

NARRATING OTHER NATURES: A THIRD WAVE ECOCRITICAL APPROACH
TO TONI MORRISON, RUTH OZEKI, AND OCTAVIA BUTLER

By

ANDREA KATE CAMPBELL

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of English

MAY 2010

© Copyright by ANDREA KATE CAMPBELL, 2010
All Rights Reserved

© Copyright by ANDREA KATE CAMPBELL, 2010
All Rights Reserved

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of ANDREA KATE CAMPBELL find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

T.V. Reed, Ph.D., Chair

Noël Sturgeon, Ph.D.

Donna Campbell, Ph.D.

Pamela Thoma, Ph.D.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks are due to my chair, T.V. Reed, for his support, guidance, and feedback over the course of my graduate studies. I extend my appreciation to my committee members, Noël Sturgeon, Donna Campbell, and Pam Thoma for their advice and their insights. This project would not be what it is without their valuable input. And thanks to Jana Argersinger, whose editorial talents and enthusiastic support taught me much about being an academic.

The support and encouragement of my family kept me motivated and determined. Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, and Kelli—thank you for always believing in what I do. And thanks to all my most wonderful friends who celebrated my triumphs along the way—Hilary, Marie, Kris, Loren, Shelly, Nora, Amber, Jim, Erin Mae, Mary and Megan. Graduate school would not have been the same without you!

NARRATING OTHER NATURES: A THIRD WAVE ECOCRITICAL APPROACH
TO TONI MORRISON, RUTH OZEKI, AND OCTAVIA BUTLER

Abstract

by Andrea Kate Campbell, Ph.D.
Washington State University
May 2010

Chair: T.V. Reed

This study examines literary constructions of nature and the natural in works by women of color. Together, these chapters explore how oppressive environmental narratives are often used by dominant power structures to develop and maintain dominance and, by using a third wave ecocritical approach that puts ecofeminist and environmental justice perspectives at the center of ecocritical cultural studies, these chapters reveal how literature can challenge such narratives and create opportunities for counter narratives to be voiced.

Each novel discussed takes on a different strain of oppressive environmental narrative that has been co-opted or apportioned for a specific agenda, be it racist, capitalist, or colonial. Through fiction, Toni Morrison, Ruth Ozeki, and Octavia Butler are able to expose these narratives, to call attention to the damage wreaked by these narratives, and to produce counter-narratives which disrupt the idea that nature is a static monolith which can be looked to in order to justify an agenda and solidify an identity.

Chapter one offers an overview of ecocriticism and how it started and how it evolved. It discusses how first wave ecocritics, amidst the urgency to instill an environmental ethic

in readers of literature, had a tendency to celebrate a seemingly universal nature that offered comfort and serenity. Chapter two examines Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the history of African American women's views of nature and how the institution of slavery fractured African American relationships with the environment and rendered nature as a place of conflict for slaves. The third chapter discusses Ruth Ozeki's novel *My Year of Meats* and transnational environmental issues as seen in food production and consumption. It looks at how environmental narratives are used in order to privilege corporate power and profit, through a compartmentalized, controlled view of nature that relies on essentialized racial and gendered identities. The final chapter on Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis Trilogy* focuses on rejecting the "natural" through the use of science fiction that highlights and magnifies the ways that environmental issues are being manipulated and used to maintain existing hierarchies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTERS	
1. The Evolution and the Future of Ecocriticism.....	12
2. Owning Nature in Toni Morrison’s <i>Beloved</i>	36
3. Corporate Greenwashing and Environmental Justice Narratives in Ruth Ozeki’s <i>My Year of Meats</i>	72
4. Rejecting the “Natural” in Octavia Butler’s <i>Xenogenesis</i> Trilogy.	108
WORKS CITED	151

Dedication

To Simon,

for always supporting, always believing, always loving.

INTRODUCTION

The Search for Nature in Literature

Henry David Thoreau wondered “Where is the literature which gives expression to Nature...I do not know where to find in any literature, ancient or modern, any account which contents me of that Nature with which even I am acquainted” (196). In response to that lack of literature, Thoreau took it upon himself “to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil – to regard man as an inhabitant or part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society” (180). Thoreau remains a foundational figure in American nature writing and environmental studies, and Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* made him a sort of indirect founder of ecocriticism. First-wave ecocritics heeded Thoreau’s (and Buell’s) call for a literature of nature and rallied for new understandings of the relationship between literature and the environment. Yet, in the rush to answer this call, early ecocritics unquestioningly accepted Thoreau’s nature of “absolute freedom and wildness” as a universal understanding of the natural world, and left many writers of color wondering where to find the literary nature with which they were acquainted.

While Ralph Waldo Emerson was another canonical voice of first-wave ecocriticism, his words, “The difference between landscape and landscape is small, but there is great difference in the beholders,” better describe the efforts of second-wave ecocritics that examined how issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality affect constructions of and interactions with nature. These scholars argued the first-wave ecocritics had privileged

white, male perceptions of nature without recognizing how such subject positions affected environmental relationships. The work of second-wave ecocriticism does not dismiss the views of writers like Thoreau or Emerson, but it does call for the study of multiethnic literature and more complex understandings of nonhuman nature.

Robert T. Hayashi shares these concerns about ecocriticism's predominantly white focus on literature and limited constructions of nature. Hayashi is especially critical of the lack of Asian American literary works in current ecocritical scholarship and strongly advocates using a larger variety of texts and disciplinary approaches. He argues "the inclusion of multiethnic literature and the traditionally interdisciplinary methodology of its study can move ecocritical inquiry into more salient discussions of current environmental issues" and "provides a necessary critique of the historical class and racial positioning of canonical writers and the traditionally narrow concerns of American environmentalism they have espoused" (Hayashi 68). Yet he adds "I am wary if the toggling of multiethnic literature to environmental literature remains its only point of entry in ecocriticism" (Hayashi 60). It is my hope that this dissertation, in its discussion of works by women of color, does not simply add multicultural literature to the ecocritical arena and declare the field to be diverse. This dissertation is about more than inclusion, more than a broadening of ecocriticism's scope and/or the nature of the field, for simply adding women of color writers does a great disservice and threatens to cast the worth of these writers as nothing more than offering a nonwhite perspective. It also leaves ecocriticism's methodologies unquestioned, and if ecocriticism has relied on white perspectives of and interactions with nature, then how can it effectively discuss writers like Toni Morrison or Ruth Ozeki? So in order for ecocriticism to discuss works by

women of color writers the questions ecocriticism asks need to shift as well as the field's understandings of nature and the way people construct it. By reading Toni Morrison, Ruth Ozeki, and Octavia Butler ecocritically, this dissertation demonstrates how multiethnic literature offers important understandings of environmental relationships through the use of environmental narratives that have co-opted nature as an oppressive tool against marginalized groups. By recognizing how we oppress nature as well as how we use nature to oppress, this dissertation pushes ecocriticism to be more "ecological" in its methods by recognizing the potential of partnerships with other forms of humanistic inquiry.

Arriving at this Project

To offer definitions of "nature" and "environment" would be counterproductive since the basis of this dissertation is that nature is fluid and indefinable. Instead, it is more useful to offer the questions to ask when discussing nature. In the introduction to *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies*, Castrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer introduce questions such as "How and to what effect is nature conceptualized in various cultural, critical, and disciplinary contexts? How and to what effect are concepts of the natural and the human related to each other? What is the relationship between nature, language, art, and literature?" (13). These questions, among many others posed by ecocritics/ecofeminists/environment justice critics, are not concerned with defining nature. Instead, the word serves as a sort of placeholder that allows readers to insert their own conceptualizations. While a lack of definitions has been a criticism of ecocriticism,

the ability to pose important questions that allows for a multitude of answers is one of the field's greatest strengths.

It was a series of important questions that prompted me to undertake this dissertation. My journey to this project began some time ago. I first read Ruth Ozeki's *All Over Creation* as a master's student, and I felt instantly drawn to her connections between the women of her story and environmental issues. These parallels had never occurred to me before and I wanted to research it further. Her novel paved the way to ecofeminism, a theory foreign to me even in its name, but one that immediately captured my interest. Much reading and research ensued, most of it occurring outside the classroom, and I found myself writing my master's thesis on Ozeki's first novel *My Year of Meats* using ecofeminist literary theory as my primary approach.

I entered my Ph.D. program, planning to continue my work exclusively with Ozeki, but through my course work, I developed interests in other female writers. I also became more familiar with environmental justice, which pushed my work beyond a heavily gendered focus. When I sat down to write my exam reading list, I noticed two important details. First, my chosen primary sources for my special area were mostly women writers. Second, they were mostly women of color writers. This raised many interesting questions: Why was I drawn to these writers and what was unique about these approaches to environmental literature? Why are women of color writers interested in environmental issues? These types of questions are what sparked this dissertation topic, and while Ozeki still plays a large role, I find that exploring other writers has led me to a richer, more complex understanding of literary constructions of nature.

In her essay “‘Nature’ and Environmental Justice,” Mei Mei Evans argues “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 white, and/or not straight when they attempt a transformative experience in nature to see what they risk”. In other words, “Whereas straight white men look to nature to offer up something—the ‘elements’ or large mammals with big teeth—against which they can prove themselves; women, people of color, and gays and lesbians go into nature in fear of encountering straight white men” (Evans 191). Evans’s argument intrigued me, as it offered a significantly different approach to nature from first-wave ecocritics, who often relied on the works of white men, like Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Henry David Thoreau, that celebrated nature and often constructed it as a safe, healing space. Her essay made me wonder about multiple constructions of nature and led me to ask what could I learn by exploring these constructions more in-depth. Even more so, I wanted to know how different writers were resisting “white” notions of nature. How were different women of color writers (re)constructing nature? Evans’s essay served as useful jumping off point because I felt there was much more to explore. While I agreed with many of her arguments, I also recognized important complications that needed to be made and possibilities for expansion. Much of her essay focuses on fear and negative associations, which this dissertation will also discuss, but it will also complicate those fears and provide positive associations and possibilities as well.

These were some big questions, and this dissertation offers one way of answering them. Many women of color writers offer literary constructions of nature that vary in leaps and bounds. Their works cover multiple landscapes, cityscapes, and mindscapes,

demonstrating how constructions of nature have profound cultural, political, social, and environmental impacts. In exploring these impacts, boundaries are blurred yet connections are formed and the novels discussed here are examples of how environmental literature by women of color illustrates how issues of race and gender are not separate from issues of nature. More specifically, this dissertation explores how nature is often appropriated by various dominant forces in order to construct oppressive environmental narratives that privilege and naturalize hierarchies, and how women of color writers utilize fiction as way of challenging and deconstructing these narratives through multiple counter-narratives that question identities grounded in nature or the “natural” and rely on more fluid conceptions that allow for healing, alliances, and transformation of environmental relationships.

Methodology

I chose to use ecofeminist literary criticism as one eco-analytical partner, and while I’m certainly not the first scholar to do so, there is still much to explore in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nature. Gretchen Legler defines ecofeminist literary criticism as “a hybrid criticism, a combination of ecological or environmental criticism and feminist literary criticism...One of the primary projects of ecofeminist literary critics is analysis of the cultural construction of nature, which also includes an analysis of language, desire, knowledge, and power” (Legler 227). Building on/complicating ecocriticism’s desire for a literary environmental ethic, “Ecofeminists argue that unmasking the metaphorical, conceptual links between gender, race, class, and representations of nature in literature is an important part of forming a more viable

environmental ethic” (Legler 228). Ecofeminist literary criticism asks similar yet different questions to ecocriticism and offers alternate critiques of canonized works, portraying their limited views of nature and the absence of women and people of color by “critiquing the very notion of ‘form’ as a way to define a genre and insisting that genre or canon formation is a politicized process, and in the case of nature writing, that it has resulted in a canon that reflects masculinist values and assumptions about the natural world” (Legler 229). Ecofeminists share the desire for a stronger appreciation of nonhuman nature and a stop to environmental degradation, yet they argue that the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and nature must be recognized. The oppression of women, children, people of color, the poor and the environment is linked (in various ways) and therefore must be combated simultaneously.

Environmental justice criticism has similar goals and is my other chosen ecological partner for this project. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein define environmental justice as “the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment.” While many ecocritics (and some early ecofeminists) often equated “environment” with “nature,” environmental justice broadens our understanding of what constitutes an environment by defining it as “the places in which we live, work, play, and worship” (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 4). While the work on environmental justice activism is relatively available, scholarship on environmental justice literary criticism as a field is quite limited. To date, only a handful of books include sections that specifically address environmental justice in literature. Annie Ingram specifically states “Environmental justice literature implicitly critiques and explicitly expands the mainstream canon of environmental literature. Environmental justice literature is

multicultural, emphasizes social justice, identifies ‘environment’ as the inextricable combination of human culture and natural setting, and attends to issues of race, class, and gender as often as it acknowledges the influence of place” (Ingram 228). Ultimately, environmental justice literary criticism recognizes how social issues and environmental degradation are inextricably linked, and it sees literature as an effective tool in voicing multiple perspectives and concerns that are not restricted by place, time, or reality.

Julie Sze argues that “Literature offers a new way of looking at environmental justice, through visual images and metaphors, not solely through the prism of statistics. This new way of looking references the ‘real’ problems of communities struggling against environmental racism, and is simultaneously liberated from providing a strictly documentary account of the contemporary world. It allows for a more flexible representation of environmental justice, one with a global view and historical roots” (Sze 163). Rachel Stein echoes Sze’s assertion when she writes

Expressive arts offer individuals and communities creative media through which to explore the intricate intersections of gender and sexuality with environmental justice...By representing sexed and gendered speakers and protagonists who live inside the issues, the artists give us an honest emotional sense of the complicated costs of environmental ills for those who dwell within affected communities. They also provide an appreciation of the complex and often conflicted positions of the women and men who act against these ills, incurring daily difficulties and real dangers to do so (Stein “Introduction” 13).

Literature can engage environmental justice issues without temporal or spatial limitations and incorporate multiple points of view within its pages.

In chapter one, I offer an overview of the field of ecocriticism — how it started, how it evolved, how it changed. Lawrence Buell has declared there to be two waves of ecocriticism so I explore how first wave ecocritics, amidst the urgency to instill an environmental ethic in readers of literature, had a tendency to celebrate a seemingly universal nature that offered comfort and serenity without consideration of other environmental experiences. As a result, the celebratory views were often those of white, male authors which severely limited ecocriticism's ability to discuss literary works outside of such viewpoints. Second wave ecocritics still desire to study literary constructions of nature beyond discussions of setting but focus more on how race, gender, class, and sexuality mediate perceptions of nonhuman nature, therefore rejecting monolithic constructions of the environment. I contend that second wave ecocriticism would greatly benefit from the insights of ecofeminist and environmental justice literary criticism (and vice-versa). Such a move would challenge ecocriticism and its early methodologies and create avenues for discussion of more diverse literary texts, such as the ones discussed in this dissertation. Therefore, a third wave ecocriticism that puts these concerns at the center of ecocritical studies can explore the way authors such as Morrison, Ozeki, and Butler reveal not only how we oppress nature but also how nature has been used to oppress.

Chapter two begins the work by examining Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and how the institution of slavery fragmented African American environmental relationships by using conceptions of "natural" and "unnatural" to distance white people and black people and

justify racial hierarchies. In Morrison's novel, constructions of nature as a fluid yet politicized space that has very strong historical constructions as a white space are elucidated. Dominant culture relied on these interpretations to exclude African Americans by making (false) associations between them and nature and then using those associations to marginalize them. However, there are many inconsistencies in those associations, and *Beloved* demonstrates how these inconsistencies leave space for African Americans to resist oppressive structures and reclaim nature as a space of power and healing. Specifically, this chapter looks at the character, Baby Suggs, and how her spiritual revivals in the Clearing aim to recast nature as a positive force for the African American community.

Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* is the major work discussed in chapter three. Ozeki's novel portrays nature being co-opted into use by transnational corporations in order to sell Western products and lifestyles. In order to construct these narratives, the media representations must silence or exclude those who suffer as a result of their practices—women, children, people of color, and the poor—which the protagonist, Jane, discovers while working for the television show *My American Wife!*. Ozeki creates counter-environmental narratives that expose the realities of corporate narratives and focuses on those who are hurt in these processes, giving them a voice. However, Ozeki is careful to produce these counter-narratives while still questioning the media's ability to tell the truth. In our haste to undo or challenge corporate narratives, we can fall into a trap of creating equally narrow or restrictive counter-narratives. *My Year of Meats* is mindful of this, and the goal is to find those spaces where multiple voices can be heard and multiple points of view can be considered.

Chapter four explores the “natural” in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis Trilogy*. Like the other chapters, this one examines how oppressive environmental narratives work to maintain current power structures through classifications of “natural” versus “unnatural.” Butler’s trilogy combines colonialist, racist, and sexist rhetoric in the presence of an alien species claiming to save humanity following nuclear war. But through the efforts to repopulate the earth, it becomes apparent that the aliens are more interested in controlling the future population through their ability to read and manipulate genetic material. Butler’s use of science fiction highlights and magnifies the ways that environmental issues are being manipulated and used to maintain existing hierarchies by placing them outside of everyday contexts. In a post-earth setting, narratives that have relied on restrictive definitions of nature cease to function.

Together, these chapters explore how oppressive environmental narratives have been/are being used by dominant power structures to develop and maintain their power and, by using a combination of ecocriticism, ecofeminist literary criticism, and environmental justice criticism to analyze these novels, these chapters reveal how literature can challenge such narratives and create opportunities for counter narratives to be voiced. This project questions many things yet it doesn’t seek to offer answers or solutions to the many environmental issues raised here. In fact, it probably raises more questions. The literary counter-narratives should continue to raise questions—each author confronts similar yet varied environment issues and methods of resistance, which demonstrates the complexity of experiences, identities, and realities.

CHAPTER ONE

The Evolution and the Future of Ecocriticism

I was not introduced to the field of ecocriticism before beginning my master's degree in literature. My initial encounter was one of excitement and curiosity—this was a fresh new way of looking at literature and I felt inspired and ready to make this my primary field of study. Yet along with the excitement came some frustration. As I delved into early ecocritical texts and conversations, I felt limited and contained. Women writers have always captured my interest and fueled my scholarly undertakings, yet they were largely absent from the ecocritical scope. I worried that if I truly wanted to pursue ecocriticism, I would have to become a Thoreau scholar, or I would have to continue my studies of ecofeminism and leave literature to other fields of inquiry. Luckily I have a committee who pushed me to recognize the oversights of early ecocriticism and use them to challenge the field and incorporate my interests in ecofeminism and environmental justice. I didn't have to turn away from the field—I could embrace it by demonstrating how women writers could in fact be read ecocritically. And by reading works by women and people of color, the field of ecocriticism itself is forced to self-reflect and engage in more richly nuanced understandings of literature and nature. Because this realization was so instrumental in my scholarly pursuits, I wanted to write a chapter that reviews the evolution of ecocriticism and the connections with ecofeminism and environmental justice. Here I examine a general history of ecocriticism and the problems it faced and why I, and a growing number of ecocritics, argue for more intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in explorations of nature and literature.

Since its formal inception in the 1990s, the field of ecocriticism has experienced dramatic growth and dramatic changes. Such a young field has attracted scholarly attention, praise, and criticism as the words “environmental crisis” are heard more often in more places, and the twenty-first century looks to be a time of excitement and challenge for ecocriticism.

Although the early 1990s are seen as the formation of the field, the idea of ecocriticism had already been explored by scholars in various articles. But it was the publication of Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination* in 1995 and Cheryll Glotfelty’s and Harold Fromm’s collection, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, in 1996 that solidified ecocriticism and gave scholars a foundation. A community was created around one major focus: literature and the environment.

Frustrated with literary theory’s lack of engagement with environmental issues, scholars like Glen A. Love and Lawrence Buell called on colleagues to take nature seriously. Love argued that theory, especially postmodernism/poststructuralism, had alienated readers from their natural surroundings, creating a sense of apathy towards environmental issues. Buell advocated a return to realism as way to engage with the natural world through literature. Other ecocritics agreed and responded by privileging realism, personal narrative and nonfiction over other genres, believing that realistic depictions of nature and experience would ultimately reconnect people with the environment.

However, these privileged genres attracted their fair share of criticism as well as praise, causing some critics, including Buell, to rethink ecocriticism’s beginnings, which split the field into what is now being called first and second wave ecocriticism. This

essay will explore ecocriticism's beginnings and its initial rejection of postmodern theory as well its transition to a more inclusive field and the influences of ecofeminism and environmental justice. In order for the field to expand to other literary genres as well as beyond U.S. borders, I argue that ecocriticism must critique itself and work to create environmental possibilities in postmodern literary theory. One way of doing so is with the help of ecofeminist and environmental justice literary criticisms, two other relatively young and growing fields. Surprisingly, little scholarship exists that explores intersections of these three criticisms and the possible contributions each can make to one another as well as to literature. My goal for this chapter is to demonstrate the benefits of such intersections and argue for a more encompassing ecocriticism that looks beyond narrative, nonfiction nature pieces to a variety of literary genres.

Ecocriticism's Flight from Theory

The recognition of increasing environmental devastation in the late twentieth century and the simultaneous popularity of postmodernism alarmed early ecocritics, who saw postmodern theory's dismissal of the "real" as complicit in the destruction of nature. Ecocritics argued that "postmodernism re-creates the world as text, destroying the world in the process" (Slocombe 494). Because "the constructedness of nature is a basic tenet of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and other forms of theory" ecocritics feared postmodernism and postmodern literature's declaration of the death of nature and the simultaneous celebration of culture (Phillips 578).

Postmodern literature especially frightened first-wave ecocritics who argued that it "often distances us from the world" (Slocombe 498). Because many postmodern literary critics were concerned more with metaphorical nature than the actual natural realm,

ecocritics perceived a widening gap between people and their environment, both in fiction and reality. Such distance could only lead to continued environmental destruction. Scott Russell Sanders was especially critical of postmodern literature, accusing it of focusing exclusively on the urban: “You can see this ignorance of land and landscape illustrated in the stylish fiction of our time” (Sanders 193). When literary critics promote such literature, ecocritics argued they failed to teach environmental ethics to their audiences and their students, contributing to the environmental crisis. Sanders argued “however accurately it reflects the surface of our times, fiction that never looks beyond the human realm is profoundly false, and therefore pathological. No matter how urban our experience, no matter how oblivious we may be toward nature, we are nonetheless animals” (Sanders 194). Ultimately, ecocritics believed that ignoring nature would not only lead to continued degradation but would also discount human connection to nature.

To counter postmodernism, ecocritics turned to realism, with two of its biggest proponents, Glen A. Love and Lawrence Buell, leading the way. Buell’s highly influential book *The Environmental Imagination* calls literary critics to return to realism when examining nature writing. Frustrated with the parameters of literary theory, Buell asked, “Must literature always lead us away from the physical world, never back to it?” (Buell *EI* 11). He lamented the relegation of the environment as “setting” that is used metaphorically “rather than as a place of literal reference or as an object of retrieval or contemplation for its own sake.” By engaging in such literary analysis, Buell argued that “professors of literature...easily become antienvironmentalists in their own profession” (Buell *EI* 85). Instead, he proposed more attention to environmental nonfiction and its admirable attempts to portray nature realistically. Although he complicates the notion of

“classical realism” somewhat, Buell pointed to realism as a way to move the environment to the forefront of literary discussions, de-center the human character and reconnect readers with their natural environment.

