end is debt and loss of freedom" (128).

The one feature all of these apocalyptic views share, however, is optimism, even if it is fleeting. For Miles Smythe and Will Gulliver in *The End of the Dream* there is still a faint sign of hope that allows those people remaining to think seriously about changing their ways. The narrator states that "there could be found evidence that the titanic 'vengeance' of nature which had left few people had also allowed tiny samples of uncounted life forms to persist" (11). They receive signs of life, therefore, endorsing the purpose of Faraway and the Foundation to protect human life from its own errors. The narrator says that "the fact that the snake-bitten Texan died was not nearly so cogent as the fact that another and supposedly extinct reptile had lived and could perhaps take its place again in the ecological life chains so hideously interrupted" (12). With this bit of optimism, the main characters in the novel find it necessary to document all the tragic events humanity has suffered. Likewise, Anna Blume in *The Country of Last Things* ends up adapting to some of the ways of the community members in the unnamed city and establishes relationships on which she had not otherwise counted. Lauren Olamina in *Parable of the Sower*, despite living in a walled community regularly ravaged by thieves, arsonists, and murderers, anticipates escaping her parents' shadow and heading north, all the while focusing on reestablishing community.

Destroy First, Prosper Later

Lewis Mumford states that "By exploring 'possible worlds,' 'intuitions of the future' that critique the present as we know it, the writer recovers purposive human time, the sense that history is not simply something that happens to us, irrespective of our will and desires, but is, indeed, ours to make" (qtd. in Phillips 199). Mumford's philosophy is woven throughout all three apocalyptic novels, and in each case the protagonist(s) attempts to shape a future that will allow for a symbiotic relationship between human beings and the environment.

To warn those who will survive to see another generation, Wylie's central and significantly named protagonist, Willard P. Gulliver, is ordered to write a directive documenting the fall of the human population and environment. Will is Acting Director of The Foundation for Human Conservancy, since Miles, its director, is in Paris. Will's document begins with the year 1970, citing excerpts of a fictional book written in the 1990s by George Washington Packett about the state of the civilization. He makes mention of polluted lakes and toxic chemicals found in the water, not unlike the environmental prose emerging in the 1970s. "Nobody, or almost nobody," he says, "had enough knowledge to contemplate usefully the present situation, not to mention the future" (31). The narrator accurately states that "Americans were fed a stream of corporate "information" about various resource exploitations that sounded satisfactory and in many cases were lies" (32). The question remains, however, whether or not Wylie is documenting or predicting a remorseful population indebted to society to demonstrate the errors of its ways, or simply demonstrating how human beings will continue to write

about environmental collapse without really ever fully understanding the crisis or changing its ways.

The directive, then, walks through some of the major complications that human beings have encountered between 1970 and 2023. The narrator tells readers about the Black Valentine's Day blizzard and blackout, the first catastrophe covered in Will's directive. The disaster confirms the distrust that community members have for the government; citizens conclude that governing bodies withhold important information from the public. When most of New England and New York City experience power failure during a blizzard, it leads people to think the worst about the safety of the community. First, Will writes about a former electrician, Elliot Brown, who on his death bed confesses to sabotaging a power company and causing the massive power failure. The power failure resulted in an explosion that claimed the life of Elliot's doctor's wife as well as hundreds of thousands of other people. While travel and communication is hindered because of the snowfall, an immediate suspicion of a Communist attack is believed to have been at the center of the chaos. Miles states,

> Funny how nearly everybody, even then, was under a compulsion to believe what was happening must be the result of a Communist action. And even when the USSR began to suffer identical or similar calamities. The Red mania did a lot of damage to our own work. Gave people a whipping boy—and so, a rationalization for that endless notion they could eat their cake, have it, feed it to their kids, and the kids would still have it too. (49)

The result of the Black Valentine's Day disaster is a death toll of one million one hundred thousand for the Greater New York area. Five million were estimated dead from Maine to North Carolina and west to Ohio.

Part of the trauma and panic to erupt during this catastrophe, however, came from the public's lack of details of the disaster. Thus, the warning that Wylie puts forth is that communities crumble when the facts are not known, as we have seen documented in many works of environmental prose, perhaps most notably in Lois Gibbs's *Love Canal: My Story*. Will states, "As much information as possible was broadcast. For a while, and after certain prior disasters the authorities had tried the opposite method, keeping most of the worst news secret. It merely increased fears and led to more extensive panic. Not knowing is worse than knowing. . . the worst" (56).