Other ecocritics were in agreement as seen in the foundational text *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Love, Sanders and others scolded theory for its severing of connections, which directly contradicts the ecological belief that everything is connected in some form. Love called for eco-consciousness over ego-consciousness and pointed specifically to Western American literature as the genre to bring to the forefront of the field. SueEllen Campbell reflected on her love of theory and her love of nature and how the two seem so at odds with one another despite some seeming similarities: “While both theory and ecology reject the traditional humanist view of our importance in the scheme of things, though, what they focus on as a replacement is quite different. Theory sees everything as textuality, as networks of signifying systems of all kinds...But ecology insists that we pay attention not to the way things have meaning for us, but to the way the rest of the world—the nonhuman part—exists apart from us and our languages (Campbell 133). As a result, ecocritics sought to set themselves apart from traditional literary criticisms, claiming the field was not a theory but an “attitude.” By celebrating works that attempted accurate depictions of nature and testified to its importance, ecocriticism worked to revamp the “nature writing” genre and reconnect the American public with nature “because the natural world is indubitably real and beautiful and significant” (Love 237). Early ecocritics frequently turned to nonfiction and personal narratives as the preferred genres. Striving for unity with the natural world was one way the field of literary

criticism could do more to combat environmental destruction, with “one foot in literature and the other on land” (Glotfelty xix).

There is much to admire about ecocriticism’s beginnings. The desire to make the environment more central to literary discussions, to reconnect readers with nature and to downplay the importance of strictly theoretical discourse, all in the hopes of combating environmental destruction—together these characteristics point to an energized and fresh new way of approaching literature. Many scholars quickly jumped onboard and in just a few years, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment was formed with its own academic journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. *The Ecocriticism Reader* is now a foundational text offering an introduction to the field. While I don’t agree with the dismissal of postmodernism/postmodern literature altogether, I do believe that certain postmodern views that dismiss nature need to be questioned. After all, a dismissal of nature also dismisses any possible repercussions of human action. And I find the goal to connect readers with the environment to be useful and important for a number of reasons. First, it directly addresses the arguments of theory being too far removed from everyday lived experiences. Ecocriticism can bring readers and scholars into conversations such as how attitudes toward nature in a piece of literature could affect reader attitudes and interactions with their own environment. For any student who has sat in a literature class and wondered how reading a piece of fiction will have any bearing on “real life,” this type of conversation can demonstrate those connections. Second, by focusing on connections with the physical environment, ecocriticism opens a door for all sorts of scholars. Readers from a variety of disciplines can join the conversation through discussions of perceptions of nature, interactions with

nature, and constructions of nature. However, early ecocriticism's resistance to theory drew some heated criticism and some scholars questioned the depth and longevity of the field.

Facing Critical Responses

Early ecocritics took the return to realism to heart and ran with it. Essays on Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Edward Abbey and other authors who wrote in a realistic vein increased in number and popularity. Yet in the rush to revive nonfiction environmental writing, ecocritics failed to reflect on the possible shortcomings of such an approach. With ecocriticism loosely defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” (Glotfelty xviii) some critics felt unsure about what the field was striving for. Was it about recognizing nature in literature? In all literature? And how do we define words like “nature” and “environment”? Serpil Oppermann argues that rejecting theoretical status places ecocriticism on shaky ground: “avoiding to generate its own systematic theory makes ecocriticism potentially fuzzy in its method” (Oppermann 108). Other critics, like Dana Phillips, accused ecocriticism of being reactionary and that ecocritics “often treat literary theory as if it were a noxious weed that must be suppressed before it overwhelms more native and greener forms of speech.” (Phillips 579). The aversion to theory as well as to much of recent fiction (Sanders “in essence condemns virtually all of contemporary American literature as un- if not anitnatural” [Reed 149]) made ecocriticism too narrowly focused.

Many critics of first wave ecocriticism took issue with the field's hyperfocus on realism. Phillips states “Realism is idiomatic. It works only when interlocutors share similar assumptions about what is perfectly ordinary and its proper description; such

sharing is not universal” (Phillips 597). While his argument could potentially apply to any literary form, it is especially pertinent to ecocriticism which has relied on a seemingly “universal” concept of nature, assuming that the word (and concept) means the same thing for everyone. When focusing on the realist piece of nonfiction environmental writing, ecocritics often failed to consider that these pieces reflected only one sort of view of nature, only one experience, which was often the white, male perspective.

Such a narrow focus also limited what ecocritics could do with a text and Phillips argues

If ecocriticism limits itself to reading realistic texts realistically, its practitioners may be reduced to an umpire’s role, squinting to see if a given description of a painted trillium or a live oak tree is itself well-painted and lively...Literary realism privileges description, and even the sharpest description can seem inert if it does not occur in a narrative context heightened by philosophical or psychological or political or scientific interests, which need not themselves be ‘realistic’ to have some real urgency (Phillips 586).

Critics like Phillips expressed concern that a hyperfocus on realism meant a hyperfocus on realistic details, restricting the reading of nature texts to nothing more than whether or not the author did his/her landscape homework.

A narrow focus also limited early ecocriticism’s growth as a field. In attempts to escape the literary canon, ecocritics subsequently formed their own canon, dominated by Muir, Leopold, Thoreau, Joseph Meeker, Leo Marx, Lawrence Buell and others. These names appeared over and over in many early ecocritical essays, suggesting that these

were the only people ecocriticism could work with. Moreover, the views of these eco-celebrities offered a narrow view of nature itself, working almost exclusively with the pastoral, wilderness, or the West. Critics questioned ecocriticism's rejection of other landscapes, including the urban. What counted as nature according to ecocriticism?

Based on the work of first wave ecocritics, the answer would include traditional "natural" settings – forests, fields, deserts, mountains, rivers—all spaces that did not include large numbers of people. Ecocritics especially preferred the solitary experiences from writers who travelled to nature and/or lived in nature for a period of time, which suggests that, for first wave ecocritics, true nature is a space apart/away from large populations. Here is where I believe first wave ecocriticism actually defeats its own goal of reconnecting readers with nature. By ignoring urban spaces and heavily populated areas, ecocriticism fails to reach people who call these places home and actually maintains a nature/culture dualism.

The emphasis on place also kept ecocriticism in the local, unable to conceive of the global, as Greg Garrard demonstrates: "Sustained attention to the idea of place as locale has provided us with no sense of place of the whole Earth in contemporary culture" (Garrard 178). An exclusively American canon confined ecocriticism within the borders of the United States and Ursula Heise points out "The rise of ecocriticism... was initially facilitated by its foundational investment in local subjects and forms of knowledge, an interest that it shared at the time with many other fields in American studies, but which subsequently made it more difficult for ecocritical theory to take the step toward transnationalism" (Heise, "Ecocriticism" 383). While other fields began addressing the

issue of globalization, early strands of ecocriticism remained stubbornly entrenched in U.S. soil.

Perhaps what has been most troubling for critics of first wave ecocriticism is its lack of engagement with issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Cheryll Glotfelty readily admitted in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* that ecocriticism is a white movement but suggests that the field will welcome “diverse voices” “when stronger connections are made between the environment and issues of social justice” (Glotfelty xxv). Such thinking in first wave ecocriticism contributes to stereotypes that people of color simply aren’t interested in environmental issues, that only social justice matters to communities of color¹. The call for stronger connections also creates a false sense of separation between social justice and environmental issues, ignoring communities that live with poverty, pollution, and poor health.

Buell also rationalized the lack of people of color when he claims “in American literary history the dominant contribution [to environmental literature] has been made by members of the dominant Euro-American subculture” (Buell *EI* 14). Yet he offered no explanation for why this is. Neither Glotfelty nor Buell reflected on the reasons behind ecocriticism’s predominantly white focus. Other ecocritics pointed to other strands of literary criticism and their abilities to incorporate issues of race/gender/class/sexuality, so ecocriticism could focus exclusively on the environment. Therefore, early ecocriticism’s white, predominantly male canon appeared unproblematic to the field’s practitioners throughout much of the 1990s. Yet, as Heise points out in a recent article, the tight focus

¹ First wave ecocriticism did, however, engage with Native American literatures. While many essays were beneficial, others generalized and romanticized Native American cultures, contributing to stereotypes of Native Americans as natural environmentalists. For more on this issue, see Shepard Krech’s *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*.

on the local “was centrally envisioned in terms of the experience of single, mostly male individuals encountering wild landscapes or homesteading agricultural ones” (Heise “Ecocriticism” 385). In addition, these white males also represented a middle-class point of view, which prompted Phillips to ask “Do ecocritics really want to promote environmental literature in the retrograde and potentially contradictory terms of realism? The result can only be middle-brow literature of nature informed only by middle-class values, and too much contemporary nature writing is like that already” (Phillips 587). The lack of recognition of such issues caused a type of internal crisis within first wave ecocriticism, with groups such as the Caucus for Diversity pushing ASLE to include more panels and discussions on writers of color. Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic point out that ecocriticism’s focus on conservationists like John Muir was troublesome and “many environmentalists of color choose not to stand on the shoulders of Muir since he developed his conservation ethic during the movement to abolish slavery and in the midst of the expropriation of Native American lands for the creation of national parks, yet never addressed these two great racial struggles” (Adamson and Slovic 5). In 2004, Michael Cohen stated “One thing is certain: traditional theories of representation are under attack because of the narrowness of their interests and especially because younger critics have become suspicious of personal narratives about nature produced from privileged positions of gender, class, and ethnicity” (Cohen 29).

In addition, early ecocritics seemed unaware and/or unwilling to recognize their own positions of privilege, which resulted in articles and stories that included overwhelmingly positive portrayals of the environment and people’s interactions with it. Cohen argues “In its enthusiasm to disseminate ideas, a certain version of narrative ecocriticism might

be better described as praise than criticism. I call this version of ecocriticism the ‘praise-song school’” (Cohen 21). The “praise-song school” focused on stories of healing, spiritual journeys, and aesthetic enjoyment of the natural world, painting nature as an almost sacred space and environmental authors as “prophets.” In their effort to reconnect people with nature, ecocritics seemed afraid to discuss negative experiences, as if that might exacerbate the gap between the two. Yet the result was an idealization of nature that reflected a limited view which “masked the effects of environmental degradation” (Reed 151). Early ecocriticism’s opposition to environmental destruction failed to investigate the reasons behind such destruction and instead focused on glorifying the natural world in hopes that aesthetic appreciation would change people’s attitudes.

Despite my admiration of much of early ecocriticism, I am inclined to agree with many of its critics (though some, like Phillips tend to be overly harsh). Glotfelty and Buell’s “explanations” concerning the lack of people of color are severely problematic and do not excuse their absence. The field’s narrow focus appealed to a certain group of scholars which resulted in an ecocritical canon, studied by a canon of scholars (Slovic, Buell, Branch, etc). The concept of a universal nature put forth by early scholars actually limited ecocriticism’s potential and appeal to those who fit into the white and male perspective—therefore reemphasizing problematic relationships between many people of color and women and the environment. As mentioned earlier, I agree with ecocriticism’s goal of connecting readers with their environment through literature, yet first wave ecocriticism’s approach mainly focused on *certain* readers. Where I don’t agree with critics of ecocriticism is on the matter of legitimacy and longevity. Some view the goal of connecting readers with nature as interesting but limited, meaning that it can never

achieve the status of a serious literary criticism. I believe ecocriticism can indeed become a major branch of literary criticism and can be used to analyze all sorts of writings, but in order for this to happen, the field must grow and evolve beyond the limited view of nature set forth by early practitioners. It is essential that ecocritics reflect on earlier practices and critique them, which some have been reluctant to do. What I think is most important to note is that while there was much criticism of ecocriticism, few critics dismissed it all together. There is recognition of the field's potential, and that recognition continues to grow with the emergence of second wave ecocriticism.

Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice

Ecofeminist and environmental justice literary criticism are two fields that prove beneficial to the ecocritical arena. While early ecocriticism embraced genres such as realism, personal narrative, and nonfiction environmental writing, ecofeminist literary criticism looked to places like postmodern fiction, science fiction, and women's regional writing. Using gender as its main lens, ecofeminist literary criticism analyzes literature through the "interconnections of forms of oppression" between gender, race, class, sexuality and the exploitation of nature (Gaard and Murphy 3). An excellent definition of ecofeminism comes from Noël Sturgeon's *Ecofeminist Natures*: "Ecofeminism is a movement that makes connections between environmentalisms and feminisms; more precisely, it articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment" (Sturgeon 23). When examining Western thought and cultural constructs, similar oppressions and their justifications emerge in terms of women and nature, which is further complicated by race, class, sexism, and colonialism.

Ecofeminism views environmental and social issues as inextricably linked, and seeks to recognize and battle these injustices.

Because “ecofeminism is not a single master theory and its practitioners have different articulations of their social practice,” its approach to literature is similarly varied (Gaard and Murphy 2). While there are many branches of ecofeminism (social, radical, Marxist, spiritual, queer etc), in brief, many ecofeminist critics argue for the fluidity and instability of categories and definitions and work to deconstruct binaries and boundaries in order to combat multiple oppressions, which makes much of postmodern literature a useful playground for the field. Buell notes “One of the most significant insights for literary studies afforded by approaching the general problem of ecological denial or alienation through the lens of gender is its exposure of the double paradox of ‘nature’ having been andocentrically constructed as a domain for males...yet at the same time symbolically coded as female—an arena of potential domination analogous to the female body” (Buell *FEC* 109). Not only does ecofeminist literary criticism direct attention to women writers, female characters and their interactions with nature, but it also points to nature as a (complexly) gendered realm. While the main focus of first wave ecocriticism was nature conservation, ecofeminist literary criticism investigates what nature conservation entails, who it privileges and who is ignored as a result. The tone of ecofeminist literary criticism is significantly different from much of first wave ecocriticism in that it analyzes how literary constructions of nature are gendered and racialized. While first wave ecocriticism sought to connect readers with the environment, ecofeminist literary criticism focuses on what comprises those connections, how those connections differ, and what severs those connections.

Of course, ecofeminism has its critics as well, as discussed in the introduction, but in brief, initial backlash against ecofeminism came from other feminist camps who accused ecofeminists of essentialism. Some feminists argued that connecting women with nature contradicts what feminists have worked so hard to eradicate. Others took issue with ecofeminism's mainly white composite and heavily gendered focus that seemed to marginalize issues of race, class, and sexuality.

Environmental justice criticism grows out of the social/political movement which "call[s] attention to the ways disparate distribution of wealth and power often leads to correlative social upheaval and the unequal distribution of environmental degradation and/or toxicity" (Adams, Evans, and Stein 5). The environmental justice movement began to take hold in the early 1990s as a result of the work being done by a number of grassroots groups and organizations. Activists focused on the hazardous working and living conditions of many poor people of color in urban areas, and their work helped coin the phrase "environmental racism." These communities defined "environment" as the place where people "live, work, play, worship, and go to school, as well as the physical and natural world" (Bullard 2). In 1991, at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington D.C., activists presented "Principles of Environmental Justice" which served as an environmental bill of rights that demanded environmental protection be recognized as a human right.

While ecocriticism attempts to draw attention to environmental destruction, environmental justice criticism points to the imbalance of environmental destruction with much of it affecting poor people of color. Literary critics "argue for an expansion of environmental literature by focusing upon texts that incorporate racial, ethnic, class, and

sexual difference, and that emphasize intersections between social oppressions and environmental issues” (Adamson, Evans and Stein 9). Similar to ecofeminist literary criticism, environmental justice criticism favors such intersections and interconnections, yet its focus has been more urban, which has helped push the ecocritical field to expand its definition of “environment.”

While ecofeminism has been accused of focusing too heavily on gender, environmental justice has been criticized for its almost exclusive focus on issues of race. Furthermore, like ecocriticism, the movement has also struggled to look beyond U.S. environmental problems and recognize the global impacts. Some critics claim that environmental justice’s focus on contemporary issues results in a somewhat ahistorical understanding of degraded environments.

What is interesting to note is that all three fields focus in some way on environmental issues yet there was very little intersecting between them. Each needed to find a foundation and demonstrate various capabilities but I still find it surprising that so little recognition existed between ecocriticism, ecofeminism and environmental justice in the beginning, especially given the similarities in their critical receptions. Fortunately, those criticisms have pushed each field to address their shortcomings, and Lawrence Buell notes that “environmental criticism in literary studies is increasingly moving...in the direction of extending the concept of environment beyond the arena of the ‘natural’ alone and in the process is becoming increasingly sophisticated in its address to how, in both literature and in history, ‘natural’ and ‘social’ environments impinge on each other” (Buell *FEC* 127). Ecofeminist literary criticism and environmental justice criticism have aided in the emergence of second wave ecocriticism, which takes issues of gender, race,

class, and sexuality in literature more seriously and recognizes their bearings on environmental perceptions and problems, therefore expanding definitions of “nature” and recognizing the natural world can also be a constructed one. Both ecofeminist and environmental justice criticisms tend to favor more diverse literatures than early ecocriticism and while these fields are still talked about separately, more scholars are recognizing the benefits of connecting ecofeminism and environmental justice. I argue that all three fields have much to offer each other, especially in terms of literary criticism.

Exploring Second Wave Ecocriticism

Second wave ecocriticism has examined gender in environmental literature much more frequently, but ecofeminist literary criticism can contribute beyond critically analyzing female characters and their interactions with nature. Using ecofeminism, literary critics can also examine how women and children are adversely affected by environmental degradation and what women are doing to combat environmental destruction and their successes as well as the obstacles they face (sexism, racism etc). Furthermore, ecofeminist literary criticism can also show how these things differ across borders, cultures and languages by examining more global environmental novels. This is especially important for ecocriticism—not only to help the field examine more diverse authors but also to break down the “universal” view of nature created by many first wave ecocritics. So when exploring a piece of literature, ecocriticism may ask: What is the relationship between women and nature? How do men and women view nature differently? Ecofeminist literary criticism would add questions such as: What are the implications of identifying women with nature? How does this work portray women

using this association to their advantage? How is this different for different communities of women?

Environmental justice literary criticism brings even more to the ecocritical table, aiding both ecocriticism and ecofeminist literary criticism. Environmental justice criticism has been labeled a “vanguard” by Buell (Buell *FEC* 113) and has helped diversify the field of ecocriticism, as Ursula Heise points out:

While a certain kind of multicultural consciousness accompanied the emergence of ecocriticism from its beginnings through its pronounced interest in Native American ways of life, mythologies, oratures, and literatures, a more politicized type of multiculturalism with broadly leftist orientations only became a sustained presence in the field with the rise of the environmental justice movement at the turn of the millennium (Heise “Ecocriticism” 386).

Environmental justice adds more urban-centered literatures, helping to expand and complicate notions of nature and environment. It also confronts pollution in cities and other spaces, such as Native American reservations, and allows literary critics to examine more diverse authors and the connections between environmentalism and social justice. Ecocriticism would especially benefit from this last point because this would move the field beyond works that focus on nature preservation and wilderness protection. “Universal” views of nature would also be disrupted once again. Traditionally, ecocriticism asks literary questions: How is nature affected by environmental destruction? Why does this author feel it is important to save nature? Environmental justice literary criticism adds different questions: Why are certain groups of people

exposed to more pollution than others? Who does the polluting? How does the author demonstrate that issues such as health, housing, and nutrition are inextricably linked to environmental concerns? Together, these criticisms offer richly complex literary modes of inquiry while also filling in gaps within the respective fields. All three are influenced and pushed to engage more deeply with issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

So is second wave ecocriticism responding to criticism? My answer is yes and no. Scholars like Patrick Murphy have made important contributions to the field, incorporating international viewpoints. Buell's latest book, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, recognizes the "positive and permanent advantages of stretching the new movement's horizons beyond the academy and of provoking a self-examination of premises that has intensified as the movement has evolved beyond an initial concentration on nature-oriented literature...to take into account urban as well as rural loci and environmental justice concerns as well as nature preservation" (Buell *FEC* 7). Buell not only re-evaluates the field but also his own approaches and "found [himself] agreeing with those who thought the concentration on 'environment' as 'nature' and on nature writing as the most representative environmental genre were too restrictive" (Buell *FEC* 22). Buell's third book represents a mature, more diverse approach to literature and the environment that incorporates view points from ecofeminism and environmental justice. Many others (such as scholars quoted earlier, Heise, Cohen, etc.) have followed in his footsteps and second wave ecocriticism is well on its way to being a more diverse field. A major development for ecocriticism was the emergence of a "postmodern ecology" which "emphasizes indeterminism, instability, and constant change" (qtd. in Phillips 580). Suddenly ecocriticism's other half determined that nature was not static,

and ecology aligned itself more with postmodern/poststructuralist theory, as Phillips states: “Ecology today thus might be said to be more like poststructuralism and less like the sort of values-rich, restorative, and recuperative discourse ecocritics have imagined it to be” (Phillips 580). This shift in focus significantly affected ecocriticism, which had relied so heavily on the idea of nature as a stable, unchanging realm, and opened the door to second wave ecocriticism. Greg Garrard welcomes the new ecology and argues that an alliance with this new definition would allow ecocriticism to confront its earlier problems because “postmodern ecology neither returns us to the ancient myth of the Earth Mother, whose loss some ecocritics lament, nor supplies us with evidence that ‘nature knows best’” (Garrard 178). A more fluid definition of nature allows ecocriticism to incorporate more points of view and reach a larger audience.

Now, more ecocritics are embracing a postmodern approach to literature than in the past and the 2009 ASLE conference included a number of panels that examined issues of race, gender, sexuality, etc and the environment. Michael P. Branch’s and Scott Slovic’s collection, *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, demonstrates the broadening of topics taking place in the journal. It begins with first wave essays that examine Aldo Leopold and Gary Snyder and ends with second wave essays that discuss urban spaces and feminist responses.

Despite positive changes, I echo T.V. Reed’s argument that ecocriticism still lacks a sense of urgency in responding to issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. While critics like Buell recognize their importance, they remain unwilling to openly criticize the absence of these issues in early ecocriticism. *The Future of Environmental Criticism* contends that race, class, gender, and sexuality are important issues for the future of

ecocriticism yet the book does not fully explore why they were lacking in the first place. Buell is willing to recognize a broader range of literature but still relies heavily on writers like Leopold, Thoreau, Meeker, etc. A few years earlier, Buell responded to criticisms of ecocriticism by arguing

On the one hand, they do testify to certain parochialisms, especially during the movement's beginning, chief among which perhaps have been too selective emphases on anglophone and particularly United States writing, on country landscapes, on traditional conservationist or preservationist thinking at the expense of other environmental(ist) persuasions (particularly the environmental justice movement), and on modes of criticism excessively reactive against poststructuralist or cultural studies models instead of on direct constructive engagement. On the other hand, a certain hyperconcentration was, I think, necessary to get ecocriticism—like all critical movements—going: to give it energy, momentum, an edge of contrarian disaffection (Buell "Forum" 1091-92).

I believe his answer reflects the thinking of some ecocritics who, wanting to maintain an allegiance to the field, are willing to admit that issues of race, class, and gender should be part of environmental discourse, but then point to the environmental justice movement as the field that is taking care of this. In other words, ecocriticism doesn't necessarily have to address it because others are. This is also demonstrated in various anthologies that have emerged since *The Ecocriticism Reader*². In *Writing the Environment*:

² *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment* works to take gender more seriously and includes a chapter by Joni Adamson Clarke that calls for "an ecology of justice." Yet the introduction is hesitant about addressing issues of race, class, or sexuality explicitly and moves quickly through criticisms of ecocriticism. *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism* includes

Ecocriticism and Literature, issues of race, gender, and sexuality are examined, but their role seems to still be considered secondary, as editor Richard Kerridge demonstrates when he writes “Green politics cannot easily be, like feminism, a politics of personal liberation and empowerment” (6). Obviously ecofeminism and environmental justice critics would disagree with this statement and argue that environmental issues (such as polluted air and water, toxic work environments, and hazardous living conditions) are tied directly to matters of “personal liberation and empowerment.”

In fact, this point of contention can be used to strengthen second wave ecocriticism without severing connections to first wave ecocriticism. Some early ecocritics view the second wave as a departure from the original goals of connecting readers with the environment and refusing to conform to other literary theories. By becoming more “critically sophisticated,” some first wave ecocritics argue that ecocriticism is now more concerned with the theorization of the environment in literature versus the exploring the connections between a physical environment and literature (Buell *FEC* 27-28). I argue that second wave ecocriticism does not need to leave the goals of first wave ecocriticism behind in order to become a stronger form of literary criticism, and refuting Kerridge’s statement offers an opportunity to explore how this can be accomplished.

First, by incorporating ecofeminist and environmental justice literary criticism, second wave ecocriticism makes issues of “personal liberation and empowerment” a more central component, which in turn actually broadens ecocriticism’s scope and

sections on both gender and race and moves away from traditional authors such as Thoreau. Yet, like *Reading the Earth*, the introduction celebrates ecocriticism as an attitude, not a theory and focuses only on the positive. *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* is more willing to critique the shortcoming of early ecocriticism, as seen in the introduction, and points to ecofeminism and environmental justice as important fields for ecocriticism. Finally, *Coming Into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice* engages with Asian American literature as well as urban spaces, and the introduction discusses the importance of growth and expansion in the field of ecocriticism. But, like the other volumes listed here, ecofeminist and environmental justice issues are still sidelined.

reaches a wider range of readers. This focus also eradicates the notion of a “faceless environment” (where it is only nature that suffers from harmful effects) which is prevalent in first wave ecocriticism. Recognizing people as part of landscapes does more than aid in connecting readers with their environment; it actually immerses readers within a text and within their environment, therefore blurring boundaries between self and nature and deconstructing a nature/culture dualism. This also begs the question what happens if we view literary characters as landscapes themselves. Suddenly the scope of ecocriticism is blown wide open without departing from the original purpose.

As mentioned earlier, environmental justice aims to recognize intersections of social issues and environmental destruction. Therefore, combating environmental destruction is directly linked to the fight for personal, social, political, and economic agency. This is another moment for not only recognizing people as part of landscapes but also analyzing how this affects different communities and cultures. For second wave ecocriticism, the issue of “personal liberation and empowerment” and the environment opens the door to literature with urban centered plots and questions concerning literary constructions of environmental racism. As mentioned earlier, first wave ecocriticism defeated its own goal of connecting readers with the environment by only focusing on one version of nature. Here, this move helps ecocriticism achieve its original goals. It gives ecocriticism more material and steers the field away from the “universal” nature comprised of mainly white men, allowing a variety of readers to recognize their realities within a broader genre of environmental literature.

Ultimately, ecofeminist and environmental justice literary criticism can broaden the scope of ecocriticism, pushing it towards previously unexplored genres and topics. As

mentioned earlier, second wave ecocriticism has made some important advances by considering more postmodern literature as well as works by women and authors of color, helping to the field to reach a broader audience and create more complex discussions of nature³. By using ecofeminist and environmental justice influences, ecocriticism can truly expand beyond traditional American nature writing and tackle literature on a global scale. What I hope to see more of in second wave ecocriticism is a deeper and more complex understanding of human interaction with nature. Through literature, ecocriticism can go beyond connecting readers with nature and analyze what constitutes those connections and how they vary as well as what severs those connections or keeps them from forming in the first place. This can lead to richly nuanced readings of nature that not only helps us look at literature differently but also leads us to better understandings of environmental issues and our own place within them.

Such is the goal of this dissertation. I hope to demonstrate the literary rewards of reading the works of Toni Morrison, Ruth Ozeki, and Octavia Butler ecocritically and what they reveal about constructions of nature, environmental narratives, and issues of identity, power, race, gender, and class.

³ To show just how quickly the field is moving, while writing this chapter, the Summer 2009 issue of MELUS declares the beginning of a third wave of ecocriticism. Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic define this wave as one “which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries; this third wave explores all facets of human experience from an environmental view point” (6-7). I see my work in this dissertation touching on the focus of third wave ecocriticism, but a revision of this project will definitely benefit from international authors and their views of transnational environmental issues.

CHAPTER TWO

Owning Nature in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

What do we think about when viewing nonhuman nature? When someone sees a tree, for instance, what feelings are evoked? When someone reads about a field, what memories are ignited? For many first wave ecocritics, the answers to such questions would often include feelings of serenity, comfort, and affinity and memories of childhood spent in an unspoiled nature. Such scenes drive us to recognize the human place in a complex ecological chain and live more consciously. But what if those same trees and fields don't bring comfort and joy? What if they inspire fear and violent memories? Or, what if they are off limits all together? These types of questions led me to literary works that early ecocritics were not discussing. I wondered how human relationships to nature differed if, quite simply, nature wasn't the safe place so many others felt comfortable living in and writing about. Toni Morrison quickly helped me explore this nature—one that is complexly mediated through race, gender, and history. In her novel *Beloved*, Morrison tells the story of runaway slave Sethe and reveals her conflicting attitudes towards nature as a result of the violence she experiences while enslaved on the Southern plantation Sweet Home. Sethe's past and the history of slavery in America illuminate African American women's complicated views of nature and how that has translated into modern day environmental perceptions. Morrison's unique stream-of-consciousness writing style is especially effective in blurring the boundary between past and present. Constantly switching between past and present events allows Morrison to portray the

fluidity and instability of categories and how defying definition allows for resistance and healing.

In this novel, Morrison focuses less on the destruction done to the earth and more on the damage inflicted on African American relationships with nature as a result of slavery. Unlike many white writers who portrayed nature as a space devoid of social problems, Morrison's writing reveals how "our perceptions and valuations of nature are not simply 'natural' responses to the green world but responses that rest on underlying racial politics" (Wallace and Armbruster 225). In this chapter, I examine the history of slavery in the United States and how the conflation of African Americans with nonhuman nature by dominant white culture not only justified black enslavement but also disallowed slaves and ex-slaves from identifying as American citizens. As a result, African American environmental relationships were fragmented and nature was revealed to be deeply politicized. Morrison's *Beloved* captures these anxieties about nonhuman nature and challenges white constructions of the natural world while suggesting how these complexities can be translated into tools of resistance and healing for the black community. This is what interests me most about Morrison—her ability to critique, challenge, and create within just one novel. Her characters, her dialogue, and her descriptions all create intricate explorations of identity, power, and nature.

First, it is important to explore how "slavery and racism have shaped the meaning of the American landscape, its physical features, its patterns of possession and dispossession" (Smith 200). Slaves were referred to as savages, uncivilized and more animal-like than human, which therefore justified their enslavement. Slaves were not only taught that they were less than human but also that the natural realm was equally

inferior, and the two were conflated. Roderick Nash notes that for many early European immigrants “civilizing the New World meant enlightening darkness, ordering chaos, and changing evil into good. In the morality play of westward expansion, wilderness was the villain, and the pioneer, as hero, relished its destruction. The transformation of a wilderness into civilization was the reward for his sacrifices, the definition of his achievement, and the source of his pride” (Nash 24-25). Because of their savagery and wildness, slaves were similarly in need of “civilization” and, as with the wilderness, white culture saw it as their duty to tame them and make them useful.

Yet there were risks that accompanied such duties. The forest was a dangerous place that lacked social and moral strictures and “for the first Americans, as for medieval Europeans, the forest’s darkness hid savage men, wild beasts, and still stranger creatures of the imagination.” Yet, despite these dangers, an even larger one lurked in the shadows of the trees—the temptation of the wilderness. Men feared the forest yet were also intrigued by its mysteries and its adventures and therefore risked straying too far from civilization. So a “civilized man faced the danger of succumbing to the wildness of his surroundings and reverting to savagery himself” (Nash 24). Again, the association between slaves and wilderness is apparent in such arguments. “Savage” slaves could lead their masters and their wives into temptation, seducing them against their will with their wildness. Black women were especially dangerous, even predatory, because of their primitive promiscuity, so white men had to beware of the “Jezebels” on the plantations lest they succumb to their wildness and revert to savagery themselves⁴. Both of these

⁴ White women considered women of African descent so promiscuous that they would abort their children “because children interrupted their seductions of the white populations” (Schiebinger 181). Black female sexuality was dangerously overt and “drained white male planters of any productive energy” (161). In each

fears transfers responsibility away from men onto the wilderness and slaves and privileges white views of nature as well as whiteness itself.

Forests became what civilization was not; blacks became what whites were not. Freedom defined itself against what was not, and as Morrison herself writes, “nothing highlighted freedom—if it did not in fact create it—like slavery... This population is convenient in every way, not the least of which is self-definition. This new white male can now persuade himself that savagery is ‘out there’” (*Playing* 38, 45).

In *Beloved*, Morrison builds on this statement when she writes:

Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way...they were right. The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The

instance, while men are relieved of any responsibility for their sexual encounters with black women. Instead, they become the victims of wild, animal-like sexual energies emitted by their female slaves.

screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own (198-9).

Slaves and nature are conflated and are viewed as threats unless they can be tamed and controlled. So this notion of “red gums ready for...sweet white blood” is overhyped in order to subjugate slaves and protect white Americans. But as Morrison points out, this “led whites to construct a notion of blackness that said more about their concept of whiteness than the other races” (Peach 117). She demonstrates the circular evolvement of the “jungle” that truly begins and ends with white people. It was created to define what nature and black people were not.

Discussions of the relationships between African Americans and nature vary in their outlook. Many books and articles describe positive African American relationships with nature, prior to, during, and after slavery. In “Slavery and the Origins of African American Environmentalism,” Mart A. Stewart offers an extensive look at the positive roles nature could play in the lives of African American slaves. He argues that activities such as hunting, fishing, gardening and farming gave slaves “knowledge of the land that was intimate and precise, and in turn had material, social, and political usefulness” (Stewart 11). Writers Alice Walker, Deborah Gray White, and Dianne D. Glave focus on the important role of gardens in the lives of African American women during and after slavery. The act of gardening allowed women to maintain cultural traditions and sustain their families, turning a small plot of land into a space for “sustenance, comfort, joy, and sometimes profit” (Glave 50). Elizabeth Blum explores how “in dealing with illness, slaves, and especially slave women, frequently used nature for their benefit” (Blum 256). Many scholars have demonstrated how slaves utilized their surroundings for survival as

well as resistant and subversive acts. The wilderness often served as a refuge for slaves escaping from plantations or as a meeting place for friends and families where stories and traditions from African culture could be shared and passed along.

While being a place of beauty and escape from plantation life, nature could also serve as a site of fear and violence. Runaway slaves that were discovered hiding in swamps and forests faced “varying degrees of torture, beatings, and other violence...as punishment for escaping” (Blum 251). Therefore, “fugitive slaves on the run had to be constantly on their guard” out of fear of discovery by their white captors (Dixon 25). African American women in particular were victims of sexual assault and rape, often taking place in nature at the hands of the white plantation owners. They also had to witness these same violent acts being committed against their children, so African American women carried an especially complicated view of the natural world because “Just as the wilderness could serve as a hiding place for beneficial aspects of black culture, it could also hide violence against women” (Blum 253). Natural elements presented dangers as well. Severe weather and wild animals were real environmental threats, so nature was constantly being negotiated because of “the basic duality in nature: the same natural force, such as wide river, deep valley, soggy swamp, treacherous storm, or impassable mountain, was both obstacle and aid” (Dixon 26).

Taken together, these points create a complex view of nature, and that is what interests me in this chapter. It is not my goal to disprove one argument over another. Instead, I hope to demonstrate how the institution of slavery contributed to these conflicting views of nature that fragmented African American relationships with the environment. White culture relied on this fragmentation because it helped maintain a

system that rejected black citizenship through denial of freedom, property ownership, and recognition of African history and spirituality. In other words, by denying slaves access to and control over nature, the white national identity is safeguarded. The link between ownership and citizenship has been expressed by many authors and one striking example comes from J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*. There he writes "What should we American farmers be without the distinct possession of that soil?...it has established all our rights; on it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power as citizens" (Crèvecoeur 27). Those peoples who are not allowed to possess the soil cannot position themselves as citizens.

Interestingly, this renders nature as a white space which may seem contradictory to the earlier discussion of associations of slaves with nature. It also raises the question how white culture can associate slaves with nature while simultaneously denying them a relationship. My answer is that white culture maintains the right to define, so nature is a white space through domination, and in order to be dominated it must be viewed as "other." So by associating slaves with nature, both are "othered" and subjugated, which allows the dominant culture to control and define them each. And because white culture's control of nature factors into its identity, black culture must not be allowed a relationship with the natural realm; it must remain embedded within nature. After all, "definitions belonged to the definer—not the defined" (Morrison 190).

Yet nature can also be a source of healing and resistance for African Americans through recognition of the fragmented relationship. Toni Morrison narrates the effects of slavery on African American views of nature as well as the possibilities of resistance: "In representing the subjugated standpoint of African Americans, Morrison is notable for

exploring how the natural world has been used as an instrument of oppression but has simultaneously provided a source of sustenance and comfort” (Wallace and Armbruster 213). By reclaiming a relationship with nature, Morrison demonstrates how African Americans not only challenge definition and subvert a white national identity but also reconstruct their history and their African culture.

Memories and Landscapes

Beloved tells the story of Sethe, a runaway slave from the plantation Sweet Home, and her life after slavery. Sethe and her four children make it safely to Ohio, where Sethe’s mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, is already living, but it isn’t long before men from Sweet Home arrive to take Sethe and her children back to the plantation. Fearing capture, Sethe attempts to kill her children but only succeeds with her infant daughter.

Afterwards, their home in Ohio is haunted by a disturbing presence that drives Sethe’s sons away and isolates the family from the community. Sethe begins to find happiness again after the arrival of Paul D, another former slave from Sweet Home, but it is disrupted by the appearance of a woman named Beloved, the same name carved on the tombstone of Sethe’s murdered child. Convinced that Beloved is her daughter reincarnated, Sethe cares for her and is quickly consumed by her presence. Denver, Sethe’s daughter, fears for Sethe’s wellbeing and enlists the help of the community to exorcise Beloved from the house and free Sethe from her influence.

(Re)memory plays a large role in the novel and Sethe is haunted by more than just a ghost. Her memories of Sweet Home and the abuse she suffered plague her thoughts and affect her relationships. One example is Sethe’s relationship with nature and how it

reflects complications brought on by slavery. While she can admire and even enjoy natural beauty, it is often accompanied by violent images such as “Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world” (6). After escaping from Sweet Home, Sethe is surprised that she remembers it as a beautiful place since “there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream” yet in her memory “it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was” (6). Sethe is torn between the aesthetic appeal of Sweet Home and memories of the violence she endured there, violence which has permanently marked her body. And remembering beauty “[shames] her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that” (6). Yet, despite the horrors of the plantation, Sethe finds herself missing certain aspects of it. After all, it was where she lived most of her life. It was where she met her husband and gave birth to her children.

Paul D’s memories of the trees at Sweet Home differ from Sethe’s. While Sethe’s visions blend beauty and violence, Paul D remembers that “trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to as he frequently did since way back when he took the midday meal in the fields of Sweet Home. Always in the same place if he could, and choosing the place had been hard because Sweet Home had more pretty trees than any farm around. His choice he called Brother, and sat under it, alone sometimes, sometimes with Halle or the other Pauls” (21). “Brother” becomes a source of comfort for Paul D, a sort of escape from the ugliness around him. Later in his life, after escaping a chain-gang in Georgia, Paul D runs to freedom in the North by following the blooming trees along the way (112-113). Still, Paul D recognizes the danger of becoming

too attached to something like a tree because such things are not for him to own, so he has to maintain some emotional distance from things he loves. And yet, after all the atrocities he has witnessed and experienced during his various escapes, “he could not help being astonished by the beauty of this land that was not his. He hid in its breast, fingered its earth for food, clung to its banks to lap water and tried not to love it” (268). While Sethe is conflicted by her memories of nature, Paul D struggles between wanting to love nature and needing to protect himself. If you don’t love anything, then it doesn’t hurt when those things are taken away.

After Paul D’s arrival at Sethe’s home in Cincinnati, they reminisce about happenings at Sweet Home, prompting Sethe’s daughter Denver to ask “How come everybody run off from Sweet Home can’t stop talking about it? Looks like if it was so sweet you would have stayed.” Paul D responds “True, true...It wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t home.” But Sethe interjects “it’s where we were...All together. Comes back whether we want it to or not” (13-14). It may not have been a home and it was not a place that physically belonged to the slaves working there, yet Sethe reminds Denver and Paul D that it was all they had and Sweet Home was the last place Sethe’s family all lived together.

Poet Margaret Walker describes the complicated layering of fond memories of the Southern landscape with those of racial hatred that many African American women like Sethe carry. She writes:

O Southland, sorrow home, melody beating in my bone and blood!
How long will the Klan of hate, the hounds and the chain gangs
keep me from my own? (Walker 322).

The haunting lyrics about lynching in Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" echo this complexity:

Pastoral scene of the gallant South

The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth

Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh

Then the sudden smell of burning flesh

Holiday, Walker and Morrison emphasize how the South was home to African Americans and although they felt strong connections with the landscape, violence perpetrated by white culture fragmented that relationship. This fragmentation helped maintain white dominance because it kept African Americans from claiming the Southern landscape as their own. Rachel Stein makes a similar argument, noting how the "social geography of racial segregation and white supremacy *dispossesses* blacks of any secure relationship to homeland, history, and self-determination. Ironically, the historical conflation of blacks with nature severs them from any secure relationship to southern land; while blacks continue to be seen as innately suited to agricultural labor, as serfs they are unable to purchase the land they worked" (Stein 89). By distancing slaves from the land, white culture safeguarded its rights to ownership and citizenship. Yet the relationship was fragmented, not destroyed.

Even though Sweet Home held natural beauty, the slaves living there recognized how white people associated them with the "wildness" of nature. As a child, Sethe remembers her mother and how "she'd had the bit so many times she smiled" (203). Her mouth becomes permanently disfigured from "the bit," marking her as an animal designed for work. Dixon comments on how "slaves knew that as chattel they were considered part of

the property and wilds of nature, which a smoothly functioning plantation could restrain” (Dixon 17). Paul D recognizes his status as plantation animal; and not just simply an animal, but “something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub” (72). He becomes “less than” because the chicken has the opportunity to sit “in the sun” and enjoy it. This opportunity is simply not available to Paul D, which for him signals that a chicken has more freedom than himself. Here the uniqueness of the African American relationship to nature is portrayed—while other racial groups have similarly been associated with nature as a form of subjugation, slaves were put on the same level as nature because both could be owned. African Americans were “property” and experienced less freedom than the plantation animals around them.

Sethe witnesses firsthand the characterization of slaves as animals when she observes one of schoolteacher’s lessons. One of his students specifically studies Sethe and schoolteacher instructs him to “put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up” (193). Disturbed by the lesson, Sethe asks Mrs. Garner what the word “characteristics” means. Mrs. Garner replies “A characteristic is a feature. A thing that’s natural to a thing” (195). This later leads to an assault in the barn by two white men that drives Sethe to escape Sweet Home. While the men restrain Sethe and suckle her breasts, schoolteacher watches and takes notes, studying her like an animal. Sethe later reveals the incident to Paul D, describing how “they handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses” (200). This is one of many instances that illustrates “how dominant (white) American culture has employed the concepts of natural and unnatural to reinforce ideological boundaries between the human and the less-than-human, often in the service

of denying African Americans their full humanity” (Wallace and Armbruster 216). This helps to ensure control over slaves and maintain power structures. By denying slaves their humanity, white culture also succeeds in denying them any claims to citizenship. If they are viewed as property, much like plantation animals, or even scientifically categorized as animal-like, then a clear line is drawn for white culture to point to as justification for white domination and natural rights as citizens.

However, Sethe makes a comment that points to the contradictions within these beliefs. After telling Paul D how she was treated like a nasty animal, she says “but I wasn’t too nasty to cook their food or take care of Mrs. Garner” (200). Here Sethe demonstrates the inconsistencies in white culture’s framing of slaves. Whites render them as subhuman, more primitive, as “people who needed every care and guidance in the world to keep them from the cannibal life they preferred” (151). Yet, slaves also clean white houses, cook white meals, and care for white bodies, so their “animalism” serves to justify violence and sexual assault but doesn’t prohibit them from performing intimate “human” tasks. In other words, slaves are really constructed according to white convenience—therefore, those constructions slide between animal and human in accordance to the context white culture deems necessary. It is this sort of inconsistency that creates possibility for resistance and challenge.

When Sethe reports the incident in the barn to Mrs. Garner, schoolteacher whips her and leaves open wounds on her back that later permanently scar in the shape of a chokecherry tree, an image that is both beautiful and grotesque. Sethe’s conflicting memories of Sweet Home materialize in this tree and she is weighed down by its presence. Because it is located on her back, Sethe can never look directly at the tree, but

she never forgets that it is there. Long after the beating, “it grows there still” (17). It is a piece of Sweet Home that is always with her, much like her memories, and she is permanently marked by violence that coexists with the natural beauty of the landscape. Sethe’s body is a site where multiple oppressions converge and leave lasting impressions and the chokecherry tree symbolizes the deep roots of racialized and gendered hatred that have become associated with the Southern landscape.

As a result of this hatred, many African American women still hold a complicated view of nature. Evelyn White is one such woman and in her essay “Black Women and the Wilderness” she recounts how the violence of slavery as well as the civil rights movement has negatively affected her perception of nature. Like Sethe, she is able to recognize beauty in natural settings but felt “certain that if [she] ventured outside to admire a meadow or to feel the cool ripples in a stream, [she]’d be taunted, attacked, raped, maybe even murdered, because of the color of [her] skin” (White 317). Although White has never directly faced violence while in nature, she writes “my genetic memory of ancestors hunted down and preyed upon in rural settings counters my fervent hopes of finding peace in the wilderness” (White 318). White remembers as a young girl seeing photos of the young man Emmett Till, who was brutally beaten and murdered beyond recognition for whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. His mangled body was dumped near the river, and White could not venture into nature comfortably afterwards. Instead, she

conjured bloodhounds, burning crosses, and white-robed Klansmen
hunting down people who looked just like me. I imagined myself being
captured in a swampy backwater, my back ripped open and bloodied by

the whip's lash. I cradled my ancestral mother, broken and keening as her baby was snatched from her arms and sold down the river (White 319-320).

The branches of the chokecherry tree have extended across time to touch African American women living long after the end of slavery. White wrote this essay in 1995, yet the “genetic memory” of the violence faced by her ancestors and her own memories of Emmett Till affect her current relationship with nature. Like Morrison, White recognizes the fluidity of past and present and how that violence still controls her movements.

Sethe references memories and how they continue to live in the places where they took place. She tells Denver

Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my memory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my memory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened...It's never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even

though it's all over—over and done with—it's always going to be there waiting for you (36).

Everything that happened at Sweet Home can affect Denver, even though she has never been there. Because these memories live past the actual events, Morrison suggests that those people who didn't live experiences can still be touched by them, which is similar to what White experiences in the wilderness. Such events serve as reminders of the complex African American relationships to nature. White's ambivalence towards the wilderness is shared with many other contemporary African Americans and the historical violence committed against African Americans in natural settings continues to influence current relationships with nature.

Owning Property, Owning Nature

Although the Southern landscape served as home and workplace for slaves, it was always clear that white people owned the land. The forest, the fields, the swamps—all of nature was reserved for those who had the ability to own land and dictate how that land was used. So, though slaves worked the land and were even associated with nature, they were not allowed to claim it as their own. While working on a chain gang in Georgia Paul D is “listening to the doves” and understands that he has “neither the right nor the permission to enjoy it because in that place mist, doves, sunlight, copper dirt, moon—everything belonged to the men who had the guns” (162). He is performing someone else's work on someone else's land, so even the smallest things like doves and dirt are not his to own.