Hazards related to increased industrialization contributed to the downfall of civilization as well. In 1976, a bluish haze which produced an "acrid-smelling, eye-smarting, nauseating" consequence that was quite dense appeared over the Genesee River Valley in western New York (67). Between 1976 and 1979, more than twelve billion dollars were spent by industry and government to avoid the "'blue-haze type' situations" (67). When it was deemed that the money wasn't enough, industry executives who had been incarcerated were freed, and the attempt to prevent the "blue-haze" problems was instead only a postponement of the inevitable. The fallout from industrial waste resulted in industry being shut down so as to fix the pollution problem that the industry had created. With the shutdown of many industries and the new fight in the late 1970s to use technology and science to fight the fears of a pending apocalypse, mass hysteria occurred as well as mass unemployment. Consumer goods were unavailable. The narrator says

that “The American citizenry revealed in its great majority that it was addicted to consumerism, in effect, and the projected period of goods withdrawal resulted in mass symptoms not unlike those of a drug-deprived addict” (69-70).

The blue-haze resulted in potato crops of one town in the Genesee Valley becoming wilted, thus resulting in a multi-million dollar loss of potato crops that supply local potato chip factories. The cause of the problem comes from distant industrial disposal wells, where toxic chemicals had been pumped for a decade. In March, when storm sewers overflowed, toxic green liquid flooded streets, and in one instance, the flooding occurred at a school bus stop where ten children suffered burns after soaking their feet while waiting for the bus. Additionally, many areas became active with Earthquakes because of the liquid being pumped underground.

For years industrial companies were dumping hazardous wastes into waterways, and, despite a multi-million dollar attempt to clean it up, the Cuyahoga River, deemed a fire hazard, exploded and destroyed half the city of Cleveland.

> The Industrial Revolution enabled most men in many lands to enjoy benefits that no man had ever known before, and to have other comforts, conveniences and luxuries that only kings and courts and feudal lords had previously possessed. For three generations the rise of technology increasingly provided that gigantic boon to most citizens in technologically advanced nations. The change in life was *that* sudden; the cornucopia exploded *that* abruptly; human hell was replaced by the new heaven of modern living *that* quickly. There was no time for men to adapt. There was not even enough data about the growing cost of this

> machine-made bounty until the machinery was in place and vastly producing. Man had too little warning of the self-limiting nature of his materialistic "spree," and that little came so late, and was so complex, man in general could hardly be expected to understand and act properly—halting work on what he believed the most glorious and rightful page he'd written in all history. (70)

Wylie's predictions of events to come in the late 1970s were not the end of his predictions of ecocatastrophe and the extinction of hometown communities. His predictions of events in the 1980s are just as severe. This portion of Will's coverage of the 1980s begins with an excerpt of a television documentary where Donald Cason, a reporter for a television station, is interviewing a family about a catastrophe that has happened just two days prior. The Little Dwain River, a tributary off the Kentucky, is the scene of the catastrophe. Argie Beeley, a Vietnam War veteran and his wife have lost their two young children to a toxic event. A nuclear reactor upstream used the river for cooling purposes. After hearing the children screaming, the Beeleys realized their children were literally being cooked in the river. Mr. Beeley says, "I mean, boiling. I know, now, they had a situation at the reactor where they couldn't help using the Little Dwain. And some other plants had to, on that account. But, Lord Gawd! who'd think a river could be set to *boiling*, mile after mile!" (128). The narrator of the documentary says at the closing of the scene,

> The sudden cooling requirements of industry have actually made one river boil. We can say that it was a small river where few persons lived. Only two lives were lost. Little kids steamed to death like puddings. And only

> one business was ruined. Because there aren't any more trout in the Little Dwain River and there never will be any. Why? From now on the power plant and some other factories upstream will draw on the Little Dwain steadily, keeping it warm. (128-29)

Then the narrator goes on to discuss that the reason for the catastrophe was the demand for power by the east coast grid forced the plant to load to capacity. A jam in one atomic pile required a lot of cold water immediately, but when the water left the plant it was boiling. The narrator concludes that "the only damage was to the Beeley family" (129). The catastrophic prediction is grim, but the reaction of the reporter makes the scene even more devastating. When the narrator depicted in the documentary states that the children's deaths are the *only* lives lost and that the deaths are the *only* damage to the family, the welfare of community families becomes marginalized in the face of catastrophe, especially by those emotionally disconnected from the events as symbolized by the reporter.

The disaster known as The Saturday Slaughter occurs when the east coast and the five boroughs of New York experienced a pollution-related weather condition. The pollution was caused, in part, from factory over production to create weaponry for a possible Desert War with Vietnam. When the mayor refuses to shut down the factories in fear of an attack, the city succumbs to pollution. Death tolls are high, and "these cadavers were laid out in Central Park and elsewhere for identification, a process that was never complete as so many of the dead were from out of town and, of them all, a great many had been robbed or trampled, had lost pocketbooks, and even their clothes." Those not identified were left to decay, and "the city smelled like a battlefield" (142). The

battlefield imagery is ironic in that the pollution situation is caused by an attempt to protect citizens, but in reality, the real battlefield is the city streets where people fall victim to the pollution. The narrator states,

> What happened to New York, indeed, should serve as a final lesson, for all who still needed the instruction. And the lesson is elementary. It asserts that you (and I, of course) are the agents of that slaughter. And it states that whatever is to happen to man today, tomorrow and as long as man endures is the result of what you (and I) do, whether it's net is to improve or poison us. (151-52)