While working in Mrs. Garner's kitchen at Sweet Home, Sethe brings plants and flowers in order to feel like “some part of it was hers, because she wanted to love the

work she did, to take the ugly out of it, and the only way she could feel at home on Sweet Home was if she picked some pretty growing thing and took it with her” (22). Sethe looks to nature to bring her comfort and ownership on Sweet Home—perhaps the beauty of flowers could mask the ugliness all around her. She decorates the kitchen in order to make a mark on her surroundings and gain some control in her work. But she soon realizes it is a false sense of security, brought on by her belief that “Sweet Home really was one” (23). It is suddenly silly to think that “a handful of myrtle stuck in the handle of a pressing iron propped against the door in a whitewoman’s kitchen could make it hers” (23). Vera Norwood observes that in this moment, “the green world cannot save Sethe from the violence of slavery. Though Morrison never denies the beauties of nature, she pointedly rejects any romantic notion that Sethe’s connection with plants provides her power” (Norwood 189). Sethe realizes that the kitchen is not hers no matter what she brings into it—that space belongs to Mrs. Garner, and Sethe is merely a component, not an actor. And ultimately, the flowers she adds still grow on land that is also not hers. Again, Morrison demonstrates the complex relationship between slaves, property, and nature. Although plants and flowers may provide distraction or pleasure for Sethe, in the end, they only reaffirm her lack of agency on the plantation. Nothing about Sweet Home is hers to claim, not even the plants growing there.

A similar situation occurs in another Morrison novel, *The Bluest Eye*. A young black girl named Pecola has three pennies which will allow her to buy some candy at a small grocery store. As she walks, the pennies in her shoe rub against her foot, offering “a sweet, endurable, even cherished irritation, full of promise and delicate security” (*BE* 47). Comforted by her money, Pecola happily takes in her surroundings and particularly

notices the crack in the sidewalk and some dandelions. Such “inanimate things” were the “codes and touchstones of the world, capable of translation and possession. She owned the crack that made her stumble; she owned the clumps of dandelions...And owning them made her part of the world, and the world a part of her” (*BE* 47-48). Pecola’s pennies seemingly solidify her place in the world; they give her ownership and she is able to participate in a system of exchange that reflects worth. The sense of ownership collapses boundaries and makes her feel powerful.

However, Pecola soon learns that her pennies do not negate the color of her skin. When she enters the store, the white owner, Mr. Yacobowski, looks at her in a way that conveys “the total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness” (*BE* 48). Pecola recognizes such a look and understands what is behind it; it is her “blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes” (*BE* 49). She buys some candy with her three pennies that Mr. Yacobowski hesitates to take because of the color of the hand that offers them. Once outside, Pecola feels “the inexplicable shame ebb” and the dandelions “do not look at her” and “she trips on the sidewalk crack” (*BE* 50). Her sense of ownership and belonging is disrupted and, like Sethe, Pecola realizes that it was never real to begin with. Flowers and cracks can be deceiving and both women learn that simply looking to nature does not alter situations. The kitchen is still not Sethe’s kitchen and the sidewalk is still not Pecola’s sidewalk because nature is not a world apart; it is defined and characterized by a dominant white culture that looks to nature as its own. This is where “translation and possession” truly lie, so in order for black women to find a sense of place and ownership, they must renegotiate nature. They must create their own version, their own values and their own uses. Instead of looking to

a “white” nature to free them, Sethe and Pecola need to instead explore how challenging those definitions of nature can lead to empowerment.

In her book, *Undomesticated Ground*, Stacy Alaimo asserts nature to be a place outside of the dominant culture that can be reclaimed by women and people of color. Alaimo looks to African-American women writers such as Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler and Nella Larsen and concludes, that, although nature has been cast as cruel when it comes to child birth, “African Americans have experienced nature, or more specifically the ‘wilderness’ as a real and imaginary place of refuge” (Alaimo 138). Using Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Alaimo argues that nature is place free from the oppressions of the dominant culture and “Morrison can symbolically reverse the valences of class, gender, and cultural hierarchies” and nature therefore “...functions as a rich oppositional space” (Alaimo 139-140). Ultimately, black women can utilize nature as a place of power.

While I agree with Alaimo’s assertion that nature can serve as a place of power for women and people of color, I find her argument about nature’s distance from dominant culture to be one-sided, as suggested by my earlier discussion. Nature has often been a space to be occupied and controlled by white men. Since the arrival of Europeans, nature (and people associated with it) has been dominated and exploited. Places of wilderness were seen as a challenge, needing a master to make it useful and more productive. Unoccupied land (Native Americans didn’t count) was seen as free for the taking and was used as dominant culture deemed necessary. White men said who could and could not be in natural spaces, as demonstrated by the conservationists, and rarely viewed nature as a place that could not be entered. Dominant culture has generally ruled over nature, and even when it doesn’t occupy the natural space, it maintains its right to do so. As

discussed earlier, the wilderness has historically been the site of lynchings, beatings, capture and rape for African-Americans, both during and after slavery. African-American women, in particular, faced both physical as well as sexual assaults. Therefore I am more inclined to agree with Mei Mei Evans when she writes “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 white, and/or not straight when they attempt a transformative experience in nature to see what they risk” (Evans 191). I believe she is making her argument based on a more historically inclusive concept of nature. In short, I argue that while many places in nature may physically exist outside of dominant culture, the threat of its occupation may always be lingering.

Beloved demonstrates this concept perfectly in an exchange between Sethe and a young white girl named Amy Denver. After escaping Sweet Home, Sethe is stuck in the forest in Ohio, about to give birth to her fourth child, when she is discovered by Amy, who is travelling to Boston to purchase some velvet. After ascertaining that Amy is alone, Sethe tells her “You ain’t got no business walking round these hills, miss.” Amy shoots back “Looka here who’s talking. I got more business here ‘n you got. They catch you they cut your head off. Ain’t nobody after me but I know somebody after you” (78). These few lines reveal much about unspoken regulations within the forest. First, both women recognize that the forest is not their “space.” It is deemed unsafe and inappropriate for women to wander in the woods alone, as Sethe points out to Amy. So the forest is immediately constructed as a male dominated space, which may seem to contradict ecofeminist arguments that point to women’s associations with nature through various means. However, this highlights an interesting paradox within environmental

theory: nature is a patriarchal space that is also rendered as female. In other words, men dominate natural spaces and even utilize them to enhance masculinity; but in order for nature to serve this purpose, it must be viewed as inferior, as “other,” which is where the female associations come in to play.

Linden Peach argues that this is a moment of connection for Amy and Sethe because of Amy’s class status: “In Amy’s own tortured body there is literally and metaphorically a history of the slavery endured by poor, working-class whites, whose treatment at the hands of their masters was not so dissimilar as Sethe discovers from her own” (Peach 111). I agree that Amy’s class exposes her to discrimination and mistreatment, and Morrison describes both women as “throw-away people, two lawless outlaws” (84). But I’m not sure that I would conflate her experiences with those of Sethe. In fact, this scene in the woods suggests how both Sethe and Amy are aware of how race separates them. On multiple occasions, Amy refers to Sethe as “ugly” and “the dumbest thing on this here earth” (82-83). Although both women recognize how their gender keeps them from freely entering the forest, Amy points out how their respective races come with different rules. She knows that being a white woman allows her to access spaces that Sethe cannot. Because of her whiteness, Amy can enter the forest as someone travelling from one place to another. But Sethe’s blackness does not allow her to simply enter the forest; she must escape to it, hide in it, and fear discovery in it, because “one step off” the plantation means she becomes a trespasser “among the human race” (125). For Sethe, the forest is clearly a space reserved for people with individual rights and freedoms—for white, American citizens. All others are trespassers; people who are there because they are breaking the law and/or threatening white dominance. In this sense, the forest is a site

that white Americans utilize to bolster a national identity that maintains white supremacy. If the forest is a natural space that only American citizens have legal access to, than by simply being in the woods, Sethe becomes a criminal; a runaway slave who threatens to undermine white control and disrupt national identity.

Amy also knows that the consequences for each of them if caught in the forest would be different as well—Sethe may very well have her “head cut off” by those who are surely pursuing her while Amy can be confident that she is not being chased and that, even if she was, death is not a sure result. Again, these consequences reflect what each woman’s presence means to the dominant culture. Because she has escaped slavery, Sethe obviously poses more of a threat, which results in more violent consequences. In this brief exchange, so much is revealed about the construction of the forest. Here, Morrison successfully demonstrates how natural spaces are not devoid of social constraints; they are in fact gendered, racialized and nationalized. And the fact that the forest is not inhabited supports my earlier point about dominant culture’s rights to spaces regardless of occupation. Even without white people around, Amy and Sethe are fully aware that the forest is not “their” space.

Reclaiming Nature and Identity in the Clearing

So does that mean black women are doomed to conflicted views of nature for all time? Both Morrison and White tell us no. While *Beloved* contains numerous accounts of violence associated with nature, it also offers hope for a newly created relationship between African American women and the environment. As suggested earlier, relationships with nature were fragmented but ultimately not destroyed, so the possibility

for connection, healing and resistance exists within the fragmentation. One vivid scene from *Beloved* that I want to discuss is that of the Clearing. More specifically, I want to examine the how the Clearing is utilized by the black women of the community and in particular by Baby Suggs. Through her messages of hope and healing, Baby Suggs offers healing to other ex-slaves and forges positive associations with nature through environmental relationships that do not rely on boundaries or binaries.

The Clearing scene is rich for analysis. Baby Suggs and Sethe form an attachment to the Clearing, a space in the woods where Baby Suggs preaches messages of hope and healing to the black community. The people regard her as a sort of holy figure and gather each weekend to hear her speak. Here, she calls on the people to sing, laugh, dance and cry. But most importantly, she calls on them to love themselves. She preaches “Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it...And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands!...Raise them up and kiss them...You got to love it, you!” (88). Baby Suggs asks her community to reclaim their bodies and find strength within themselves and their community. In the Clearing, black people celebrate their bodies, their worth, and their spirituality—all things that white culture has oppressed—while in a natural setting, therefore suggesting the fluidity of nature. While nature has been used to oppress, it can also be used to challenge and heal. Although white culture may have constructed seemingly monolithic views of nature, those constructions were actually manipulated according to convenience (much like constructions of slaves themselves), so the Clearing takes advantage of such inconsistencies.

Sethe feels the healing that Baby Suggs offers and “bit by bit...in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (95). Instead of trying to claim herself within a white woman’s kitchen or a white man’s plantation, Sethe finally succeeds in finding freedom within her community by using nature to love herself without conforming to other standards. She forges her own relationship with nature; one that does not rely on white culture’s views or definitions. Instead of looking to nature to mask her oppression, Sethe recognizes how nature can be used to challenge that oppression.

Strong spiritual connections are made in this setting that echo African religions and views of the natural world and deconstructs boundaries between bodies, nature, and culture. After “reveling in the dazzling truth of her humanity and connection to Nature, Baby Suggs sees herself as the subject of an African reality of equalitarian values,” and she aims to share this with others in her community (Daniels 4). After Baby Suggs’ passing, Sethe continues to visit the Clearing to find strength and comfort. With such scenes, Morrison reveals that positive relationships with nature are possible for black women. Black women must write a new history that contains positive experiences in nature, for this will allow them to heal the trauma caused by the violence of slavery and it will also provide them with an opportunity to reconnect with their African culture.⁵

White’s essay follows this line of thinking as White faces her fears of the wilderness and participates in a river rafting trip. Although fearful at first, she discovers a strength that allows her to connect with the positives associated with nature; positives that even past violent events could not completely eradicate. She concludes that “No matter where I

⁵ For more on the Clearing and elements of African religions, see Michele Bonnet “‘To Take the Sin Out of Slicing Trees...’: The Law of the Tree in *Beloved*” *African American Review* 31.1 (Spring 1997): 41-55, and Barbara Christian “Fixing Methodologies: *Beloved*” *Cultural Critique* 24 (Spring 1993): 5-15.

travel, I will always carry Emmett Till and the four black girls whose deaths affected me so. But comforted by our tribal ancestors—herders, gatherers, and fishers all—I am less fearful, ready to come home” (White 320). Both Morrison and White remind us that there is a history for African American women that occurred long before slavery; their African culture, and reconnecting with these traditions and practices can heal the fractured relationship with nature.

But I think there is more to discuss here. The reconnection with nature through destabilized boundaries is indeed an important aspect of the Clearing. Yet I argue the Clearing succeeds in destabilizing a national identity as well. By placing this scene in the Clearing, Morrison challenges the white, nationalistic construction of the forest that I discussed earlier. She uses the same nature that the dominant culture looks to for definition and justification to challenge and deconstruct not only monolithic views of nature but also a white national identity, and successfully demonstrates how “one’s relationship to the land is integrally connected to one’s relationship to the political community” (Smith 9). In order to elucidate this idea, I will juxtapose the Clearing with the grove in Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. By doing so, I hope to first demonstrate how white authors such as Jewett have often used nature as a means to portray the white American as the “natural” citizen. Then, by using Morrison’s Clearing, I want to show the “falseness” of relying on nature to justify identity. Instead, nature’s fluidity can be a source of power and resistance for African Americans.

Country’s reunion scene in the grove has received much scholarly attention and been analyzed through a number of lenses. In summary, the unnamed narrator of the story, who is visiting the small Maine coastal town Dunnet Landing, attends the annual Bowden

family reunion. The gathering consists of a procession and then a feast in a grove with the many members of the Bowden family in attendance. The event is lorded over by Mrs. Blackett as the family rejoices in their lineage and their history.

Elizabeth Ammons, and Sandra Zagarell have read this scene as a moment of nationalism, a celebration of white supremacy and cultural superiority that casts the Bowdens as the true Americans. Ammons argues that “the orderly marching and solemn worshipping” that takes place during the reunion affirms “racial purity and white cultural dominance” (Ammons 96). By building off their arguments, I want to emphasize how Jewett uses nature to support nativism. After all, “many members of Jewett’s class were deeply nativist. They believed that ‘America’ had been, and should remain, a homogenous nation—a nation whose origins were usually identified as Anglo-Saxon” (Zagarell 41). It is in this understanding of how white authors have employed nature to justify a white national identity that Morrison’s *Clearing* becomes a space that resists and subverts white dominance.

Jewett opens the chapter, “The Bowden Reunion,” by declaring “but when, at long intervals, the altars to patriotism, to friendship, to the ties of kindred, are reared in our familial fields, then the fires glow, the flames come up as if from the inexhaustible burning heart of the earth” (Jewett 97). Here Jewett asserts the naturalness and power of white cultural dominance by rooting it deep in the American landscape. And those roots spread across the landscape through the “ties of kindred” as Mrs. Todd points out: “Yes, I do feel that when you call upon the Bowdens you may expect most families to rise up between the Landing and the far end of the Back Cove. Those that aren’t kin by blood are kin by marriage” (Jewett 97). Through blood and marriage, the Bowden family spreads

across the New England area and most are ready to “rise up” if need be—suggesting that perhaps the Bowden family is prepared to come together for more than just a party.

Later, as the family marches across the field toward the grove, birds are flying and bees are humming and the narrator notices how a “fleet of boats rode the low waves together in the cove, swaying their small masts as if they kept time to our steps” (Jewett 101). Upon reaching the grove, the narrator comments “we were set in our places by the straight trees that swayed together” (Jewett 101). Beyond the militant orderliness that Ammons points out, these descriptions also highlight the reunion’s alignment with nature. The humming and swaying in unison with Bowden family members suggests this truly is the natural order of things. With everything in place from people to trees, the harmony demonstrated between the reunion and nature solidifies the white American national identity. Jewett’s placement of the reunion in nature reifies the “naturalness” of white supremacy—it emphasizes the Bowden’s roots in “our familial fields,” where Jewett believes America draws its strength and power. Moreover, that strength and power is expressed through ownership of the land that hosts the reunion and highlights the Bowdens’ rights as citizens.

Focusing on the trees in particular, Zagarell argues that by “repeatedly referring to Maine’s firs and spruces, *Country* posits these trees as autochthonous, indigenous; they stand for the Dunnet community as a whole, giving it an air of being native and natural to its particular environment” (Zagarell 44). The “straight trees” also highlight the unbroken Bowden family lineage. Exploring concepts of the family tree, Heike Härting notes how “the image of the ‘tree’ denotes a genealogical metaphor that has been historically inscribed by Western literature, science, and philosophy. In this respect, the image of the

‘tree’ reflects an ideological pattern of exclusive and patriarchal values, which are constituted and safeguarded in the image of the family-tree. Based on the notion of originality, purity, and blood, family genealogies have been traditionally constructed as a cohesive and linear unity of white and male descent” (Härting 36). During the feast, various speeches are made and stories are recounted about the Bowden family history. The speakers tout community and family ties and emphasize natural bonds and pure European lineage, echoing sentiments expressed by writers such as Crèvecoeur, who wrote “What then is the American, the new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European” (Crèvecoeur, “What is an American?” 23).

So if the true American must be of European descent and be able to trace such lineage accurately, then obviously slaves cannot call themselves citizens. Family history simply cannot be celebrated in the same way in the Clearing. The historical practices of breaking up black families, selling children and spouses, and many slaves’ inability to record family history made tracing genealogy difficult. Yet the Clearing celebrates different bonds and “alternative histories – personal, social, political, racial – embedded in or occluded by official histories determine the structure of the novel” (Peach 110). By finding value and strength, former slaves in the Clearing use nature to destabilize the white American identity put forth by families like the Bowdens. As mentioned earlier, nature could be a site of fear and violence but could also hide acts of resistance and community building. Members of the black community also abolish notions of a white, universal nature by using it as a space to reclaim agency. This act destabilizes a number of ideas put forth by Jewett: first, the idea of the white American as the natural American. If nature can also serve as a point of justification for black Americans, then looking to

nature to confirm identity becomes fluid and unstable. Second, it destabilizes nature itself and questions national identity and history. The Bowden family presents their history as the true American history. Morrison presents a different history, one that came before America and one that only serves as an unspoken backdrop to the Bowden family. The Clearing challenges and complicates the white constructions of nature as well as white identity put forth in the grove.

Sandra Zagarell attests to how Jewett's writing style bolsters her picture of Dunnet Landing as grounded and rooted in history. She notes how "repetition makes the community at Dunnet seem both dynamic and fixed, unchanging" (Zagarell 44). The sort of orderliness of the reunion scene transfers to Jewett's literary construction as well. Although readers are introduced to a number of locations in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, all of these settings (and ones not visited) are united in the reunion chapter, creating straight and clear connections between people and places—much like the historical connections Jewett highlights in the Bowden family. As discussed earlier, her style translates to her construction of nature as well—static, ordered, and rooted. Juxtaposing Jewett's style with Morrison's offers another point of comparison that demonstrates each author's aim. Toni Morrison is known for her circular, back and forth narrative style which is beautifully showcased in *Beloved*. Her stream of consciousness type of narration defies traditional linear styles and challenges constructions of voice, character, and history in particular, which is seen in the Clearing scene. Morrison describes the Clearing in way that contrasts the nature put forth by Jewett. While Jewett's narrator paints the trees and people as calm and orderly, Sethe remembers the Clearing as "the smell of leaves simmering in the sun, thunderous feet and the shouts that ripped pods off the limbs

of the chestnuts” (94). Here, nature and the people are jumbled and animated—both are “simmering” and charged with emotion. The fluid descriptions do not rely on a linear plot but instead weave together various moments such as Sethe’s arrival at 124 and Baby Suggs’ death into Sethe’s later visit to the Clearing. Together, they create a space where Morrison uproots American history and reveals the false and flawed national identity that has been perpetuated by authors such as Jewett. Jewett’s national identity relies on the exclusion of racial groups, their histories, and their roles within the formation American culture which is made clear in the grove. Morrison’s Clearing calls attention to this “oversight” by demonstrating how African Americans may have been marginalized but are still very much embedded within American culture and identity. It is their “flesh,” their hands, and their bodies that have performed the work and created the capital for white masters to profit from. Slaves helped define white Americans as a point of reference, as stated by Morrison earlier. Freedom and citizenship were measured against their very presence.

Forging New Relationships

In her article, “The Greening of African-American Landscapes: Where Ecocriticism Meets Post-Colonial Theory,” Christine Gerhardt discusses the difficulty slaves faced when challenging both white imposed associations with nature and the domination of nature itself. She argues that, although many slaves felt connected to the natural world, ultimately they had to become dominators of nature because identifying with it maintained white oppressive discourse. So many slaves occupied a hybrid position “as a colonized other who depends on nature as a liberatory space, but is nevertheless complicitous with

the colonization of this very space” (Gerhardt 524). Using Henry Bibb’s narrative as an example, Gerhardt argues “Both his reluctant domination of nature and his partial identification with it are highly ambivalent processes that remain inextricably linked as he seeks to stabilize his own identity in opposition to another colonized other” (Gerhardt 527). Slaves and the descendents of slaves often felt that identifying with nature reaffirmed white articulations of black people as more primitive, therefore justifying their enslavement. So in order “to become...free American[s] in the American cultural context” slaves were forced to follow “the dominant white patterns of self-creation and dominate the wilderness” (Gerhardt 524).

Although African Americans often felt conflicted toward nature as a result of white discourse and positioning, Toni Morrison seemingly rejects the choice between identification and domination. Instead, *Beloved* offers resistance and reclamation as possibilities for African American environmental relationships. As discussed earlier, Sethe and Pecola attempted self-worth and agency through a “white” nature, yet in the end, they only found rejection. But in the Clearing, Baby Suggs offers a relationship with nature that identifies black bodies as worthy and important, therefore challenging white constructions of nature and identity—becoming a free American does not necessarily require assimilation into “white patterns.” Instead, African Americans need to imagine a new pattern since Baby Suggs preaches “the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine” (88). The continual flux of the Clearing (and nature itself) means it can become a positive force for African Americans through possibilities of reclamation and new understandings.

Morrison's choice of a clearing as the space for resistance also functions on multiple levels. The Clearing is immersed within the forest, which, as discussed, has been historically constructed by white culture as an unruly place needing domination. Nash writes that, for European immigrants to the new world during the 17th century, the line between the forest and society was apparent and "morality and social order seemed to stop at the edge of the clearing" (Nash 29). Morrison's Clearing deliberately resides at this edge and Baby Suggs's revivals take place at the heart of this wildness. She begins her rituals by praying silently in the Clearing while everyone waits "among the trees" (87). Once ready, she calls for the children to join her "and they ran from the trees toward her." Next, the men, who "stepped out one by one from the ringing trees," and finally the women all come to dance in the Clearing (87). They emerge from the very woods that whites have deemed (as well as those peoples associated with it) to be dangerous and unruly and celebrate themselves on the supposed border of civilization. In doing so, Baby Suggs confronts stereotypes and destabilizes white definitions and identities that have relied on such characterizations to create distance between black/white, nature/culture, and slave/citizen.

Morrison also appeals to more Thoreauvian constructions of the wilderness. Instead of viewing the forest as being an immoral and dangerous place, Thoreau chose to "seek the darkest woods the thickest and most and interminable and, to the citizen, most dismal, swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place... There is the strength, the marrow, of Nature" (Thoreau 183). For Thoreau "wilderness was ultimately significant... for its beneficial effect on thought," an excellent place to clear the mind and nourish the soul (Nash 89). She asserts the right for African Americans to enjoy the woods in the spirit of Thoreau

and other nature writers such as Emerson, who happily wrote “In the woods too, a man casts off his years... and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth...In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life” (Emerson 147). Yet, for Morrison’s characters, the Clearing becomes more than a “clearing” of the mind. It is also “place that signifies the necessity for a psychological cleansing from the past, a space to encounter painful memories safely and rest from them” (Krumholz 397). Here, environmental narratives that privilege whiteness are cleared away, making room for a multitude of “simmering” voices.

But Morrison doesn’t suggest that forging new relationships with nature and each other is easy. It is a difficult process that requires recognizing how white culture has dictated social and political norms. The community in Ohio struggles with reclaiming themselves and building ties outside of plantation life. After Sethe’s arrival at 124, Baby Suggs hosts a feast “rocking with laughter, goodwill and food for ninety” that ends up offending her neighbors (137). They deem it excessive and extravagant, and they wonder why Baby Suggs is so fortunate. Their envy turns to anger and rejection because Baby Suggs “had not even escaped slavery—had, in fact, been *bought out* of it by a doting son and *driven* to the Ohio River in a wagon—free papers folded between her breasts” (137). They create levels of suffering and decide that Baby Suggs has always led a more fortunate life. So no one warns Baby Suggs and Sethe about the arrival of schoolteacher and the slavecatchers, and when Sethe murders her daughter to keep her from schoolteacher, the community turns its back completely on 124. Baby Suggs loses hope and quits holding revivals in the Clearing. She despairs that perhaps her teachings about “what the heart and the body could do was wrong,” because, in spite of them, “the

whitepeople came...She had done everything right and they came in her yard anyway” (209). The “whitepeople” enter her yard in multiple ways. One way is through the arrival of schoolteacher and the slave catchers. But this arrival is more than just the physical presence of schoolteacher; it is also white culture’s creation of divisions within the black community that aided this arrival. When Baby Suggs’s authenticity is questioned by other former slaves, Baby Suggs surrenders her heart and declares “there was no grace—imaginary or real—and no sunlit dance in a Clearing could change that” (89). After her death, Sethe asks Stamp Paid to bury Baby Suggs in the Clearing “which he tried to do, but was prevented by some rule the whites had invented about where the dead should rest” (171). Instead, she is buried next to Sethe’s dead daughter and “So Baby Suggs, holy, having devoted her freed life to harmony, was buried amid a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite” (171).

Dominant culture relies on these divisions in order to maintain control, which the community does not recognize at first. But as Beloved’s control over Sethe grows, the women of the town come to Sethe’s aid and stop her from killing Edward Bodwin, who she mistakes for schoolteacher returning for her children. They remember their own troubled pasts and children who still haunt their memories. They recall the generosity of Baby Suggs and the happiness that 124 used to bring to others and “for Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words” (261). The healing that began in the Clearing has spread; the women of the community carry that strength back to their homes and use it to confront past traumas. They help free Sethe from her haunted past—the women let go of their

judgment and come together to break “the back of words” of others that have defined and subjugated them. Although Baby Suggs lost faith, her preaching from the Clearing has not been erased from the community, despite the initial resistance following Sethe’s arrival. The reclaiming of their bodies, their minds, and their words begins in the Clearing, but it cannot only happen there. It must branch out in order to truly impact their community. If memories live in the places they happened, then the Clearing cannot be the only site of community bonds because those bonds (and memories of them) will live only there. By taking those experiences into the town to save Sethe, she is reminded of the Clearing and memories of community support spreads into the homes.

What is especially powerful about *Beloved* is its ability to defy definition. As discussed earlier, Sethe has both fond and terrifying memories of Sweet Home, making it impossible to define it as either a good or bad place. Nature itself becomes slippery as Morrison portrays it as both a place of fear as well as spiritual healing. Even the Clearing cannot simply be a “safe” space, as seen by Baby Suggs’ lost faith and *Beloved*’s attack of Sethe. To define something is to make it exclusive and static with little room for negotiation, so by blurring boundaries and defying definitions, Morrison can portray the fluid relationships of race, gender, nature, identity, and history. If *Beloved* had portrayed the landscape as exclusively a space of fear for black women, then there is no room for negotiation, no recognition of alternate views and experiences and no possibility of reconciliation. Fluidity allows us to recognize the complex relationships between nature and African American women as well as the possibilities for healing. It also allows for challenge of dominant values and identity that have looked to nature for justification and confirmation by revealing the instability of both nature and such identities. Morrison

deconstructs the notion of a universal nature and “by consistently representing clashing cultural perceptions of the natural world, Morrison emphasizes that any human perception of nature is a culturally mediated one rather than an inherent truth about the world” (Wallace and Armbruster 213). Although white culture proclaimed dominance over nature and inscribed it with social and cultural rules, literary constructions like the *Clearing* offer counter narratives that include alternative histories and values connected with the very same nature, therefore destabilizing dominance and an exclusively white national identity. In her book, *The Good-Nature Feminist*, Catriona Sandilands makes a compelling argument concerning the fluidity of nature. She writes:

Nature always already defies its construction; it is always Other, uncatchable.

It can never perfectly appear through politics, because it embodies a moment

that defies its constitution in discourse...It is impossible to ‘get it right’; its

constant Otherness prevents the full closure of human upon itself. Nature

show the perpetual failure of culture to paint the whole picture...A space is

left open for other experiences, for Otherness, for the recognition that

discourse, no matter how democratic, cannot be complete (Sandilands 203-4).

This is the nature found in *Beloved*—it reveals the impossibility of categorization and how that impossibility creates a space for “Otherness” to challenge and resist the dominant discourse.

CHAPTER THREE

Corporate Greenwashing and Environmental Justice Narratives in Ruth Ozeki's

My Year of Meats

In *My Year of Meats*, Ruth Ozeki exposes transnational corporate narratives that market products as well as identities and cultural values while ignoring the plight of women, people of color, children, and the poor. Through the production of global narratives, transnational corporations focus on conditioning the global consumer to desire Western commodities and identities. Yet these narratives are specifically constructed to exclude the harmful effects on marginalized groups and the environment, resulting in a type of green-washing. The novel gives special attention to the role of women and how, for them, “the body, often emphasized as ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomically marked, is the repository of the toxic products of transnational corporate practices” (Fish 49). This chapter will explore how Ozeki's *MYOM* confronts these issues by constructing environmental justice narratives that give voice to marginalized groups and demonstrate how media (and literature) can be used as a tool to create transnational alliances that complicate essentialist notions of gender and difference.

MYOM tells the story of filmmaker Jane Takagi-Little, who becomes involved in the beef industry through the show *My American Wife!*, an American produced television show aired in Japan. Sponsored by the corporation, BEEF-EX, the show aims to increase the exportation of American beef to Japanese consumers by featuring different meat recipes each week. Jane's job is to scope out different families in America to feature in the show and “stimulate consumer purchase motivation” (*MYOM* 41). At first, Jane views

her work as just a way to pay the bills, but as time passes, she learns more about the dangers of beef industry and how those dangers are repressed by corporations like BEEF-EX. Her role as media-maker becomes more complex and Jane struggles between keeping her job and negotiating cultural exchanges that aim to expose the abuses of the meat industry. This complexity is heightened when Jane meets Akiko, a Japanese housewife who reaches out to Jane after viewing episodes of the show in hopes of obtaining a life similar to the ones she sees on television. This interaction, in addition to Jane's discovery of the effects of hormone poisoning on a young girl, forces Jane to face the consequences of her work and question media's ability to convey truths.

Meat, Motherhood, and *My American Wife!*

When Jane begins her work with *My American Wife!*, she is instructed by the producers to take extra care in choosing the wives to star in each episode. The wives are of particular importance because they cook the recipes, so both must be "appealing." The show's sponsor gives Jane a strict list of criteria to adhere to when choosing a wife—mainly, she must stick to white, middle-class families with attractive homes and children. The recipes must always focus on beef and be simple yet delicious recipes. The goal is to entice Japanese housewives to buy and prepare the beef the "American" way.

The wife cooking the beef is just as important to the show's message as the beef. Not only must she be white but she also cannot look or act working-class or have anything physically wrong with her because this is not the image of Americans the industry wants Japanese viewers to see. Viewers are not meant to focus on troubles the wife may have financially or with her children or husband since that reflects badly on all American families. If she is less than admirable, Japanese consumers may believe that only less

than ideal families in the United States eat beef. For the beef to sell, it is essential that the consumers believe it is a “good” product, eaten by “good” families, making the wife a product as well. The wife’s identity is what matters, so she is chosen and filmed based on her marketability. After all, it is her “civic duty to promote American meat abroad and thereby help rectify the trade imbalance with Japan” (*MYOM* 35). Here begins the weaving of the corporate narrative that links women and meat, commodifying each in order to sell Western goods and values. The show’s emphasis on the women and their families reveals how the beef is really a vehicle for Western lifestyles. BEEF-EX is interested in exporting essentialist notions of American families (wives and mothers in particular) and American consumer habits in order to build a market for Western products. The campaign is designed to link consumption with desire through visual depictions of white women and beef that are meant to influence Japanese women to desire them both.

In order to propel these new consumers, the beef must be as desirable as the presented lifestyles. When a Japanese housewife is seeing pictures of beef, the likelihood of her purchasing it is low if she is also shown the cow being slaughtered and butchered. So the idea of beef must be separated from the animal it came from as well as the process of turning it into the packaged beef found at the grocery store. A sizzling pot roast now represents a hearty meal for a hardworking American family, instead of an animal’s carcass. The meat has been changed, given a name that doesn’t remind the consumer of what it “used to be,” as pointed out by Carol Adams, who states, “animals are made absent through language that renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them” (Adams, *SPM* 40). Words like steak, pot roast, pork, bacon make no reference to what animal or even what part it is taken from. Meat serves as what Adams deems a

“mass term” and “objects referred to by mass terms have no individuality, no uniqueness, no specificity, no particularity” (Adams, “Feminist” 201). Furthermore, the terms mask the poor living conditions, the injections of hormones and antibiotics, and the slaughtering of the animals. Corporate environmental narratives suppress these steps, and by putting dead animals into an overarching category of “meat,” the narratives take away any unwanted characteristics or connotations, green-washing the actual production of meat. The meat is being redefined as a product that is wholesome and better than what the consumer is currently eating.

The connection between the female characters and the meat is not merely coincidental. Not only are the wives being objectified but they are being described as the product the company is pushing on Japan; meat. Jane’s bosses remind her that “[the wife] must be attractive, appetizing, and all-American. She is the Meat Made Manifest: ample, robust, yet never tough or hard to digest. Through her, Japanese housewives will feel the hearty sense of warmth, of comfort, of hearth and home - the traditional family values symbolized by red meat in rural America” (*MYOM* 8). Appetizing, ample, never tough or hard to digest—taken out of context, these are words used to depict food. She is part of the package and the company is relying on her to help boost the sale of meat to Japanese housewives. Both images must be delicious and inviting or neither will be successful in the marketplace. Both are meant to be consumed, which means both must be desired by the show’s audience.

It is not only beef being sold but also Western representations, attempting to convince “the East” that eating American beef somehow makes them a stronger force in the global scheme of consumer capital. By becoming more Western, countries such as Japan will

enjoy “more.” The West represents abundance; abundance of food, abundance of wealth, abundance of power. After starting her job, Jane notes “I was learning. *This* was the heart and soul of *My American Wife!*: recreating for Japanese housewives this spectacle of raw American abundance” (*MYOM* 35). This is what the show perpetuates by infiltrating the Japanese homes, teaching the wives how to make their families a part of this Western prosperity. In order for this to work, it is necessary that each part of the package be representative of what is “good” and “wholesome” according to Western ideals. BEEF-EX constructs a green-washing narrative that portrays happy cows, healthy food, and wholesome wives as an American standard that Japan can also enjoy.

In order to convince Japanese citizens that they want what BEEF-EX is selling, the company promotes American abundance which frames Japanese culture as “less-than.” This type of capitalist globalization ignores cultural pasts and practices in order to inscribe new ones that rely on the presence of a certain product, such as beef. In the instance of Japan, the country has a diet that has included more fish than beef, yet this fact turns Japan into a new market for the beef industry. So part of BEEF-EX’s narrative involves idealizing the West as way of denigrating “other” cultures as shown explicitly through Joichi (Jane’s boss) “who advocates meat’s superiority over the so-called lesser grains of bread and rice, [and] ignores the history of Japan’s hesitant acceptance of beef in his television marketing campaigns” (Chiu, *FF* 140). BEEF-EX wants their product to sell so it must manufacture narratives that convince Japan’s citizens that their culture is inferior and can be made better by the introduction of beef into their diet. As Ynestra King accurately points out, “The homogenizing of culture turns the world into a giant factory...In the name of helping people, the industrial countries export models of

development that assume that the American way of life is the best way of life for everyone” (King 117). In order to create global consumers, BEEF-EX must manipulate and shape other peoples, convincing them that they desire such products. Early in the novel, Jane and her cameraman, Suzuki, roam the aisles in a Wal-Mart, “filming *goods* to induce in [the] Japanese wives a state of *want* (as in both senses, ‘lack’ and ‘desire’), because *want* is *good*” (MYOM 35). BEEF-EX redefines the Japanese culture as lacking what the West already has—meat, strength, power, and abundance. Julie Sze makes this point when she writes “the novel thus connects meat production with global consumption, including advertising, that functions to create and shape the needs and desires of individual consumers and in national and global markets” (Sze 806). By creating needs and shaping desires, BEEF-EX can maintain a strong hold on an American market through the idealization of Western culture while pushing these same values on other cultures.

The person on the other end of *My American Wife!* is Akiko Ueno, a Japanese housewife who is married to the show’s Japanese producer, John. John makes it Akiko’s job to watch the show and prepare the featured recipe. She is also given questionnaires to fill out, rating the show’s appeal and authenticity as well as the deliciousness of the recipe. By splitting the novel between Jane and Akiko, Ozeki gives readers the opportunity to engage with transnational narratives from multiple positions. It also allows Ozeki to play in the messiness of these cultural exchanges. What begins as a story of Jane as producer and Akiko as consumer becomes an entangled web of race, gender, nature, and capitalism where nothing is static, the truth is fuzzy, and the many female characters find themselves playing multiple roles.

Meat and Environmental Narratives

When Ozeki began working on her first novel, she was very aware of how media manipulated consumer wants and needs. The book began as a satire of media and commercial television, with meat playing a minor role. Ozeki speaks to this initial goal and how she envisioned “television as a meat market, and Jane as a cultural pimp, pandering the physical image of American housewives to satisfy the appetites of the Japanese TV consumers. And thus Beef-Ex was born as the sponsor of Jane’s TV show” (“Conversation” 6). Jane’s work for BEEF-EX echoes past work Ozeki did with television shows sponsored by Philip Morris, that had to include scenes of people smoking its product. Ozeki states “I was very aware of the way that the content of our program was being impacted by our sponsor’s message” (“Conversation” 7). Yet BEEF-EX doesn’t come out of thin air; its fictional practices in *MYOM* are all too similar to those of the very-real U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF), whose job, according to its website, is to “create new opportunities and develop existing international markets for U.S. beef, pork, lamb and veal.” In order to create international consumers, USMEF relies heavily on specific marketing campaigns, and those designed for Japan are aimed at Japanese housewives. Through commercials, pamphlets, websites, and grocery store displays, USMEF pushes the nutritional value of meat on Japanese women who cook for their families. To help women learn how to cook meat, USMEF runs a website (americanmeat.jp) that features recipes, blogs, and information on the safety of American meat. Women can also subscribe to the supplementary magazine, *American Meat Café*, which “reinforces many of the elements of the Web site, providing recipes, restaurant information, discussions about seasonings that go well with U.S. beef and pork.” By

basing BEEF-EX on the USMEF, Ozeki highlights how women become the main targets (as well as features) of corporate campaigns that are designed to sell lifestyles that require the presence of certain products.⁶

What's Really in the Meat?

Jane gets her first glimpse into the harmful effects of the beef industry as she prepares to shoot another episode of *My American Wife!*. Frustrated with the stereotypical white American family featured each week, Jane pushes to film more diverse families. She knows it is probably naïve but Jane feels determined “to use this window into mainstream network television to *educate*” (*MYOM* 27). Jane’s desire to counteract the BEEF-EX narratives is complicated by the problematic nature of using media to depict “truth,” which the novel suggests is impossible. She pitches the idea for a show featuring the Martinez family, immigrants from Mexico now living in Texas. The Japanese director, Oda, rejects Jane’s idea of filming a Mexican family and chooses a white middle class family in Oklahoma instead. The featured dish is veal, “dredged in crushed Kellogg’s Krispies” and Oda happily samples a cutlet. As he is eating, suddenly Oda “drop[s] his fork and clutche[s] his neck as though he were choking” (*MYOM* 59). He is rushed to the hospital, barely able to breathe. There, doctors connect Oda’s allergy to antibiotics with the veal he consumed, and Jane learns her first lesson about what really goes on behind

⁶ Ozeki’s second novel, *All Over Creation*, also includes a fictitious company (Cynaco) that is based on an actual transnational corporation (Monsanto). *AOC* revolves around the issue of genetically modified food, the prime example being potatoes. Here the novel pits Cynaco and its proponents of transgenic plants against a group of activists, the Seeds of Resistance, and their desire for more research and labels on products containing GMOs. The story becomes a web of family drama, corporate control of agriculture, the plight of farmers, and issues of resistance and knowledge.

the scenes. All of the hormones and antibiotics given to cattle in feedlots are often still present in the cuts of meat bought at the grocery store. So people with allergies like Oda run the risk of anaphylactic shock when consuming meat. Coincidentally, Oda becomes a victim of the very system he is promoting, and we detect a crack in the armor of transnational corporations. Though it creates powerful product narratives, BEEF-EX cannot control how the products themselves will react in all situations which therefore destabilizes the “wholesome” narratives surrounding them. Oda’s reaction is a signal to Jane that something is rotten and it is this incident that turns the director job over to her. BEEF-EX’s inability to maintain complete control over its products and respective narratives gives Jane the opportunity to explore the alternate environmental narratives she is slowly learning about.

Jane decides to use her new position as director to examine more diverse families and the role meat plays in their lives. While interviewing a southern African American family, the Purcells, Jane learns that other meats pose health problems as well. The Purcells have nine children and money is scarce, so they rarely buy beef, Mr. Purcell tells Jane, because “red meat’s too costly with so many mouths to feed.” Instead, the Purcells consume cheaper chicken parts, which they thought were fine until “Mr. Purcell’s baritone came out soundin’ serpraner!” Jane doesn’t make the connection so Mr. Purcell explains that parts like chicken necks contain a lot of residual hormones and that after a while, “that medicine, well, if it didn’t start to make me sound just like a woman!” (*MYOM* 117). Here, Ozeki outlines a meat hierarchy, with expensive cuts of red meat on top and cheap “parts” on the bottom. These types of meat are eaten by working class citizens and are deemed too disgusting for the upper class. The bottom of the meat

hierarchy is where those people on the bottom of the social hierarchy are forced to eat and are subsequently exposed to more toxins. This is no coincidence since “health and wealth, suggests Ozeki, are often reserved for those who set the criterion for acceptable consumption, not for those consumed in the process” (Chiu, *FF* 147). So people who eat “dirty” meat become dirty as well. The Purcells are poor and African American, unable to consume the same foods as wealthier white families, and Mr. Purcell has been poisoned by hormones as a result. Poor, black bodies are consumed and erased in corporate environmental narratives designed to promote American meat. In the very beginning of novel, Jane is told by the Tokyo office that the show must always include a “Delicious meat recipe (NOTE: Pork and other meats is second class meats...)” and must exclude unacceptable features such as “second class peoples” (*MYOM* 12). The chicken and the Purcells have been categorized as second class, therefore unsuitable as representatives of American values to Japan. They should be kept hidden from view, because, as Jane points out, BEEF-EX doesn’t want “their meat to have a synergistic association with deformities. Like race. Or poverty. Or clubfeet” (*MYOM* 57). What is also hidden are the environmental hazards and the poisoned bodies.

The Tokyo office made an attempt to clarify their stance on “second class peoples” in a second memo to Jane, stating:

The reference to “second class peoples” does *not* refer to race or class.

Kato does not want you to think that Japanese people are racist. However, market studies do show that the average Japanese house-wife finds a middle-to-upper-middle-class white American woman with two to three

children to be both sufficiently exotic and yet reassuringly familiar
(*MYOM* 13).

The second memo only manages to reinforce the transnational corporate narrative that commodifies women and “the American family” and simultaneously suppresses the environmental racism that permeates the U.S. beef industry. Ultimately, the Purcell episode is rejected by Jane’s new boss, Joichi Ueno, and Jane’s journey of producing alternate environmental narratives begins to take off.

Mr. Purcell’s story motivates Jane to do some research on hormone and antibiotic use in American meat, and this research leads her to DES—a man-made estrogen that was initially used in poultry. More specifically, it was used to “feminize” roosters, resulting in plumper breasts and more profits. This was common practice until the FDA banned its use in 1959 when “someone discovered that dogs and males from low-income families in the South were developing signs of feminization after eating cheap chicken parts and wastes from processing plants, which is exactly what happened to Mr. Purcell” (*MYOM* 124). However, this ban did not apply to cattle, and the use of DES continued in order to fatten cattle on less feed. Deemed a miracle drug, researchers explored other possible uses for DES—one of which became a miscarriage prevention pill. Millions of women were prescribed DES as a vitamin, a precaution and a guarantee of healthier babies, all despite a lack of evidence. In the 1970s, the aftermath became clear—female children of mothers prescribed DES developed rare vaginal cancers, experienced difficult pregnancies and deformed reproductive organs (these deformities also appeared in male children). After much public outcry, the FDA banned the use of DES in cattle in 1979 in

spite of pressure from the beef industry to maintain its safety. However, illegal use of DES continues and prosecution is rare.

Ozeki provides these facts to Jane and the reader, and the novel begins to connect the dots. With the beef industry hammering the message “Beef is Best” Ozeki offers an alternate message—one that exposes environmental abuses and damage to women and animals. Women and cattle become more than just metaphorically linked. They are virtually one and the same in the eyes of transnational corporations that exploit them in the name of bigger and better profits and control—control of markets, of peoples, of nature, of consumption, of desires. Meat becomes a vehicle of all of these things in Ozeki’s novel and “is how ultimately one can make sense of DES’s rise in the United States, both as *a symbol* connecting women and animals, and as a *technological process* to *control nature* and *maximize efficiency* through technology” (Sze 803). Jane’s research on DES leads her to the realization that she is one of these women. Before the show, Jane never knew the cause of her cancer or the deformity that resulted in her infertility. Her first marriage while she was living in Japan ended after repeated failed attempts at having children. Jane blames herself: “My relationship with my body had been irrevocably altered by my failure to conceive. With a shriveled uterus and a predisposition to cancer, I was not in the mood for love. I was deformed, barren, and scared” (*MYOM* 158). Her cervical cancer and deformed uterus turn out to be because of her mother’s DES use. Because Jane’s mother is small by U.S. standards, doctors advised her to take the hormone to make the pregnancy easier (later research revealed DES possessed no ability to help sustain a pregnancy, in fact it resulted in more miscarriages than it prevented). Jane is angry and disbelieving that her mother would take the hormone that resulted in

Jane's reproductive problems. Her mother's reaction is quite the opposite when she tells Jane "I feel sorrow for you. But why you blame me? Only I try everything possible to make healthy baby - maybe take some pills, maybe swallow nickel. I try everything..." (*MYOM* 312). Like millions of other women in the 1950s, Jane's mother took the hormones because she wanted a child that would thrive and she was told that the pills would help achieve her dream. The makers of the synthetic hormone profited off these very emotions; women desperate for children and terrified of miscarrying were willing to try anything without much information. Any glimmer of hope blotted out any risks so the pills were dispensed with little research performed. Pharmaceutical companies saw a chance to make a fortune regardless of potential health risks and pushed the "product" as safe and effective even though the data did not support these claims. Women's bodies were the testing grounds and their offspring paid the price.