The next three decades serve as repetition of the disasters encountered in the 1970s and 1980s. By the late 1980s, food becomes scarce because of the Black Blight on crops. The hard work by scientists to solve the blight doesn't stop the rise of human meat markets. Forest fires are rampant and rice-dependent nations are on fire, thus contributing to starvation. Military attacks, mutation of plants, leech-like animals attacking residents in Florida, exploitation of petroleum in Antarctica causes earthquakes, rising waters mark the environmental conditions well into the new millennium. It is not until the writing of Will's directive in 2023 and the near extinction of the human population that the environment begins to rebound.[7]

The optimism in *The Country of Last Things* is a bit more difficult to uncover. The narrator suggests the lack of civility and danger that defines this city when she says that living in this city becomes a "day at a time" approach. Homes and streets are present

[7] In the novel's conclusion, we learn that the concentration of toxins in the environment increasingly leads to human extinction, and perhaps more telling is that the remaining inhabitants turn to violence against each other. As Miles returns from Paris to Faraway, he discovers that nothing remains of the make-shift community.

at one moment and then gone the next. She eats only enough to give her the energy to take the steps she needs. Bumping into people, she suggests, is one of the most dangerous situations someone would find themselves. She tells readers that the people pound you with fists or you lay on the ground until you can get up. People trick others for food in hopes to steal money. People who have homes are in constant danger of being targeted for robbery. Finding a place to live is equally dangerous, as renters tend to rob their tenants. She also indicates that to survive one must have a keen sense of smell since bodies line the streets because they stay where they die. The sense of smell becomes important for two reasons: first, rotting corpses carry disease and thus the ability to avoid exposure to disease is beneficial, and second, people rob the dead bodies of clothes, jewelry, and other valuable possessions, thus finding a body early could be profitable.

Next, the narrator notes the general environment and how the weather becomes problematic but that the problems in the weather come from the negative thoughts of the people. She says, "There are people so thin, [. . .] they are sometimes blown away" (3). Additionally she notes, "It's not uncommon to see the thinnest people moving about in twos and threes, sometimes whole families, bound together by ropes and chains, to ballast one another against the blasts" (3). Bad weather is brought about by bad thoughts. "If enough people are thinking gloomy thoughts at once, then rain will begin to fall. That is the reason for all the startling shifts in the weather, they claim, and the reason why no one has been able to give a scientific explanation to our bizarre climate" (26).

People are so miserable in this city that suicide is the ultimate goal. Suicide is so common in the city that the narrator shows us examples of groups that are formed for that purpose. First, "the runners" run to exhaustion. To prepare for the suicide, lots of

extensive training is required for such a death run. In order to push the human body to the point of exhaustion, people have to be in shape to actually be able to get their bodies to that point. The narrator talks about people who take the "last leap" to plunge to their death. She states, "you would be amazed at the enthusiasm of the crowds: to hear their frantic cheering, to see their excitement" (13). She says, "I sometimes think that death is the one thing we have any feeling for. It is our art form, the only way we can express ourselves." Then, there are the Euthanasia Clinics, where people are helped along by injection, either quickly or experiencing a slow state of euphoria. The Assassination Clubs also exist where people volunteer to be assassinated, but they know not when they will be killed. Killings are random, and members of the community who participate in this type of suicide can never opt out, unless they volunteer to become one of the assassins.

Then, of course, the city is made up of the homeless, who have the most negative attitude of all of the community. They only appear from time to time to pick up the bodies. When they do, the homeless throw stones at them. The narrator says that "One could say that the stones represent the people's disgust with a government that does nothing for them until they are dead" (17). However, the narrator does point out a few good qualities of the government. She says, "It only goes to show how effective the government can be under certain circumstances. Dead bodies and shit—when it comes to removing health hazards, our administrators are positively Roman in their organization, a model of clear thinking and efficiency" (30). Prisoners are given a reduced sentence for picking up sewage, and human excrement and garbage are the new fuel. Those dumping human waste into the street could face arrest and the death sentence.

Despite the danger of the unnamed city, Auster does create scenes that depict that all humanity in human beings has not been lost in the face of environmental catastrophe. Auster demonstrates the ability of the community to rely on one another when Anna saves Isabel from a potentially deadly situation. The narrator states,

> Just as the woman managed to get the cart into the middle of the street, a band of Runners came charging around the corner. There were twelve or fifteen of them, and they were running at full tilt, closely packed together, screaming that ecstatic death-drone of theirs. I saw the woman look up at them, as if suddenly shaken from her reverie, but instead of scrambling out of the way, she froze to her spot, standing like a bewildered deer trapped in the headlights of a car. (44-45).

Anna jumps in to save the woman, "a second or two before the Runners passed," knowing she certainly would have been trampled to death (45).

It is the moment that Anna connects with Isabel that her life in the city begins. Anna has ties to the woman she saves, and she states, "Once it happens, they say, that person becomes your responsibility, and whether you like it or not, the two of you belong to each other forever" (46). The relationship does not come a moment too soon, either, since Isabel's husband, Ferdinand, was beat up once and refuses to go out, showing little interest in his and his wife's survival. Since Ferdinand has lost his business as a sign painter, Isabel becomes a scavenger, and Anna's going to live with them pinpoints her as a guardian angel, so to speak.

While Anna takes on a close guardian relationship with Isabel, her relationship with Ferdinand is strained, and it suggests that even the most humane citizens have

grown accustomed to gaining pleasure from destroying others. When Ferdinand tries to rape Anna, she tries to kill him in self-defense. However, she soon acknowledges what she as well as many other community members have come to believe. She says, "As I lay on my back in the sweltering darkness, slowly squeezing the life out of Ferdinand, I understood that I was not killing him in self-defense—I was killing him for the pure pleasure of it" (65).

Auster illustrates the need for community members to work together when he creates the relationship between Anna and Isabel, and Octavia Butler portrays similar relationships. However, the familial relationships and sense of community grow stronger with the danger that becomes increasingly violent. One of the most significant images is presented in the beginning of the novel when Lauren's father, a Baptist minister, loses his church, a place where community members used to be able to gather. She says that "Dad once had a church just a few blocks outside our wall. He began it before there were so many walls. But after it had been slept in by the homeless, robbed, and vandalized several times, someone poured gasoline in and around it and burned it down. Seven of the homeless people sleeping inside on that last night burned with it" (8). Immediately, with an attack on a church, the reader is aware that the sense of community is altered.

Even though the community lives within a walled area to protect itself, the danger outside of the walled community continues. The narrator says, "We rode past people stretched out, sleeping on sidewalks, and a few just waking up, but they paid no attention to us. I saw at least three people who weren't going to wake up again, ever. One of them was headless. I caught myself looking around for the head" (9). Directly following this image, the narrator states that she sees "a woman, young, naked, and filthy stumbl[ing]

along past us," which she points out looks as if "maybe she had been raped so much that she was crazy. I'd heard stories of that happening" (9). It seems, however, that the entire outside world suffers from the poverty from which Lauren's walled community protects itself. She observes that "a lot of houses were trashed—burned, vandalized, infested with drunks or druggies or squatted-in by homeless families with their filthy, gaunt, half-naked children" (10).

The narrator, with her acute observations of the outside world, creates a dichotomy between a community that is protected and victimized because of their wealth and a community that is terribly divided and succumbing to the environmental and economic degradation. This dichotomy is established when the narrator says,

> We ride down the middle of the cracked street, and the kids come out and stand along the curb to stare at us. They just stand and stare. I think if there were only one or two of us, or if they didn't see our guns, they might try to pull us down and steal our bikes, our clothes, our shoes, whatever. Then what? Rape? Murder? We could wind up like that naked woman, stumbling along, dazed, maybe hurt, sure to attract dangerous attention unless she could steal some clothing. I wish we could have given her something. (10)

It doesn't take long, however, for Lauren to reflect on the life within her walled community. In Robledo, she states that "most of the street poor—squaters, winos, junkies, homeless people in general—are dangerous. They're desperate or crazy or both. That's enough to make anyone dangerous" (10). She reveals that community members

cut off each other's limbs and ears, carry diseases and untreated wounds, are malnourished, and poison themselves by eating food that has spoiled (10-11).[8]

Despite the problems on the outside of the wall, Lauren's community within the wall has become increasingly dangerous. People are in a position to have to own and know how to use guns. When neighbors insist that it is the police's and not the community members' responsibility to protect citizens, Lauren's father tells them that the police "may be able to avenge you, but they can't protect you. Things are getting worse. And as for your children. . . . Well, yes, there is risk. But you can put your guns out of their reach while they're very young, and train them as they grow older" (39).

An increase in violence within the walled community in Robledo is fostered by the conflict that exists with the world beyond the walls. Economic status becomes the catalyst for animosity between Lauren's walled community and that which exists beyond the metal gate. She says that "People toss us things sometimes—gifts of envy and hate: A maggoty, dead animal, a bag of shit, even an occasional severed human limb or dead child. Dead adults have been lying just beyond our wall" (50). Amy Dunn, a three-year old child is shot when playing near the metal gate guarding their community. One of their own is killed when someone shoots her through the gate.