Jane's mother did what she thought was the best thing for her baby because of the information presented by her doctor. She trusted medical advice and inadvertently scarred Jane. Often, corporations will try to redirect blame by claiming women such as Jane's mother made their own choices. Or the doctors prescribing the drugs are at fault, but not the manufacturers. Their responsibility ends at the production line, despite the fact that these companies are also responsible for manufacturing the narratives that convinced women that DES was safe and necessary during pregnancy.

Narratives in Action

Following her DES discovery and after further research into feedlots and slaughterhouses, Jane cannot ignore this information any longer. Armed with facts that

have been suppressed, Jane decides to use her position as a documentarian to reveal counter narratives that focus on the oppression of women, children, people of color, the poor, and nature within the beef industry. Through Jane and readers, Susan McHugh argues Ozeki aims to “create knowledge where knowledge has been actively lost, obscured, or ignored and is engaging in a new type of science fiction by using the novel as a medium to generate knowledge about contemporary science” (McHugh 39). *My Year of Meats* serves as a counter narrative itself and Jane’s journey becomes the readers’ journey as well.

Jane decides to go to the heart of the beef industry, the feedlot and the slaughterhouse, in order to see firsthand what goes on behind the scenes. She chooses the Dunn family. John Dunn and his son Gale run a full scale feedlot and slaughter house in Colorado. John is in his seventies and is married to his much younger wife, Bunny, and together they have a five year old daughter, Rose. Gale, who is in charge of operations, takes Jane and her crew on a tour of the feedlot first. When asked what they feed the cattle, Gale begins a series of environmental narratives designed to promote safety, recycling, efficiency, and natural methods:

You East Coast environmental types are always going on about recycling...well, that’s just what we’re doing here with our exotic feed program and we’re real proud of it. We got recycled cardboard and newspaper. We got by-products from potato chips, breweries, liquor distilleries, sawdust, wood chips. We even got by-products from the slaughterhouse—recycling cattle right back into cattle. Instant protein. Pretty good, huh? (*MYOM* 258).

Not only are the cattle being fed industrial waste but also carcass parts, which had been linked to mad-cow disease in England during the late 1980s. Jane accuses Gale of promoting cannibalism but Gale shrugs it off since the cows aren't humans. He is in fact quite proud of the money saving techniques the slaughterhouse and ranch are utilizing. He shares more of his secrets concerning the feed when he states:

You gotta understand the way feedlots work. The formulated feed we use is real expensive, and the cattle shit out about two-thirds before they even digest it. Now, there's no reason this manure can't be recycled into perfectly good feed...And another thing you East Coast environmentalists are always griping about is organic-waste pollution. Well, you should be real happy, 'cause this pretty much takes care of the problem, don't it. Feed the animals shit, and it gets rid of the waste at the same time. That's two birds with one stone (*MYOM* 260).

Again, he refers to this practice as recycling, putting a positive environmental spin on a disgusting and dangerous situation. The cows are not viewed as living creatures and therefore not treated as such. If products like cement fatten cows faster at a cheaper cost then production and profit are increased while cost is decreased and this is all that matters in the industry. Rachel Carson observes "We are accustomed to look for the gross and immediate effect and to ignore all else. Unless this appears promptly and in such obvious form that it cannot be ignored, we deny the existence of hazard" (190). Gale's narratives transform the cows into machines, manipulated to generate more product at lower costs, and because the consequences are not immediate, they're smart business moves. His

arguments promote production while masking toxic poisons, hazardous conditions, and racist and sexist overtones, as seen in the slaughterhouse.

Racism and misogyny permeate the walls of the slaughterhouse. The workers are hesitant at first when Jane brings the camera but they soon relent and try to answer some of her questions about the process. One employee, Donny, casually remarks, “Yup, these cows here’s goin’ straight to Japan...I heard they even eat the assholes and everything. Is that where y’all from?...You ask me, it’s a darn shame, wasting all that good American meat on a bunch of gooks. No offense” (*MYOM* 266-67). Donny makes several hierarchies clear with his blatant statements concerning meat and people in East Asia. “Good American meat” is not meant to be eaten by everyone, as discussed earlier with the Purcell family. He equates (and conflates) people from East Asia with inferior cuts of meat—dirty people eat dirty meat. Yet Donny’s opinion is ironic since the exportation of American meat to Japan is generating more demand and more profit for U.S. companies.

The connection between women and meat is reinforced by the attitudes at the slaughter house. Not only is Jane treated badly because of her race but also because of her gender. Gale taunts her about seeing the “killing floor” and as Jane looks back at him before entering the slaughterhouse she sees Gale and another employee, Wilson, standing in front of an erotic poster with “their heads perfectly aligned under the jungle girl’s large proffered breasts” (*MYOM* 281). Ozeki’s placement here is intentional as it perfectly illustrates a general relation between the men’s industry and their sexist behavior.

It is not only the hormones and industrial waste that have turned animals such as cattle into commodities but also the machinery involved, transforming the slaughterhouse

into a type of factory as seen through Jane's initial description of what she sees on the Dunn's property:

Steam hissed, metal screeched against metal, clanging and clamoring, splitting the ear, relentless. Chains, pulleys, iron hooks, whipped around us with unbelievable speed, and as far as the eye could see, conveyors snaked into the distance, heaped with skinned heads and steaming hearts. Overhead a continuous rail system laced the ceiling, from which swung mammoth sides of beef, dripping, and heavy with speed as they rattled toward us (*MYOM* 281).

The cows are separated into parts and these parts are further separated based on use value. The killing and butchering of the cows is a very mechanical process based entirely on cost reduction and profit yielding, turning the animal into a product. The cow enters the slaughterhouse as an animal and leaves as beef, steak, veal- renamed as something that doesn't remind the consumer of what it used to be or where it came from.

The illegal practices continue at the Dunn's ranch, even when the devastating effects surface in their own family. At five years old, John's daughter Rose has already been victimized by the Western cycle of profit and production. Overexposed to illegal growth hormones at the feedlot (and also through eating meat and drinking milk) Rose goes through puberty much too early, developing breasts, pubic hair and menstruating before her body is ready. Her father and half-brother are aware of the problem and can assuredly guess the causes behind it, yet they continue to use the drugs in their cattle. Even Rose's mother Bunny knows and eventually is the one that shares the problem with Jane on camera.

The fact that Rose has large breasts at age five does not alarm her father at first. Objectified and commodified both mother and daughter are pushed aside to make way for profit. Lori Gruen notes “because women and animals are judged unable to comprehend science and are thus relegated to the position of passive object, their suffering and deaths are tolerable in the name of profit and progress” (Gruen 67). Bunny and Rose are not expected to understand the workings of a feedlot or cattle ranch. Bunny is there as John’s trophy, a reminder of his virility in his old age. Rose is proof of his virility and his son Gale’s special helper on occasion when mixing the feed. All she is told is that she is feeding the cows. Even when Bunny expresses concern over Rose’s early development John says she simply takes after her mother and they should be proud. The health risk is ignored and Bunny’s worry disregarded because she has little involvement in the ranch’s operation.

Gender and oppression transfers to the cows as well. Lori Gruen reminds us that “of all of the animals that are killed in food production, female animals fare the worst” (Gruen 72). Sows, chickens and cows suffer more than their male counterparts due mainly to their reproductive capabilities and industry’s attempts at manipulating and controlling them. Millions of cows are kept confined and over milked, requiring the excessive use of antibiotics to battle the onset of diseases. Growth hormones cause the cow to grow faster and produce more milk and can also be used to force an abortion if the offspring is not needed. The Dunn’s feedlot and slaughterhouse provide a perfect example in the novel as Gale explains that pregnant cows eat too much so they simply terminate the pregnancy. Proof of this is provided as Suzuki films an aborted fetus on the floor of the feedlot. The agribusiness keeps cows full of different drugs in an attempt to

achieve their desired results, making the cow “a living pincushion whose life is painful and poisoned” (Gruen 73). Their life span is cut drastically short by their living conditions and by the need to slaughter before they age and become less valuable.

Later, Jane has a very vivid dream about her own offspring:

As I stood there with my legs spread, it started to emerge, limb by limb, released, unfolding, until gravity took the mass of it and it fell to the ground with a *thump*, gangly and stillborn, from my stomach. It was wet, a misshapen tangle, but I could see a delicate hoof, a twisted tail, the oversize skull, still fetal blue, with a dead milky eye staring up at me, alive with maggots (*MYOM* 277).

Her own reproductive health may have been jeopardized from exposure to the hormones at the slaughterhouse. Yet what is even more important is what Ozeki exposes by having Jane give birth to a dead calf. In an interview, Ozeki discusses her research and realized her connection between women and cows was not only fictional, “It was frighteningly real: women weren’t just like cows: women and cattle were being given the identical drug, with equal disregard for safety” (“Conversation with Ozeki”). Both the cows and Jane have lost control over their reproductive capabilities. They have been taken over by industry and coincidentally as a result of the same hormone treatments. Both are treated as products instead of living creatures. They are both manipulated, pushed to the limit in order to produce bigger and better results. As Gaard notes, “This linear model is based on the assumption that energy can be continuously extracted from nature—from water, from poor people, from people of color, from women—without giving back anything of sustenance” (Gaard, *Women* 167).

Jane's political awareness is raised as the interconnectedness of the issues is exposed. Not only is her fertility and gender related to the beef industry but both are also tied to environmental destruction as well. When Jane hires her driver, Dave, he informs her of other impacts feedlots and cattle ranches have on the environment. He tells her about soil erosion caused by so many cattle living in the same fields year after year as well as the effects of methane gas produced by cows on global warming. Dave studies agricultural sciences and shares other bits of information he has learned:

Did you know seventy percent of all U.S. grain is used for livestock?...And did you know that the average American family of four eats more than two hundred sixty pounds of meat each year? That's two hundred sixty gallons of fuel, which accounts for two point five tons of carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere and adding to global warming...And that's not even taking into account that every McDonald's Quarter Pounder represents fifty-five square feet of South American rain forest, destroyed forever, which of course affects global warming as well... (*MYOM* 250).

By including this brief conversation, Ozeki expands the web of connections being made between women, animals, environment and globalization. As a result, Ozeki shows her readers that these injustices as well as issues of race and class cannot be battled separately when they are oppressed by similar ideologies in similar methods.

Environmental Fallout and Corporate Spinning

Interestingly, in the years following Ozeki's first novel, the American beef industry suffered major setbacks due to the emergence of mad cow disease. Japan responded by

banning American beef in 2003, which destroyed a new and burgeoning market. In fact, Japan had become the number one importer of U.S. beef prior to the mad cow scare. As a result of the ban, American producers lost millions of dollars and heavily lobbied groups such as the WTO to force Japan to import beef again. The ban was partially lifted in 2005, reinforced in 2006, and then altered so now Japan only imports beef from cattle younger than 20 months. In order to win back the trust and patronage of Japanese customers, the U.S. beef industry began a series of advertisement campaigns that touted the safety and superiority of American beef while masking the environmental impacts and the people who suffer adverse effects, either from working in the industry or from eating the meat itself.

As mentioned earlier, the USMEF heavily targeted Japanese housewives since they often did the buying and the cooking of meat. These ads featured ranchers like “Abbie Nelson [who] trots on horseback around her sprawling ranch as she explains the care she takes of her cows. Then the camera cuts to Ms. Nelson at home, tossing carrots into a pot and serving her family piping-hot beef stew” (Ono A15). Hoping to connect Japanese women with the images of American women feeding their families beef, the ad’s tagline read “Beef that you can trust for your loving family.” Besides using reductionist images of women as caregivers, such ads exclude shots of large feedlots or slaughterhouses. Instead, they feature a handful of healthy cows, grazing in large green fields. There is no mention of hormone or antibiotic injections and we never see who is working in these factories and what they are exposed to. Through green-washing, beef, and families that eat it, become “good” and “natural.”

While these commercials boosted sales somewhat, Japan was still not importing as much beef as before the bans. So in 2007, USMEF tried a new campaign that featured baseball legend turned cattle rancher Nolan Ryan. Capitalizing on Japan's love of baseball and Nolan Ryan's legacy, USMEF installed his picture "in the meat aisles at major grocery stores under the slogan 'Beef makes you strong!'" (Chozick B1). His face was plastered all over newspapers and magazines along with his favorite beef recipes. He was even featured on bento boxes with American beef that were sold at baseball games through "American Meat Booths." Ryan flew to Japan to promote American beef through various events, such as throwing out the first pitch at a baseball game and meeting with focus groups to discuss "how the beef ban had affected his family ranch" (Chozick B1). The message changed somewhat, aimed toward more men and it promoted the strength and athletic ability that comes from eating American beef. It also added the angle of the poor American ranchers whose families suffer when Japanese consumers don't buy beef. But the narrative still ignores what/who is consumed in the process of American beef production.

The Quest for "Truth"

As mentioned earlier, a desire for interesting stories, variety and finally the truth fuel Jane's filming of different types of families for *My American Wife!*. While she has the best of intentions, Jane's chosen families and her reasoning behind her choices are still problematic. Moreover, as her aims shift to also include environmental truths, readers are given important facts concealed by transnational narratives that are packaged in neat, multicultural packages. However, it is not my intent to argue that Ozeki and Jane are one

and the same. After my initial reading of *My Year of Meats*, I was troubled by the seemingly romantic multiculturalism of Jane's chosen shows, and I agreed with critics like Monica Chiu, who condemns both John Ueno and Jane and argues that "what both characters have imbibed about ethnic others borders, to varying degrees, on racist, sexist shit, which they recycle in equally falsified television representations" (Chiu *FF*, 145). I feared that Ozeki may have attempted to promote difference yet only managed to reinscribe cultural stereotypes. Yet, a closer reading of the novel makes clear that Ozeki hints along the way about her views of truth and media and how they differ from Jane's beliefs. So now I find myself agreeing more with critics like David Palumbo-Liu, who argues that "as we move through the novel, we begin to witness telling slippages that indicate a calculated critique not only of 'the media,' but also of the ability to tell effective stories in any pristine, transparent manner" (Palumbo-Liu 54). Ozeki recognizes the problems with Jane's shows and uses them to remind the reader that any media claiming to portray the truth cannot be completely trusted—an important caveat because in questioning corporate environmental narratives, readers may be tempted to accept Ozeki's counter narratives as unfailing truth. Chiu notes how Jane's final show that reveals Rose's hormone poisoning "is itself a mediation of cultured images construed according to her particular agenda" (Chiu "Postnational" 158).

For example, one family Jane chooses to film is the Beadrouxs. They have adopted multiple children from Asian countries, one each year. In their small Southern town, Grace and her husband are aware of the difficulties their children face, being Asian in a predominately white and black community, but believe they are doing a good deed. Grace is especially concerned with overpopulation, and tells Jane: "Thinkin' about all the

billions of people on the earth multiplying, having more and more babies-I swear it used to keep me awake at night. It still does. It's the single most under discussed issue in the world" (*MYOM* 69). While overpopulation is a problem, it is more complex than Grace makes it out to be. Many parents, especially in developing nations, have large families for a number of reasons, such as limited access to education and birth control as well as higher rates of infant mortality and the need for family members to work/help provide for everyone. What she doesn't acknowledge is that countries such as the United States have smaller family units but still consume a majority of the world's resources. Again, Jane has chosen a seemingly diverse family yet the rationale behind it is still troublesome. When sharing their story of adoption with Jane, the Beadroux's describe how they decided on children from Asia. Grace says she wanted to help children "like all the little Oriental babies from Korea and Vietnam who don't have anyone to care for them or buy them toys or education..." (*MYOM* 69). Referring to them as "Oriental" children with no one to care for them also exposes Grace's ignorance of her adopted children's background. Like her views on overpopulation, Grace has oversimplified the issue of orphans in Asian countries and reinforced the Western notion of America being a better place for these children, even though they live in a town practically devoid of anyone of their race.

The statements made by Grace serve as reminders to the reader of the problems behind her reasoning. On the surface, the family appears to be doing something charitable but Ozeki adds clues to show the underlying racism and to criticize Jane's seemingly diverse families. The criticism is aimed more broadly at Western society and countries

such as the United States which believe that the world needs its help when in reality Western countries cause many of the problems that later need fixing.

Another example comes from one of the more controversial shows Jane produces which includes an interracial lesbian couple, Lara and Dyann, who have chosen vegetarianism after educating themselves on the meat industry. The women have two children together as a result of artificial insemination, a process in which they were able to choose sperm donors in order to produce children of their respective races. What stands out to Jane and her audience is the surface of this family and their difference not only in race but also sexuality, yet beneath the surface lies the fact that Lara and Dyann possess the means to be artificially inseminated by candidates of their choice (though they do discuss the difficulty in finding an African American donor). The problem with showing these families is that their “difference” is limiting because in reality, these discussed examples do not represent a norm for others with similar backgrounds. As Monica Chiu accurately states, “The text’s irony lies between rejecting Joichi’s ridiculous allusions to a so-called American dream and accepting Jane’s nonhegemonic revisions that are heavily invested in America’s romance with difference...” (Chiu, *FF* 145). Jane’s revisions still include families that are experiencing some sort of success, reflecting the fairy tale of America being a land of opportunity for all. The “romance with difference” is a romance with successful difference so we can use it as an example of the West’s accepting/progressive nature. Yet Ozeki reminds us not to accept these stories as complete truths. After taping Lara and Dyann, Jane begins the editing phase, removing pauses and stutters and “creating a seamless flow in a reality that was no longer theirs and not quite so real anymore” (*MYOM* 179).

Just as we should be wary of the narratives of BEEF-EX or the USMEF, Ozeki directs us to be critical of Jane's narratives as well. Ozeki seems to realize that it's virtually impossible to have anyone be representative of an entire culture, race, class or gender, so try as Jane might, her own preconceived notions as well as the nature of television will prevent her subjects from being accurate portrayals of an American family. Ozeki wants us to be critical of Jane's subject matter as well as the larger cycle of economic impacts in areas such as production, consumption and reproduction. These families are simply examples of the bigger picture Ozeki wants the reader to keep in mind and perhaps reflect upon. Ozeki herself did not take these impacts seriously until she could no longer ignore the research, so by making these impacts more central to the novel's plot, she is also pushing the reader to no longer plead ignorance and recognize our own involvement.

That being said, I don't believe that means Ozeki wants us to be dismissive of media all together. Although they are romanticized, Jane manages to create some powerful and important counter narratives that ultimately expose environmental racism and sexism to an international audience. By the end of the novel, Jane is more critical of her role as a documentarian but she also recognizes that she did achieve some affect: "I wanted to tell the truth, to effect change, to make a difference. And up to a point, I had succeeded: I got a small but critical piece of information about the corruption of meats in America out to the world, and possibly even saved a little girl's life in the process. And maybe that is the most important part of the story, but the truth is so much more complex" (*MYOM* 360). Although the "truth" is questionable, the information caught people's attention and resulted in some changes. Through Jane, Ozeki suggests that the media can be used as a

tool of resistance and can lead to the creation of transnational alliances. I believe this is made clear by Akiko's coming to America at the end of the novel.

Transnational/Transcultural Alliances

While Jane battles corporate narratives, Akiko faces physical abuse and rape at home. As she watches *My American Wife!* the diverse portrayals of families in America allow Akiko to imagine a different type of family that does not have to include her husband. She is especially moved by the episode featuring Lara and Dyann and decides to contact Jane. While readers see the problems from the beginning, Akiko gives Jane's audience a face, which it lacked before their interactions. Akiko has been impacted by *My American Wife!*; her husband pressures her to be like the featured wives and cook their American dishes. Yet when different families begin to appear, Joichi rages while Akiko secretly embraces their lifestyle. The "happy multiculturalism" has slightly backfired here because Akiko believes America is a place where she can find happiness. She writes to Jane, asking how to be like the women she views every week, especially now that she has seen through Lara and Dyann that you can have a family without a man. While this thought can be liberating for Akiko, what is really being fed to her is a warped version of the truth, a manipulated and false sense of women and beef that both she and Joichi are surrounded by. What is happening under the surface is unseen to the audience, the consumers and even the producers. The health of the women and the treatment of the cattle remain veiled as Black points out, "although marketed as icons of robust health, vigor, and fertility, both women and meat become commodities on the global market whose bodies are shaped, deformed and violated for commercial profit" (Black 231).

While Jane has learned about the environmental impacts of meat, the corporate narrative of America still rules the show and Akiko only has that information.

When Akiko writes to Jane about the show, the audience becomes real for Jane, forcing her to reevaluate the influence of her work:

She was an abstract concept: at most, a stereotypical housewife, limited in experience but eager to learn, to be inspired by my programs and my American wives; at the very least, a demographic statistic, a percentage point I'd hungered after, to rub in a pesky executive's face... While I'd been worried about the well-being of the American women I filmed as subjects, suddenly here was the audience, embodied in Akiko, with a name and a vulnerable identity (*MYOM* 231).

The television show has created a dilemma for Jane, who says, "On one hand I really did believe that you could use wives to sell meat in the service of a greater Truth. On the other hand, I was broke after my divorce and desperate for a job" (*MYOM* 176). Through Akiko, Jane realizes the meat industry is not only affecting women in the United States and the problem becomes international. She struggles to justify her actions, initially blaming ignorance. But she knows she was never completely unaware of health or environmental issues involved with meat; she just chose to ignore it like so many other people in America: "Once in a while story is spectacular enough to break through and attract media attention, but the swell quickly subsides into the glut of bad news over which we, as citizens, have so little control" (*MYOM* 334). Yet her job gives her a different responsibility and Jane realizes she can't hide behind ignorance anymore:

“Maybe this exempts me as an individual, but it sure makes me entirely culpable as a global media maker” (*MYOM* 335).

Jane realizes that Akiko has been accepting the show’s families as representative of all families in America. She also realizes that her audience has no access to environmental narratives that counter the information fed to them by BEEF-EX, which leads to the episode on the Dunns. Jane reflects on Akiko’s position and states “Akiko’s fax brought my audience, and my responsibility, into sharp focus. It was clear to me that I couldn’t continue to celebrate beef. I had to tell some truths about meats” (*MYOM* 232). Fish notes that “the novel shows *how* the failure to make connections between consuming and desiring, whether it is the food we eat or the ethnic and racial images we exoticize, is dangerously naïve” (Fish 43). Jane realizes that Akiko has been accepting Jane’s multicultural images as well as the show’s message about the healthy benefits of meat (in a fax to Jane, Akiko attributes the return of her menstrual cycles to her consumption of pork) and now desires to live (and eat) like the women on television.

After Joichi discovers Jane and Akiko’s communication, the violence escalates to rape, leaving Akiko hospitalized and pregnant. Akiko decides to finally leave Joichi and go to America (unfortunately before seeing the Dunn episode), where she wants to live happily ever after. She also believes she is having a girl and tells her friend Tomoko, “That’s why I’m going to America...It doesn’t matter so much for a son, but since she’s a girl, I want her to be an American citizen. So she can grow up to become an American Wife” (*MYOM* 318). Akiko has been so influenced by the images of American women on the show that she truly believes her daughter will be better off growing up in America than in Japan. Although Jane feeds Akiko some subversive images as well, they are still

constricting, offering only a glimpse into what it means to be a woman in America. As Akiko later discovers, not everyone in America lives like the families on television.