Despite the dangers that threaten the small community, the protagonist still maintains its function as "home." It's an interesting commentary, though, when the narrator proclaims "God, I hate this place" (50). Immediately following this statement, she says, "I mean, I love it. It's home. These are my people. But I hate it. It's like an

[8] The narrator says that "There was a naked little boy whose skin was a mass of big red sores; a man with huge scab over the stump where his right hand used to be; a little girl, naked, maybe seven years old with blood running down her bare thighs. A woman with a swollen, bloody, beaten face. . ." (13).

island surrounded by sharks—except that sharks don't bother you unless you go in the water. But our land sharks are on their way in. It's just a matter of how long it takes for them to get hungry enough" (50). Her friend, Joanna Garfield continues, "Rape, robbery, and now murder. Of course I think about it. Everyone thinks about it. Everyone worries. I wish I could get out of here" (53). Lauren reminds her that there really is no place to go. They talk about the spread of cholera in Mississippi and Louisiana, the rise of illiteracy, joblessness, homeless, lack of sanitation and water, and drugs that make people want to set fires. She says,

> It's spreading again. It was on the east coast. Now it's in Chicago. The reports say that it makes watching a fire better than sex. I don't know whether the reporters are condemning it or advertising it [. . .] Tornadoes are smashing hell out of Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and two or three other states. Three hundred people dead so far. 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. Measles! (54)

When Lauren's father asks her if she thinks the world is coming to an end, she thinks to herself, 'No, I think *your* world is coming to an end, and maybe you with it,' and then she reflects, "That was terrible. I hadn't thought about it in such a personal way before. I turned and looked out a window until I felt calmer. When I faced him again, I said. 'Yes. Don't you?'" (62). Part of the danger of the walled community is its inability to interact and change with the rest of the world, thus becoming symbolic of communities that refuse to address and remedy the real problems of environmental catastrophe. Lauren states,

> Things are changing now, too. Our adults haven't been wiped out by a plague so they're still anchored in the past, waiting for the good old days to come back. But things have changed a lot, and they'll change more. Things are always changing. This is just one of the big jumps instead of the little step-by-step changes that are easier to take. People have changed the climate of the world. Now they're waiting for the old days to come back. (57)

Family life in this community is basically halted. Regarding getting married and having children, the narrator says, "Now there's nowhere to go, nothing to do. A couple gets married, and if they're lucky, they get a room or a garage to live in—with no hope of anything better and every reason to expect things to get worse" (87). Lauren's brother, who decides to leave the gated community, is killed. "Someone had cut and burned away most of my brother's skin. Everywhere except his face. They burned out his eyes, but left the rest of his face intact—like they wanted him to be recognized. They cut and they cauterized and they cut and they cauterized. . . . Some of the wounds were days old. Someone had an endless hatred of my brother" (113).

Lauren is in many ways symbolic of the ideal citizen. She suffers from hyperempathy, a fictional illness that allows her to feel the pain of others. Her character suggests that she is the only one who will ever survive because of it. She says, "If hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people couldn't do such things. They could kill if they had to, and bear the pain of it or be destroyed by it. But if everyone could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture?" (115). Without feeling the pain of other community members, she says, "We are coming apart. The community,

the families, individual family members [. . .] We're a rope, breaking, a single strand at a time" (116).

After Lauren's house is attacked and the entire walled community is under attack and on fire, the community members flee for the streets. Lauren says, "Now, I have to go home. I don't want to. The idea scares me to death. It's taken me a long time just to write the word: Home" (157). When she returns home she sees what's left.

> The ground was littered with ash-covered corpses, some burned or half blown apart by automatic weapons fire. Dried or nearly dried blood had pooled in the street. Two men were prying loose our emergency bell. The bright, clear, early morning sunlight made the whole scene less real somehow, more nightmarelike. I stopped in front of our house and stared at the five adults and the child who were picking through the ruins of it" (159).

When communities are destroyed physically, there is also a sense of destruction among the people who make up the community. People turn to violence at any cost necessary because of desperation. However, as these particular apocalyptic novels illustrate, there is a sense of life after destruction, perhaps far into the future after the communities we know have been destroyed.

So, just how accurate are Wylie, Auster, and Butler about the future? As my conclusion illustrates, environmental catastrophe is still a growing fear well after these authors' predictions. And more recent apocalyptic novels address the same fears of hometown communities being destroyed. However, if we heed these authors' warnings, is it possible to see a silver lining before our backyards disappear?

CONCLUSION:

SUSTAINING THE TOXIC DISCOURSE

> The only sure antidote to oblivion is the creation. So I loop my sentences around the trunks of maples, hook them into the parched soil, anchor them to rock, to moon and stars, wrap them tenderly around the ankles of those I love. From down in the pit I give a tug, to make sure my rope of words is firmly hooked into the world, and then up I climb. (Berry 56)

Wendell Berry's remedy for our impending doom is indeed in creation, the creation of words which reflect the rootedness of our existence in the places and people we love. Each author I have included in this dissertation has created the ideal antidote for environmental catastrophe: a picture in words of communities playing the role of Carson's "Fable for Tomorrow." I argue that the most beneficial reasons for situating hometown authors and characters as the focal point of a toxic discourse is the fact that they will always be relevant to the threat of environmental catastrophe, and as I demonstrated in previous chapters, both native and adopted "hometowners" become the authorities on perceived environmental risks. The toxic discourse that this dissertation begins is just that, a beginning. However, as this discourse continues to emerge in literary and environmental scholarship, I urge researches to bear in mind what Scott Russell Sanders says about the distinction between body and land:

> Earth is sexy, just as sex is earthy. Each of us is a landscape of plains and peaks, valleys and thickets. I speak in metaphors, as through a garbled phone line, but what I mean is plain and simple: body and land are one flesh. They are made of the same stuff. Their beauty is one beauty, their

> wounds the same wounds. They call to us in the same perennial voice, crying, *Come see, come touch, come listen and smell, and O come taste*. We explore them alike, honor or abuse them alike. The health or sickness of one is inseparable from that of the other. There is no division between where we live and what we are. (50-51)

The continuation of this discourse in literary analysis, related academic fields, and popular culture depends greatly on Sanders's assessment that "where we live and what we are" are interchangeable.

Communities in the United States have had ample time to consider the warnings posed by Rachel Carson nearly fifty years ago. Additionally, communities have had more than four decades of Earth Day celebrations and just as long to reflect on the environmental movement. Yet environmental threats and catastrophes have become and continue to be a staple of daily news stories. Moreover, in light of these daily environmental problems, the drive to "go green" with energy efficient homes and automobiles has flooded every crevice of popular culture. We make conscious efforts to take small measures to protect our planet; we replace old-fashioned sixty-watt light bulbs with new, hipper CFL bulbs; we "plug in" our vehicles; we use re-usable canvas bags at the grocery store instead of plastic or paper. Each of us has undoubtedly heard Carson's plea and has placed him or herself as a protagonist in "A Fable for Tomorrow."

As we struggle more and more to create an environmental awareness by "greening" our nation, we cannot forget those who continue to live in contaminated communities. While the United States promises a move toward a "greener" nation, many people still experience the day-to-day effects of mistakes we have made over the past

fifty years. We cannot dismiss Edward Abbey's warnings of disappearing landscapes, Denise Giardina's concerns that industrial growth will destroy the family unit, Nevada Barr's concern for illegal hunting of protected game, or Lois Gibbs's and Terry Tempest Williams's fears that toxic dumping and nuclear testing will cause life-threatening illnesses. And, of course, it may even be more appropriate in the twenty-first century to seriously consider the reality behind apocalyptic tales like the ones Philip Wylie, Paul Auster, and Octavia Butler have shared. Environmental concerns within the past year alone highlight and confirm the relevance of community issues that each of the aforementioned authors have brought to our attention.

As we have seen, Denise Giardina provides an inside look at the coal-mining industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Appalachia. For Giardina's characters, the loss of "home" through the railroads' forceful acquisition of land, and the deaths of family members working dangerous industrial jobs, served as the greatest fear that the coal industry could inflict.[1] In Lois Gibbs's and Terry Tempest Williams's autobiographical accounts of pollution, the central fear is loss of "home" attributed to a poisonous environment that creates life-threatening illnesses, forcing community members to fear the area they call home.[2] In an event that to some degree mimics Giardina's, Gibbs's, and Williams's situations, a coal-mine fire burning since 1962 allegedly still threatens the few people inhabiting the Pennsylvania town of Centralia. Recently, Associated Press writer Michael Rubinkam has documented the debate

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[1] Joan Newman Kuyek addresses concerns about how limited research has been when it comes to the impact of mining on community health, or on "ways to protect women's capacity to protect their families and communities" (121). She argues that many women who live near mines or smelters have limited or no knowledge about the toxicological impacts on human health.

[2] The popular 2000 movie *Erin Brockovich*, starring Julia Roberts, is based on a true story of a mother who fights a large corporation for a community's right to live in a healthy environment.

between Centralia citizens and the Pennsylvania government. Rubinkam reports that the fire began in 1962 when a city dump fire ignited an exposed coal vein. The fire has been burning ever since, reportedly sending noxious fumes into homes that sit atop the area.

There is obviously concern for people's health in the Centralia community; however, there is a glaring difference between the Centralia coal-mine fire and Gibbs's experiences at Love Canal in Niagara Falls. Whereas the Love Canal community accused the government of ignoring their concerns and blatantly placing people in harm's way, some of the people of Centralia believe that there is no real threat. In the 1970s, carbon monoxide began entering homes and making people sick. In 1981, Rubinkam explains that a "cave-in sucked a 12-year-old boy into a hot, gaseous void, nearly killing him." The debate between residents about the perceived risks has divided the town into those who clearly welcomed relocation and those who believed the real harm to their community was the government's "help." "Standing before the wreckage of his bulldozed home," Rubinkam observes, "John Lokitis Jr. felt sick to his stomach, certain that a terrible mistake had been made." Lokitis says, "'I never had any desire to move,' 'It was my home'" (qtd. in Rubinkam). The relocation program forced 1,000 people to relocate and destroyed 500 buildings. Some people, however, reflect Berry's notion when he declares, "When the pain of leaving behind what we know outweighs the pain of embracing it, or when the power we face is overwhelming and neither fight nor flight will save us, there may be salvation in sitting still" (101). And that is exactly what some people have done—sat still.