The abuse Akiko suffers also contributes to her thought process yet it is questionable if she would leave Japan without the influence of the show. Her leaving is an escape from an abusive husband but ultimately not something to celebrate I would argue. Black claims, “Ozeki examines how literature offers a global alternative to the visual media that dominate the plot of the novel, suggesting the power of a new feminist literary canon that invites the formation of global community” (Black 244). While I believe Ozeki does draw attention to global issues, Black’s usage of “global community” makes me skeptical. Jane and Akiko’s relationship is based on misunderstanding, each of them carrying a false view of the other’s world that is fed to them through the media. Akiko’s coming to the United States is based on constructed images produced by Jane herself that, while providing figures of difference, are still neatly packaged and unrepresentative of many people in the country. Akiko has fallen for the “simple” representations of the West as a sort of utopia, a major component of global rhetoric that “assumes a universal core or norm, which spreads out across the world while pulling into its vortex other forms of culture,” a point Black has overlooked (Lionnet and Shih 5). A global community of women cannot exist simply because they suffer from global problems—this assumes universal (or essential) qualities about women that naturally link them regardless of individual backgrounds.

Black also states, “...her [Ozeki’s] work nonetheless searches for ways that women might develop usable alliances across national, racial, and sexual divides to combat the spread of global problems” (228). I find Black’s language here more applicable. By using

“alliances” instead of “global community,” Black acknowledges that women can work together without ignoring cultural differences, a danger presented with “global communities.” Shifting to transnational alliances versus global ones allows individual communities to remain intact while still reaching out to others, because “the transnational...is not bound by the binary of the local and the global and can occur in national, local, or global spaces across different and multiple spatialities and temporalities” (Lionnet and Shih 6). Such alliances do not rely on essentialist gender norms—instead women can work together through the recognition of common struggles (not identical ones). I believe this is the point Ozeki is advocating in the novel. By complicating how Akiko and Jane come together, Ozeki shows the difficulty in forming alliances across cultures/borders without misunderstandings or misinterpretations. While Jane interprets her shows one way, it becomes clear to her that Akiko has understood them differently. Similarly, Akiko has constructed Jane and her job in a certain light only to realize that Jane struggles with fertility and acceptance as well. This is not to say alliances should not be attempted. Ultimately, Akiko’s reaching out to Jane (although based on false notions) brings their communities together and fortunately leaves them both with a better understanding of each other.

When she arrives in America, Akiko experiences a variety of responses, beginning with her meeting Jane. Because Jane has challenged Joichi numerous times, Akiko expects “someone more...*shikkari shiteru*. Tougher. More resolute” (*MYOM* 331). The fact that Jane doesn’t seem to fit this definition may be beneficial for Akiko who is in need of self confidence. Although Jane seems “weaker” than Akiko expected, she still

challenged Joichi. This may tell Akiko that she too possesses the capability to survive without him.

Their meeting is a positive one, as Akiko learns who the real Jane is and Jane not only meets her audience but also a woman with whom she can share her personal struggles without worrying about the television show. She can be Jane, not Jane the director or Jane the truth seeker, just Jane. Here is a positive aspect of their meeting and where I would partially agree with Black's assessment of the novel. Jane and Akiko share their stories and find some commonality through their struggles with fertility as well as transnational politics. Both women are combating the commodification of their bodies and their identities. Akiko gives Jane the confidence to edit her slaughterhouse footage after the lost pregnancy and Jane gives Akiko reassurance and connections in America.

Jane arranges for Akiko to visit the Beaudrouxs and then Lara and Dyann. As Akiko takes the train from Louisiana to Massachusetts, she makes another important realization as she passes through a poor neighborhood:

The cars parked along the streets were old and rusty too, as were many of those she saw actually driving down the dirt roads. Akiko had never seen a rusty car, and she realized with a shock that the people who lived here were poor. She'd never thought of Americans as poor. Maybe in the past, or in the movies, but not now. Not these days. Not in real life (*MYOM* 336).

While the Beaudrouxs were just as Akiko expected, their surroundings are not. Perhaps Jane has managed to accurately portray the family in the television show but the poverty has escaped attention. Akiko is learning how this America is not quite like the television

America which ignores “undesirable qualities.” As a former audience member, Akiko must now internalize a different reality of the United States. This realization is what makes Akiko’s and Jane’s alliance successful. Akiko sees how her initial perception of the United States is flawed, which makes her coming to America positive overall.

Akiko’s alliances with Jane and other women from the show also reveal how although the beef industry has affected them all, ultimately it has affected them all differently. Issues of DES, hormone poisoning (either through the act of eating or direct exposure), infertility, physical violence, racism, classism, and sexism have played out differently in each woman’s life, creating a richly nuanced view of environmental politics and deconstructing universal conceptualizations of nature and how its destruction affects us all equally. Through these characters, Ozeki demonstrates an ecofeminist and environmental justice understanding of the varied and disproportionate effects of environmental degradation on women, children, people of color, and the poor. She does not create an environmental narrative that simply opposes to the one created by BEEF-EX; she creates one that reveals the narrow and reductive identities of such narratives and creates a space for more voices, more experiences, more complexities. It isn’t about chasing the truth while dismissing what is declared to be false, it is about embracing these mixed experiences and using that position to explore multiple truths.

Conclusion

Despite the problems of representation in media, the novel successfully demonstrates how media can be used as a tool to create transnational alliances and voice environmental justice narratives. At the end of *My Year of Meats*, after allowing Jane to film Rose’s

condition, Bunny Dunn tells her story to the USDA, which is then leaked to various television stations who all turn to Jane for more information. She is able to sell her documentary to producers in England, Japan, and the U.S., revealing the dangers of Gale Dunn's so-called environmentally friendly methods. John is forced to confront what is really happening on his feedlot and Rose is able to receive medical treatment. *My American Wife!* is cancelled and the producers find themselves "at the heart of a media controversy over reliability in television and the power of corporate sponsorship to determine content and truth" (MYOM 358). Jane hires Dave to help her field questions from the media about the dangers of hormones in feedlots as well as the potential danger of mad cow disease, which, coincidentally, is exactly what happened a few years after Ozeki's novel was published. As discussed earlier, mad cow emerged in the United States and Japan, fueling bans on American beef and a whole new wave of advertising campaigns by the USMEF.

What makes *My Year of Meats* compelling is how the novel offers a fuller analysis of the issues surrounding the beef industry. Ozeki is able to demonstrate "how media enables agency but also creates intentional deception" and construct a powerful environmental justice narrative that counters corporate green-washing by focusing on women, children, people of color and the poor (Fish 45). As readers, we can identify with Jane and criticize her work. We recognize her complex position within the media and Ozeki's understanding of the strengths and limitations of using media to create counter narratives. I find the way, in *My Year of Meats*, Ozeki walks the line "between the real and the contrived, authenticity and art, the documentary and the commercial" creates opportunities for a number of analyses (Palumbo-Liu 54).

After all her experiences, Jane muses “there are many answers, none of them right, but some of them most definitely wrong” (*MYOM* 327). She isn’t able to offer the solutions to the problems she uncovers, especially as researchers continually debate the “right” answers. But she does know that a child like Rosie developing early or a woman becoming deformed from DES is “definitely wrong.” By constructing environmental justice narratives, both within the novel and through the novel itself, Ozeki “suggests the importance of environmental justice and ecofeminism as social justice movements and interrelated critiques that have the power to bring together seemingly disparate individuals in a global economy” (Fish 44). Her work directly challenges transnational corporate green-washing and demonstrates how environmental justice narratives can give voice to those silenced and create important alliances across international borders. Palumbo-Liu writes: “If Ozeki mocks the Beef-Ex series for attempting to blunt its sheer commercialism by couching the programs as ‘documentaries’ which purport to present cross-cultural understanding...her own text parallels these strategies. That is, it is ‘packaged’ in a similar fashion. There is a novel, but the ‘book’ is *not only* a novel, not *only* ‘literature’” (Palumbo-Liu 64). Hubert Zapf argues “In its alternative worlds, literature articulates what remains unavailable in the established categories of cultural self-interpretation, but what appears as indispensable for an adequately complex account of the lives of humans and their place in the world. In this process, literature not only actualizes the repressed and lifts it into consciousness, but invests it with special imaginative energy...onto the level of language and cultural communication” (Zapf 63). By using literature as the vehicle of these narratives, Ozeki manages to make important social and environmental critiques while still questioning anyone’s truth-telling ability,

leaving room for multiple voices and complicating essentialist notions of nature, race, class, and gender. Her work serves as an important environmental justice narrative that challenges and destabilizes transnational green-washing and reveals how social issues and environmental issues are inextricably linked.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rejecting the “Natural” in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy

The concept of the “natural” is often used as a way to relegate people to certain hierarchal positions. People, actions, thoughts, beliefs, etc. are deemed to be natural or unnatural with little room for negotiation. Dominant groups often view nature as a static realm from which to draw values and affirmation of current power structures, as I have argued in the section on Morrison. William Cronon writes “The great attraction of nature for those who wish to ground their moral vision in external reality is precisely its capacity to take disputed values and make them seem innate, essential, eternal, nonnegotiable.” White, male, heterosexual discourse justifies the position of power as “natural” while labeling “others” as unnatural or “against nature” and “Nature in such arguments becomes a kind of trump card against which there can be no defense” (Cronon 36). So what happens when nature changes? What happens to identity (especially white, male, heterosexual identity) when nothing appears stable or constant? How would humans label themselves? Octavia Butler explores these very questions in her *Xenogenesis Trilogy*. On a post apocalyptic Earth, everything has changed and previous concepts of nature and the natural are exposed and deconstructed, leaving identity in flux and the future of humanity very uncertain. This chapter will examine how Butler’s use of the Oankali employs oppressive environmental narratives that further colonialist and racist/sexist agendas under the guise of ecological necessity while simultaneously challenging these narratives by destabilizing the “natural” and essentialist notions of identity.

In brief, the trilogy begins with an alien species, the Oankali, awakening Lilith Iyapo following Earth's destruction in nuclear war. They inform her of their plan to save what is left of humanity and rebuild Earth—but there's a catch. Surviving humans must “mate” with the Oankali in order to create a new hybrid species on the Earth. The Oankali, who specialize in reading and manipulating genes, tell Lilith that humanity is doomed to repeat its destructive ways because of a fatal genetic combination that makes humans both intelligent and hierarchal. Because the Oankali claim to not be hierarchal, a hybrid species guarantees the survival of both aliens and humans. It is Lilith's job to prepare humans for this new life, which proves to be no easy task. Lilith struggles between joining the Oankali and hopes of escaping their control. Ultimately she and many other humans stay with the aliens while other humans (rendered sterile by the Oankali) form resister groups that refuse to mate with the Oankali. This is where the first book, *Dawn*, ends. The second novel, *Adulthood Rites*, follows Lilith's son Akin, who is part Oankali and part human. The first generation of hybrid children is blossoming and Akin makes it his mission to learn about both sides, spending time with resister humans as well as Oankali. Ultimately, Akin decides that humans should be able to live and procreate without the Oankali if they so choose, and he convinces the Oankali to give fertility back to resister humans and create a colony for them on Mars. The final book, *Imago*, introduces another one of Lilith's children, Jodahs, who is the first construct ooloi (the third Oankali gender). Jodahs uncovers a group of humans that have managed to elude the Oankali and are reproducing, but with disastrous results due to inbreeding. Jodahs and its sibling make contact with the group and ultimately obtain human mates while many others choose to have their genetic diseases cured before relocating to the resister

colony on Mars. Because Jodahs marks uncertainty for the future of the hybrid species, since both Oankali and humans cannot predict how this new construct will react, the Oankali require it and its family to move away from the larger settlements. The trilogy ends with Jodahs, Lilith and the rest of their family starting anew.

Revising Environmental Relationships

Before discussing the problematic agendas and aspirations of the Oankali, I first want to focus on how the aliens conceive of the environment. The Oankali have a different relationship with their environment in comparison with humans. They don't view themselves as separate from their surroundings; there is no divide between self/nature or culture/nature. The Oankali erode these divides without creating new ones—it is simply a fluid relationship that they define as symbiotic. They see themselves as intimately connected to the environment, and they recognize how reliant they are on a sustainable nature. Therefore, actions are performed with the knowledge that there will be reactions. Lilith is confused by this new “nature.” Before the Oankali will allow her to return to Earth, Lilith has to learn survival skills aboard the Oankali “ship”—a simulated Earth where everything has been constructed by the Oankali. So there are new animals and new plant species that Lilith has never encountered. She asks Jdahya about them, but she doesn't receive the expected answers:

“ Are they plant or animal?”

“They aren't separate from the ship.”

“Well, is the ship plant or animal?”

“Both, and more.”

Jdahya then tries to explain that “There is an affinity, but it’s biological—a strong, symbiotic relationship. We serve the ship’s needs and it serves ours” (*Dawn* 35). The Oankali have difficulty explaining the ship to Lilith and other humans because it truly transcends definition. The environment is not viewed as a separate entity and the relationship is not one-sided but instead symbiotic. Both the ship and Oankali depend on each other for survival and nothing is wasted or deemed useless.

The environment is also more than a resource for the Oankali—they use it to communicate. The Oankali are capable of nonverbal communication and they are able to do this through their tentacles, either with one another or through the “ship.” In the third novel, Lilith’s ooloi child Jodahs describes Lo (the Oankali territory on Earth) as “parent, sibling, home” (*Imago* 554). Such a fluid relationship with nature blurs human definitions of “natural,” which organize people, animals, actions, and beliefs into mutually exclusive categories of natural and unnatural with little room for overlap or compromise. But when Butler introduces aliens who do not view themselves as separate from nature, it suddenly becomes difficult to define natural/unnatural if there is no boundary between self and environment. If it is all “one,” then how can we categorize? “Us versus them” becomes an impossible construction, especially with the creation of hybrid children.

The Oankali also recognize that nature is not static. As a species that craves difference and change and communicates with the environment, they know that nature evolves and responds to influence. Many humans are angered by the Oankali changes to Earth after the war—they want their planet restored to its original state, which is impossible even if the Oankali wanted the same thing. What the humans in the novel refuse to recognize is that the planet changed and evolved long before the Oankali

arrived. Jdahya tries to explain to Lilith “your Earth is still your Earth, but between the efforts of your people to destroy it and ours to restore it, it has changed” (*Dawn* 33-34). Perhaps the “efforts” of people have brought about some of the biggest ecological changes, but pastoral visions of unspoiled nature remain fixed in the human mind.

Perhaps one of the biggest differences between the Oankali and the humans is the use of nature as definition. By not looking to nature or the “natural” to define roles and construct hierarchies, Butler uses the Oankali/human juxtaposition to destabilize oppressive discourses. Suddenly gender roles, racial roles, and even human roles are reworked and consequently complicated. As Jim Miller observes, “the extrapolation of these discourses into a strange future world, where they are then put into dialogue with each other in an unforeseen context, is the central formal device in the novels, one that allows us to see these discourses in a new and hopefully more productive way” (Miller 345).

The introduction of a third gender, ooloi, immediately deconstructs traditional gender binaries and redefines notions of sexual relationships and family. Oankali families are made up of one female, one male, one ooloi and any number of children. While family members are not entirely without defined roles (females are the ones that give birth, ooloi manage reproduction), the responsibility of raising children falls on everyone, not just the female. Oankali children are born without a sex and therefore spend their childhood bonding with each member of the family before “deciding” which sex to become as an adult. This proves difficult for humans to comprehend, especially since many Oankali lack any indicators of sex, even after adulthood (except for size—Oankali females are larger—and ooloi grow four arms instead of two). The process challenges human

categorizations and notions of what is “natural.” Oppressive ideologies that rely on the natural as their foundation—it’s “natural” for women to raise children, for families to consist of only two parents, for children to perform in a way that is consistent with their anatomically defined sex—cannot function in this new society. Those boundaries and constraints prove to be false because they draw on a rigid notion of nature that Butler suggests simply doesn’t exist. If nature is fluid, then looking to it for definition will never provide concrete, stable answers.

After humans enter the picture, a family consists of one ooloi, two Oankali (male and female), two humans (male and female) and “construct” or “hybrid” children. Traditional Western notions of “family” are even more complicated by this setup, especially since childrearing, food gathering, etc. are still done by all members. Here, Butler also succeeds in challenging rhetoric that deems women to be closer to nature, more “natural.” Men, women, and unsexed children all take part in working for survival. Even though females still give birth in new hybrid families, the process is family oriented by requiring the presence of each member, enabling them to link with the mother and experience the birth through/with her.

Butler’s use of aliens highlights the contradiction and questions the very identity of human altogether, as Melzer observes: “The problematic category of ‘human’ in Butler is frequently symbolic of the signifying power of racial markers: to be ‘human’ is to be racially ‘pure;—that is, ‘white’...However, once visual demarcations of ‘pure humanness’ are blurred, power relations reliant on markers of sexual and racial difference are challenged and need to be redefined” (Melzer 83). Melzer’s framing of Butler’s humans echoes the history of Western scientific discourse that, claiming to be neutral in

its findings, created notions of natural purity which was then equated with racial purity. Studies declared the European male to be nature's most perfect species while women and people of other races "were studied only for their deviations from that norm" (Schiebinger 211). The white male came to represent pristine nature which allowed for "social hierarchies issued from natural hierarchies." Naturalists like William Smellie argued that "Nature herself has formed the human species into castes and ranks," therefore justifying scientific discourse's positioning of white men as superior (Schiebinger 145). If the definition of human has historically relied on renditions of the natural as white, then the Oankali plan of cross breeding disrupts and questions the stability/reliability of such identities. When all identities are questioned, nothing is stable, and by destabilizing the natural, Butler also destabilizes human identity, especially after humans and aliens begin reproducing together.

Lilith's hybrid children undermine "the naturalization of the category [human], thus challenging those categories our own order is based on..." (Melzer 65). Instead of presenting racialized and/or gendered markers that humans have used to categorize, the novel's hybrid children exhibit human and Oankali characteristics, therefore requiring new definitions of "human." And while this challenge is difficult for many of the humans in the novel to accept, the men prove to exhibit more resistance than others. After his first sexual encounter with an ooloi, Peter revolts, believing that "his humanity was profaned. His manhood was taken away" (*Dawn* 192). Other men express similar feelings, comparing mating with an ooloi to "being taken like a woman" (*Dawn* 203). Not only do these men equate humanity with manhood but they also equate reduced humanity with women, which coincides with the historical scientific renditions of women as

inferior to the European men. It also threatens the natural order of masculine and feminine roles, as well as sexual ones.

Being one of the first awakened humans allows Lilith to witness the contradictions within the “human only” mindset that many of the resisters cling to. Her knowledge and heightened physical strength (a result of Oankali manipulation) is threatening to many of the men in *Dawn* and Lilith endures physical assaults as they try to regain control of the situation. Yet when the ooloi present the plan for sexual relations and hybrid pregnancies, these same men revolt and vow to protect themselves and their partners from the aliens. Once outside of the holding area, many of the humans break away from the group and create their own “human only” camps where hybrids like Lilith and any Oankali are not allowed. However, these camps aren’t really open to any humans—Joseph, a Vietnamese-American man is eyed suspiciously by other white males in the group. Nikanj informs Lilith that it overheard two men discussing Joseph and that “One has decided he’s something called a faggot and the other dislikes the shape of his eyes” (*Dawn* 159). Fearing violence, Nikanj alters Joseph’s body by giving him the ability to heal quickly. However, when Joseph is injured during a skirmish between humans and Oankali, he is later murdered by Curt after he witnesses Joseph’s body healing the wounds. This healing ability exacerbates Joseph’s “otherness” and places him even further outside of the white male definition of human. So even though there has been a rhetorical shift to “human versus alien,” a human hierarchy still exists and Lilith and other women and people of color still occupy a marginalized position.

Many resister humans (humans who have chosen not to mate with the Oankali) cite the sexual experiences with the aliens as the most disturbing aspect of the joining of the

two species, as seen in the comments above. Without a natural order, boundaries are unclear and this causes many resister humans to cling tightly to essentialist notions of gender and sexuality. They insist on male-female relationships from the beginning, as seen with Allison, Jean and Curt. Shortly after Allison's awakening, a group confronts her about not picking a male sexual partner. Allison angrily shouts that she has no intention of becoming pregnant (unaware that this isn't possible). Jean insists "It's her duty to get with someone. There aren't that many of us left." Curt agrees, claiming "We pair off... One man, one woman" (*Dawn* 176). Two men restrain Allison, trying to force into one of the bedrooms until Lilith intervenes and rescues her.

Curt's and Jean's responses reflect an insistence on heterosexual relations, which some critics argue is heightened as a response to Oankali-human sexual interactions. Because a third gender (ooloi) is introduced and controls the sexual experiences by lying between a man and woman, the exchange ignites homophobic fears in many resister humans. And because Oankali-human families include two of each sex plus an ooloi, these fears are exacerbated. So resister humans respond by privileging heterosexual relationships as a means of separating themselves from the Oankali and humans who have relented to the Oankali plan. They become "figures for an insistence on an essential notion of identity" (Peppers 59). They declare joining the Oankali is "against God" (*Adulthood Rites* 339). This also asserts the "naturalness" of heterosexual relations over any others, so by "insisting upon the 'natural' heterosexuality of humans, the Resisters use the denial of human homosexuality as one of the characteristics that mark the boundary between 'pure' humans and 'tainted' collaborators" (Vint 73). Not only is the pure, natural human white and male, he is also heterosexual. Yet, by clinging to these

essentialist notions, the resister humans demonstrate how ridiculous and unproductive these identities are in this post-earth world.⁷

In *Adulthood Rites*, the resister towns have been built to resemble places before the nuclear war. They build their homes the same way and even recreate systems of currency as well as weapons. Villages raid each other and women are raped and traded for money and other goods. They refuse lessons from the Oankali and even resort to growing their food as they did before, cutting down trees and overplanting. Akin sees this when he is kidnapped by resister humans and taken to a town called Hillman. Although there is plenty of food growing, Akin notes that the town must have “lost a great deal of top soil to the rain in all those long, neat rows. How long could they farm this way before the land was ruined and they had to move? How much land had they already ruined?” (*Adulthood Rites* 336). Resister humans seem to be on the path to destruction again, as they recreate social roles, systems of economy, violence and unsustainable farming methods—all in the name of purity and humanity. All that being said, I don’t mean to suggest (and I don’t believe Butler does either) that the resister humans are entirely in the wrong. Their identity politics are troubling indeed, but their refusal to participate in the Oankali plan is not without validity. It is not at all clear that Butler intended for the aliens to serve as a

⁷ Other scholars, like Donna Haraway, are more critical of the trilogy’s constructions of sexuality. Even with the introduction of a third gender, family structures still rely on the presence of a male-female Oankali relationship and a male-female human relationship. Other options are never discussed, so, as Haraway argues, “Heterosexuality remains unquestioned, if more complexly mediated. The different social subjects, the different genders that could emerge from another embodiment of resistance to compulsory heterosexual reproductive politics, do not inhabit this *Dawn*” (Haraway 380). Sherryl Vint is in agreement when she states “although the coupling of five partners through the ooloi suggests the possibility of homosexual desire, the novels resist open representation of homosexuality (Vint 72). The attempted rape scene involving Allison appears more concerned with sexist behavior versus the heterosexual insistence and the possibility of homosexual couplings is never presented, even after the creation of hybrid families. I agree with Haraway and Vint here, though I do stress that heterosexuality, gender roles, and the act of sex itself is “more complexly mediated.” Butler does not achieve eradication, but I believe that she does ask readers to rethink these power structures through the essentialist identity constructions maintained by the resister humans. We are meant to critique them, not identify with them.

utopian alternative to human culture. While the Oankali relationship with nature offers more fluid views of our environment, the relationship is still not ideal. Stacy Alaimo argues “that the Oankali—though not innocent—certainly emerge as an antidote to the humans, who are forever bickering, plundering, raping, maiming, and murdering” (Alaimo 146). I’m not willing to position the Oankali as the “antidote” because acts of rape, bickering, and manipulation are very much a part of Oankali behavior—they just take different forms than the violent acts of the novel’s humans. In the next section, I will examine the Oankali’s troublesome reliance on scientific knowledge and Butler’s critique of natural behaviors.