Many community members believe the government is involved in a plot to relocate people to gain mineral rights to the land. Many homes were condemned in the

early 1990s, but only recently has the government started forcing people out. Recently, however, the few remaining residents have received reports that suggest that the fire is almost out and does not endanger anyone. "Data kept by the Department of Environmental Protection show that underground temperatures have gone down by 'several hundred percent' since measurements began," Rubinkam reports.

Rubinkam describes a scene at Centralia that is reminiscent of what Gibbs and many other researchers have described at Love Canal; that scene is a clear depiction of an area that many people call *home.* "Christmas decorations still adorned the street lamps, a large manger scene occupied a corner of the main intersection and a 2010 calendar hung in the empty borough building," Rubinkam notes. In many ways, the scene that is painted here echoes Sanders's philosophy of home when he writes, "Real estate ads offer houses for sale, not homes. A house is a garment, easily put off or on, casually bought and sold; a home is skin. Merely change houses and you will be disoriented; change homes and you bleed. When the shell you live in has taken on the savor of your love, when your dwelling has become a taproot, then your house is a home" (35).

The recent Marcellus Shale drilling phenomenon has also provided evidence that concern for the environment will continue. In November 2010, the Developing Unconventional Gas East Conference was held in Pennsylvania, with 2,500 attendees. Hundreds of drilling opponents gathered outside to protest. David L. Porges, president and CEO of EQT Corporation, maintained that improved technologies improve production and production costs and that natural gas is the way to go, all the while recognizing the "good business" of preserving the environment. Porges urged attendees

affiliated with drilling companies to make sure their companies work to prevent environmental damage and asked them to hold each other accountable.

Porges, however, reflects the exact fears that I have addressed in this dissertation and those fears that contribute to Ursula Heise's call for the implementation of a risk theory. Porges recognizes that many people who live atop the Marcellus are unfamiliar with the drilling. He says that "the new phenomenon, for them, raises multiple concerns that the industry must recognize as valid." He continues, "While answers to concerns about pollution or about jobs being created for outsiders may be obvious to producers, they aren't obvious to residents and need to be communicated." Unfortunately, these promises of communication in past environmental threats have done little to appease community members.

While environmental threats continue to accumulate and take multiple forms, prose addressing ecocatastrophe continues to line shelves at the bookstores.[3] Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic novel *The Road* (2006) mirrors the anxieties highlighted in Auster's *In the Country of Last Things.* Life on Earth is virtually extinct after a catastrophe has wiped out civilization. McCarthy relies on an unnamed father and son to assume the roles of protagonists, and they attempt to find other civilization that may have survived. The novel predicts a world of cannibalism and violence as the boy and his father make their way through a cold and dusty environment to get to the sea. Despite its grim struggle for society, it ends with the boy, after his father's death, joining another family who has been tracking them.

[3] Other environmental catastrophes that have garnered mainstream attention include El Nino's effects on southern growing areas, extinction, habitat loss, overpopulation, deforestation, and the threat of nuclear pollution.

Discussion of a disappearing landscape is also the focus of essayist Janisse Ray's *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood.* Ray, who grew up in a junkyard outside an ecosystem known as Longleaf Pine Forest in southern Georgia, depicts the disappearance of the area due to heavy logging. Founded on the beauty of nature, Ray creates and promotes a relationship with one's native ground.

A Friend of the Earth (2000) by T. Coraghessan Boyle is a futuristic novel set in 2025. In yet another reference to Edward Abbey, Boyle's protagonist, Tyrone O'Shaughnessy Tierwater, was involved in "Earth Forever!" in the 1980s and is imprisoned on charges of ecotage. Tierwater finds himself looking after the affairs of a famous pop star, Maclovio Pulchris in Santa Ynez Valley in California. Reminiscent of Karl in *Track of the Cat,* Pulchrist takes care of animals and tries to preserve them; however, a lion escapes the cage and kills the singer. A situation that to a large extent echoes Barr's novel, lions become extinct after the lions are shot for killing the employees.

My aim in all of the chapters in this dissertation has been to include a range of radical voices from all over the United States. Additionally, I have tried to remain as diverse as possible, including voices of both males and females who represent the working-class, who inhabit desolate environments and more populated cities, and who serve as scientists and housewives. Moreover, I have addressed a number of relevant theoretical approaches—beyond just the broad scope of the umbrella term of "ecocriticism"—that help focus discussion of contemporary ecocatastrophe prose.

In my introduction I asked if humanity has simply brushed environmental issues under the carpet. While the current condition of our planet seems to suggest that is the

case, the variety of environmental prose that I have examined in each of the previous chapters indicates that communities nationwide understand the inevitability of an environmental catastrophe on their home area if a toxic discourse is not seriously considered.

To that end, contemporary environmental prose has become grassroots activism in and of itself. Part of this activism stems from questions I have already posed: Do the toxins represented in hometown literature serve as symbol and metaphor for the loss of "home"? And do toxins have to come in the form of chemical substances? The answers to these questions are clear, at least when we consider the writers I have examined.

This study is significant for a number of reasons. First, the subject matter is and will remain relevant, since the connection between the environment and the places we call home continue to suffer from serious environmental pollution. Second, this study does not hold the literary canon as the be-all and end-all of relevant texts. Third, this dissertation provides a cross-section of authors and locales; it does not focus on the concerns of only one particular author or one specific area of the United States. Finally, it provides a much needed interdisciplinary approach that contemporary literary commentaries demand. I use multiple relevant, contemporary theories that blend philosophy, psychology, literary analysis, and environmental and biological sciences.

Limitations of a Toxic Discourse

As with any strategy or theoretical lens for understanding literature, toxic discourse comes with a variety of limitations that need to be addressed. Part of the trouble, of course, is that it is difficult to prove that environmental factors are to blame for illness; almost every attribution of cause is vigorously contested. An important point

that Lawrence Buell makes about toxic discourse is that even though it is meant to "imply that [it] rests on anxieties about environmental poisoning for which there is copious historical evidence, it is plainly a discourse of allegation rather than of proof" (659). This problem may not be as problematic as it seems, however. A toxic discourse should include more than just an analysis of the physical illnesses associated with environmental collapse. Furthermore, a literary analysis of toxicity in environmental prose suggests that fear and anxieties about a collapsing environment are not always as obvious as they might be. Ursula Heise, for example, argues that contemporary novelists use chemical substances as a metaphor, blurring the boundaries between body and environment, public and domestic space, and harmful and beneficial technologies (748). The purpose of studying home-focused texts, as I have demonstrated, is to focus on the "blurring" of public and private places, both physically and psychologically.

As I have explored, sometimes corporations, human beings, and nature itself serve as the toxic components that we set out to battle. Heise uses risk theory to discover chemical substances as the underlying toxin, but as I have pointed out, risk theory and toxic discourse could include metaphorical toxins, such as corporate America, the government, as well as chemical poisons.[4]

[4] Heise uses risk theory to examine the effects of environmental disaster in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. Her argument claims that the novel may use a "toxic airborne event" as its central environmental disaster, but Heise argues that there are several references to poisons and toxins throughout the novel—toxins, often looked at as minor or not threatening that play a large role on the actions of the main characters. In reference to DeLillo's novel, Heise writes, "[The novel's emphasis on] representation as reality has led critics to dismiss the novel as a serious engagement with the problem of technological risk" (750). Heise continues by citing critic A. O. Scott, who claims that "DeLillo's 'airborne toxic event' is freighted with symbolism: it's a projection of the ambient dread that pervades the social and emotional lives of his characters, and its source as a physical occurrence is thus irrelevant to the novel's purposes" (qtd. in Heise 750). Heise notes that Lawrence Buell states about DeLillo's novel that a different disaster with no ecological implications would have served the plot just as well. I am not so convinced, however. What disaster, or how many disasters, don't have an ecological impact?

Another limitation to the use of toxic discourse in literary analysis is that the "historical moment" may influence unjustified fear toward the environment. For example, Cynthia Deitering notes that novelists took an interest in writing about chemical pollution in the 1980s. She contends that although apocalyptic themes may be partly due to the historical moment (the countdown to a millennium), a preoccupation with the toxic environment in American fiction of the 1980s seems to involve more than millennial cultural concerns. Toxic waste functions in recent fiction both as "cultural metaphor for a society's most general fears about its collective future and as expression of an ontological rupture in its perception of the Real" (197). Pollution and toxicity of any kind can certainly function as metaphors for larger general problems, but authors who focus their prose on their own home-areas seem to have a larger agenda. There is something very real here, beyond metaphor, that could be the niche of home-focused environmental literature.

Toxicity is growing as a literary concern, and perhaps the most important contribution environmental authors have made is providing vivid images of events within communities that have somehow garnered the power to shape public policy. Furthermore, Lawrence Buell rightly contends that it may become second nature to everyone's environmental imagination to visualize humanity in relation to environment, not as "solitary escapees or consumers, but as collectivities with no alternative but to cooperate in acknowledgement of their necessary interdependence" (665). Rachel Carson included at the beginning of *Silent Spring* Albert Schweitzer's notion that "man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end by destroying the earth," and E. B. White's proclamation that the human race "is too ingenious for its own good. Our

approach to nature is to beat it into submission. We would stand a better chance of survival if we accommodated ourselves to this planet and viewed it appreciatively instead of skeptically and dictatorially." Yet Carson may not have envisioned that the contamination of our home communities will, with heavy costs, lead us to the "antidote to oblivion."

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