Superior Knowledge and “Natural” Hierarchies

Throughout much of the first novel, the Oankali favor their own interpretations of human nature over those of Lilith. She makes repeated attempts to convince the aliens that they cannot understand humans by simply reading their genes, but they dismiss her arguments, claiming “We’ve studied your bodies, your thinking, your literature, your historical records, your many cultures.... We know more of what you’re capable of than you do” (*Dawn* 32). Having studied a few humans prior to awakening Lilith, the Oankali privilege their scientific observations and knowledge over Lilith’s personal experiences. They explain that the dreaded genetic combination of hierarchal behavior and intelligence is present in all humans and therefore cannot be avoided. Lilith balks at this, refusing to believe that human behavior can be reduced to genetic explanations. Again, the Oankali counter with scientific explanations: “intelligence does enable you to deny facts you dislike. But your denial doesn’t matter. A cancer growing in someone’s body will go on

growing in spite of denial. And a complex combination of genes that work together to make you intelligent as well as hierarchal will still handicap you whether you acknowledge it or not” (*Dawn* 39). The Oankali’s advanced biological knowledge is translated into “superior” knowledge, which in turn justifies their actions towards humans. Drugging them, manipulating them, experimenting on them—all is done for the “greater good” and therefore relieves the Oankali of any personal agency. Through the creation of a hybrid race, the fatal genetic combination of intelligence and hierarchal behavior will be fixed, bring an end to the destructive habits of the human race. Therefore, the Oankali can use their scientific knowledge as well as the promise of a better society to genetically alter humans and future offspring.

Some critics have read Butler as a sociobiologist, who sides with the Oankali line of thinking. They accuse her of explaining racism and sexism as biological traits that cannot be resisted or changed. In numerous interviews, Butler responds to such accusations, explaining that she does “think we need to accept that our behavior *is* controlled to some extent by biological forces” (Potts and Butler 332-33). But, she clarifies, “Don’t worry about the *real* biological determinism. Worry about what people make of it. Worry about the social Darwinism. After all, if sociobiology, or anything like it (people don’t really use that term much anymore for obvious reasons), is true, then denying it is certainly not going to help. What we have to do is learn to work *with* it and to work *against* people who see it as a good reason to let the poor be poor, that kind of thing” (Butler, Mehaffy, and Keating 57). Regardless of what humans are “programmed” to be, Butler argues that biology can still be confronted and manipulated. The real danger is using biology to condone oppression and reinforce power structures. So while Butler acknowledges the

presence of biological factors in behavior, she is not letting humanity off the hook nor is she condoning the actions of the Oankali. Instead, Butler succeeds in disrupting and destabilizing scientific narratives that naturalize tendencies and behavior. By transferring these narratives to the Oankali for use against humans, Butler magnifies and effectively problematizes such narratives by revealing their ignorance and limitations.

Historical examples that involve the use of biology/scientific explanations to condone oppression are numerous, but some that are reminiscent of the Oankali's behavior include the practice of phrenology and scientific studies of African Americans. Such works deemed African Americans (and other racial groups like Native Americans) to have reduced mental and moral capacities according to physical characteristics such as head shape and size. Claiming these findings as scientific facts rendered them indisputable and justified/naturalized white superiority. This is the type of "science" is practiced by schoolteacher at Sweet Home in Morrison's *Beloved*. At first, Sethe feels it is foolish and harmless when "Schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth..." (Morrison 191). But she soon learns the purpose of these measurements when she overhears schoolteacher and his students charting her "characteristics" and their meanings, separating them into human and animal.

In her book *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*, Londa Schienbinger examines the roles of race and gender within scientific discourse and demonstrates how, historically, "naturalists did not draw their research priorities and conclusions from a quiet contemplation of nature, but from political currents of their times" (183). Many scholars conducted studies with the intent of justifying white (often male) positions of power and colonial practices due to the "natural" superiority of

Caucasians. These scholars credit the white race with providing the most useful inventions and modes of thought to the civilized world and set out to “debunk what they considered to be the myth of a black origin of Western science” (Schiebinger 187).

Some branches of science claimed all humans were equal and cited environmental factors as the reason for differences, yet Schiebinger demonstrates the underlying Eurocentrism of such arguments since the European male was used as the original human that all others deviated from. Butler evokes such scientific practices in the trilogy with the added twist of genetic coding. Now that we possess the technology to map our genes, will this scientific knowledge be used to create new marginalized groups in addition to those already in existence? Will genes be the new indisputable facts of the future?

Although the Oankali maintain a strong reliance on scientific knowledge throughout the trilogy, they do come to realize that they cannot predict every human behavior. In *Dawn*, Lilith exposes many contradictions within herself as well as with other humans (especially in the scene with Paul Titus), forcing the Oankali to admit mistakes and recognize their own intellectual shortcomings.⁸ After constructs enter their world, both humans and Oankali face new challenges and must account for all different types of knowledge. In *Adulthood Rites*, Nikanj admits “I think that your people affect us more than we realize,” to which Lilith responds “I think...that you may be better at understanding us than you are at understanding your own people.” Nikanj simply replies

⁸ Interestingly, Lilith rejects oppressive behavior from the very beginning, in regards to both humans and aliens. She is an obvious rebuttal to the Oankali’s assumptions about the inevitability of biologically determined tendencies to violence and hierarchy, but the Oankali do not view her in this manner. To them, she appears to be a sort of outlier who doesn’t disprove their theories of human behavior. Lilith becomes an exception to the rule instead of a reason to rethink the rules. Schiebinger notes how “The sciences of race and sex tended to underscore distinctions between groups by downplaying variation within these groups” (119) which is what we see the Oankali doing with Lilith. Despite the fact that she refrains from hierarchal and (unprovoked) violent behavior, the Oankali “downplay” this variation in order to maintain the frameworks of their argument as well as the differences between alien and human behavior.

“I don’t think it’s true, but it may be” (*Adulthood Rites* 300). While Lilith is willing to concede that the Oankali have some understanding of human nature, she points out that they are blind to many of their own characteristics. Nikanj maintains a superior position, acknowledging the possibility but simultaneously dismissing Lilith’s claim. However, it is Lilith’s construct son, Akin, who begins the movement for a separate community for humans not willing to join the Oankali. The combination of Oankali genes and human genes makes Akin “Oankali enough to be listened to by other Oankali and Human enough to know that resister Humans were being treated with cruelty and condescension” (*Adulthood Rites* 404). After living in a resister camp for more than a year, Akin learns why some humans feel so strongly about maintaining a purely human race. Being both human and Oankali, “he was intended to decide the fate of the resisters. He was intended to make the decision the Dinso and the Toaht could not make” (*Adulthood Rites* 474). The Oankali are strongly against a colony on Mars for humans only; they view it as cruel and tell Akin “you and those who help you will give them the tools to create a civilization that will destroy itself as certainly as the pull of gravity will keep their new world in orbit around its sun” (*Adulthood Rites* 475). Akin is not convinced and contends “chance exists. Mutation. Unexpected effects of the new environment. Things no one has thought of. The Oankali can make mistakes” (*Adulthood Rites* 502). In the third novel, *Imago*, we find out that Akin is correct. Another child of Lilith’s, Jodahs, discovers a secret colony of humans where unexplained fertility is present.

Ultimately, Butler demonstrates the impossibility of the Oankali possessing complete understanding of humans and vice-versa, regardless of superior scientific knowledge. Because bodies and minds are in constant flux, a purely scientific approach that views

them as static falls flat. Butler succeeds in supporting scientific discourse and simultaneously disrupting it; she doesn't dismiss it but she doesn't give it unquestioned authority. As readers, we should be wary of how dominant groups utilize genetic knowledge. Vint addresses this wariness when she writes "*Xenogenesis* cautions us against adopting a perspective of either genetic essentialism – in which we believe that all human potential can be predicted through reading our genes – or the perspective of genetic welfare – in which we believe that we can find genetic solutions to social problems" (Vint 77). This essentialism and welfare can be used to naturalize behaviors, characteristics, personalities, while normalizing current power structures and diverting attention away from the roots of social problems. This danger also presents itself in the previous chapters, where black slaves are deemed genetically inferior and BEEF-EX boasts meat as a healthy staple of people's diets. The Oankali are doing something similar in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy and, although "The Oankali may be genetic essentialists... Butler's readers are encouraged not to be" (Vint 67).

Hoda Zaki is more critical of the humans in the novels and argues that Butler has little hope for humanity:

Even when she describes the diminution of racial antagonisms among humans upon encountering a new extraterrestrial Other, she foregrounds how we seize upon biological differences between the two species to reassert, yet again, notions of inferiority and discrimination. For her, the human propensity to create the Other can never be transcended: the end of racial discrimination must coincide with the rise of some kind of similar

discrimination based upon biological differences, which accordingly continue to play a role in future social orders (Zaki 241).

For Zaki, humans are the main culprits who look to biological explanations in order to maintain power structures and there isn't any possibility of "transcending" these thought processes. Gabriele Schwab makes a similar argument pointing to the various prejudices of the human characters as the major problems in the trilogy. Because the Oankali lack such problems, the trilogy explores how "the educational trajectory during this extreme cultural encounter is marked by Lilith's gradual relinquishing of her intense xenophobia and racism toward the Oankali" (Schwab 209). For Schwab and Zaki, the discriminatory practices of humanity are magnified in the novels in order to draw attention to the way humans create issues of difference and categorizations.

Therefore, Butler creates a more perfect species—the Oankali—and through them "we can read Butler's works as expressing hope for unambiguous and truthful communication, for long life free of all diseases, for the elimination of racism and the tolerance of differences among people, for pleasurable work, peace, and dignity, and for total social communion—all of them authentic and time-honored utopian wishes" (Zaki 243-244). Christa Grewe-Volpp echoes Zaki, claiming "Butler's representation of the Oankali world allows for a juxtaposition of a human socioeconomic and cultural system based on destructiveness with a more egalitarian system based on biological evolutionary models that transcend the nature/culture divide and are reminiscent of utopian ecofeminist values such as a nonhierarchical way of life, communalism and body knowledge" (Grewe-Volpp 155).

I have to disagree with Zaki and Grewe-Volpp on this point. Although humans do turn to biological differences to establish hierarchies, the Oankali use scientific discourse to maintain their positions of power over humans, as demonstrated earlier. Vint makes a more compelling argument by noting that “while Butler is clearly critical of the self-destructive tendencies of humans, she sees even greater risks in the hubris of assuming that there is an all-knowing subject position – alien or scientific – that could presume to correct these faults” (Vint 71). Butler’s skepticism of scientific determinism keeps the novel from creating such binaries as human=good, alien=bad or vice versa. It also supports her dismissal of the natural, as discussed earlier. Schiebinger notes how the movements of scientific racism and scientific sexism both “regarded women and non-European men as deviations from the European male norm...deployed new methods to measure and discuss difference [and] sought natural foundations to justify social inequalities between the sexes and races” (144). While much of the human discourse in the trilogy relies on these constructions, Butler suggests that even though the Oankali do not look to the “natural” as justification of identities, their reliance on scientific discourse can be read as grounded in arguments of “natural foundations.” Therefore, readers cannot/should not accept the Oankali as the utopian antidote to humans because their seemingly positive views of nature and the natural are limited by their privileging of scientific determinism.

The Oankali claim to not be hierarchal but Lilith quickly decides this isn’t the case when she encounters Jdahya and his family for the first time: “In spite of Jdahya’s claim that the Oankali were not hierarchal, the ooloi seemed to be the head of the house. Everyone deferred to it” (*Dawn* 48). Paul Titus shares Lilith’s opinion concerning ooloi

and power, telling her that once an ooloi has grown its sensory arms (sexual organs), “ooloi let everyone know who’s in charge. The Oankali need a little women’s and men’s lib up here” (*Dawn* 89). Regardless, a lack of hierarchies does not equate to a lack of power structures, as Haraway argues by referring to Oankali relationships as “webs [that] are hardly innocent of power and violence; hierarchy is not power’s only shape—for aliens, primates, or humans” (Haraway 379-380).

Reading the Oankali as better or even perfect is not only problematic but also sets up an oversimplified dichotomy between alien and human where one is “good” and one is “bad,” creating a boundary that does not allow negotiation. In other words, we cannot use the Oankali to dismantle dualisms and simultaneously create new ones. Butler is creating much more fluid conversations where boundaries are blurred yet perfection is far from reality.

As discussed earlier, I agree with Grewe-Volpp that the Oankali do manage to “transcend the nature/culture divide.” However, Butler is doing more with this notion. Despite the Oankali’s more symbiotic relationship with their environment, they use environmental disaster as justification for their actions. The destruction of Earth and the promise of its re-birth are used against humans throughout the trilogy—humans are constantly threatened with the loss of Earth if they do not follow the Oankali plan. When met with resistance, the Oankali resort to their biological explanations of human genetics and claim that the human destruction of Earth is destined to happen again if human biology is not manipulated. So not only does biological discourse create a position of power for the Oankali, it also becomes “necessary” under the guise of environmental crisis—a rhetorical strategy that is prevalent in Western discourse. In times of

environmental crisis, those in power can use that force and scientific “knowledge” to manipulate and control others through rhetoric of fear and promises of a better future (this strategy is already in use by Monsanto and its threats of certain global starvation without the use of transgenic plants). By placing this narrative in the hands of aliens, Butler highlights the dangers lurking behind environmental disaster scenarios and makes current power structures more explicit.

Similar to the environmental narratives discussed in the previous chapters, the Oankali construct a narrative that relies on environmental disaster as a way to privilege their position and their subsequent actions. However, the issue of environmental degradation in the trilogy allows Butler to critique arguments relying on nature (and concepts of the natural) while still recognizing the importance of nature and the environment. In other words, Butler’s rejection of the natural is not a rejection of nature itself. Outside of all the discourse and scientific renderings of the natural world, nature and its destruction remain a reality that has real consequences.

In the next section, I will discuss one of the major problems associated with the Oankali—the colonization of women’s bodies—and how this practice directly challenges Zaki and other critics who view the Oankali world as utopian.

Colonization of Bodies and Controlled Reproduction

When Lilith awakens from the Oankali induced sleep at the beginning of the trilogy, she discovers a scar across her abdomen that had not been there prior to her capture. She fears what may have been done to her body and wonders what else may be in store for her. Suddenly she feels alienated from her own body and realizes “Even her flesh could

be cut and stitched without her consent or knowledge” (*Dawn* 6). Later, Jdahya reveals that the Oankali had indeed performed surgery on her in order to remove a cancerous growth. He tells Lilith that the Oankali have studied human anatomy and were able to remove the cancer without damaging any other organs, so she lost “nothing [she] would want to keep” (*Dawn* 21). Jdahya tells Lilith that the Oankali are especially interested in cancerous cells and hope to study and manipulate them in order regenerate body parts in future generations.

Despite the removal of her cancer, Lilith is disturbed that the Oankali performed surgery without her consent, and she worries that she and other surviving humans will be used as experimental learning opportunities for the Oankali: “She imagined dying humans caged and every groan and contortion closely observed. She imagined dissections of living subjects as well as dead ones. She imagined treatable diseases being allowed to run their grisly courses in order for ooloi to learn” (*Dawn* 22). Lilith’s fears stem from a human history containing numerous examples of such scenarios, especially against marginalized peoples, and she learns that the Oankali have more in mind for the use of her body.

In the early stages of her training, prior to waking others, Lilith is lonely for other humans and pushes Nikanj to let her meet with another person. Eventually it relents and sets up a meeting with Paul Titus, who has chosen to remain with the Oankali versus returning to Earth. As they approach his home, Nikanj remarks that Lilith may choose to stay permanently, immediately putting Lilith on edge and wondering “What was this? Step two of the captive breeding program?” (*Dawn* 84). Paul and Lilith are left alone to talk and Paul reveals that he has been living with the Oankali since he was fourteen years

old and has not interacted with many other humans. He also informs her that their genetic information is saved by the Oankali so they can create more humans than the ones saved from Earth. So although Paul has never seen any of them, the Oankali have used his genetic material to create more than seventy children.

At first, Lilith is relieved to speak with another human, but tensions mount as Paul begins to push her to stay with him and kisses her. Lilith rejects him, telling him that she has no interest in having sex while the Oankali watch and study them. Paul reacts violently and chases Lilith around the room, grabbing at her clothes and trying to restrain her. Lilith yells at him “Animals get treated like this. Put a stallion and a mare together until they mate, then send them back to their owners. What do they care? They’re just animals...Don’t make yourself their dog!” (*Dawn* 95). Paul continues his attack until Lilith asks him about what the Oankali have made him do in the past. She suggests that they may have made a clone of his sister or his mother and had him mate with them unknowingly. This touches a nerve and Paul beats Lilith unconscious, screaming “They said I could do it with you. They said you could stay here if you wanted to. And you had to go and mess it up” (*Dawn* 96).

This brief yet disturbing scene of captive sex/breeding is reminiscent of “a historical legacy of the system of American slavery in which African American women were treated as ‘breeders’ who owned neither themselves nor their children” (Stein 90). Black women were the source of more workers and were therefore expected to bear children that would work or could be sold. So women were impregnated by force (either by another slave obeying orders or by the master himself) or they were told to begin bearing children once married. As Toni Morrison also showed us, African Americans were

viewed as more animalistic than human, so the breeding of black women was often equated “with the breeding of stock... Chattel slavery posed African-American mothers as human cattle rather than persons and valued their children as produce rather than kin” (Stein 91). Describing women as cattle also evokes Ruth Ozeki’s work, though while Ozeki made the connection between women and livestock in researching the beef industry, Morrison and Butler demonstrate how this equation has deep historical roots for African American women.

Deborah Gray White discusses the rape of female slaves but also argues that “while it was not unheard of for a planter to slap a male and female together and demand that they ‘replenish the earth’ it was more likely that he would use his authority to encourage young slaves to make binding and permanent the relationships they themselves had initiated.” Yet she quickly asserts that it should not be thought that “the attention masters paid to getting young slave women attached stemmed from unselfish benevolence” (White 99). It was quite the contrary. By ensuring a permanent relationship, slave masters could, potentially, gain more control over the slaves’ sexual partnerships and benefit from more children. The “unselfish benevolence” masked the true intentions of slave masters and offered a false sense of agency to slaves who had seemingly “chosen” their spouses. We see this in *Dawn* as well. When Lilith is nearly raped and killed by Paul Titus, Nikanj promises that she will not be put in that position again and is free to choose her own sexual partner. After waking the first group of humans, Lilith begins a sexual relationship with a Vietnamese-American man named Joseph. However, Nikanj later reveals that it had studied Joseph prior to the awakening and, determining that he would make a good mate for Lilith, made sure his profile was included in the group for her to choose from.

Nikanj continues to control Lilith's sexual encounters, even when it appears that she is making her own choices.

Alice Walker also explores the connection between African American women, animals, and breeding in her essay "Am I Blue?" She tells the story of a neighbor's horse, Blue, who spends his days alone in his field, eating apples that Walker offers over the fence. One day, Walker notices the arrival of another horse in Blue's field. Blue is scared at first, but after awhile, "Blue had decided to make friends and the two horses ambled or galloped along together, and Blue did not come nearly as often to the fence underneath the apple tree" (Walker 865). After a few months, the new horse is pregnant and disappears without warning. Walker inquires about the horse's whereabouts and "The children next door explained that Blue's partner had been 'put with him' (the same expression that old people used, I had noticed, when speaking of an ancestor during slavery who been impregnated by her owner) so that they could mate and she could conceive. Since that had been accomplished, she had been taken back by her owner, who lived somewhere else." Blue becomes depressed and unresponsive to Walker's attempts to feed him apples. Walker sees deep pain in the horse's eyes and writes, "If I had been born into slavery, and my partner had been sold or killed, my eyes would have looked like that" (Walker 866). She feels great empathy with Blue and other animals, and the essay ends with her spitting out a bite of steak, realizing that she is "eating misery" (Walker 867).⁹

Critics like Schwab would disagree with my reading, arguing that "while most human characters perceive the Oankali as colonizers, Butler insists on the differences between

⁹ While I have chosen to focus on African American history here, these issues are relevant in a broader history of colonialism, including Native American experiences in the U.S.

human and Oankali colonization. The Oankali do not treat humans as slaves, nor do they exploit their labor or skills for proprietary purposes. Not only do they integrate humans as equal members of the new transspecies communities, they also welcome changes in their own culture and genetic material” (Schwab 211). But Butler isn’t insisting on differences—she is creating a nuanced future of past events, which becomes clearer alongside stories like Morrison’s *Beloved* or Walker’s “Am I Blue?” In the trilogy, humans are secluded, confined, drugged, chemically altered, raped and impregnated but it all happens in ways that humans have not experienced before. Perhaps slavery isn’t even the right word to use in this post apocalyptic world—yet the historical connections are enough to suggest that the Oankali are involved in very similar practices.

Both Walker’s essay and Lilith’s comments connect black women and animals (mainly livestock) and show how that connection aids in their mutual oppression. The Oankali’s practices are not futuristic possibilities—Butler evokes systematic practices of controlling and manipulating the fertility of women of color and shows how they were justified under the guise of environmental need/protection. In other words, despite traditional constructions of nature as something static, needing domination, Butler depicts the reality of nature’s fluidity and how dominant forces can use the environment as another oppressive tool against women of color. Therefore, Stein argues “Butler’s use of a black female protagonist...is significant, focusing our attention on the position of actual women of color who must negotiate inescapable colonial forces that exert control over many aspects of their lives, particularly sexuality and reproduction” (Stein “Bodily” 215).

While the Oankali hoped that Lilith and Paul would start a relationship, they never intended for that relationship to produce children. Lilith knows that all the captured

humans have been rendered sterile, including herself, because the Oankali have another plan in mind. Jdahya reveals the Oankali plan of breeding with humans in order to ensure the survival of both groups and informs Lilith that the aliens plan for her to be one of the first females to give birth to a hybrid child. This is deemed to be “a trade” with the ooloi altering Lilith’s body, as Jdahya describes it: “The ooloi will make changes in your reproductive cells before conception and they’ll control conception” (*Dawn* 42).

Possessing the ability to control reproduction gives the Oankali power over humans, despite Jdahya’s assurances that this is an equal trade. As discussed earlier, the Oankali once again justify the situation by pointing to the “greater good”—the evolution of both species—and, as Rachel Stein suggests, “the novel explores the premise that if human behavior is genetically determined, then genetic manipulation is the best means of shaping behavior, and forcible control of sexuality/reproduction is justified by the need for species evolution” (Stein “Gene Trading” 211). Environmental devastation and “the need for species evolution” inform the Oankali position—these reasons clear them of personal responsibility and serve as manipulative tools. Butler demonstrates how the destruction of Earth makes power structures more explicit and more dangerous. In a time of fear and uncertainty, groups that already inhabit a powerful position can use fears to solidify (or even strengthen) their current status and reinforce boundaries that include and exclude people. The Oankali threaten Lilith (and other humans later) with extinction and maintain that they know what is best for everyone. But Lilith doubts that mating with the Oankali and giving birth to hybrid children will result in any sort of utopian society.

The question arises concerning what control women will have in this process and Lilith wonders “What was she headed for? Forced artificial insemination. Surrogate

motherhood? Fertility drugs and forced ‘donation’ of eggs? Implantation of unrelated fertilized eggs. Removal of children from mothers at birth...Humans had done these things to captive breeders—all for a higher good, of course” (*Dawn* 60). Lilith recognizes that the Oankali are doing nothing that humans have not already done to one another—as an African American woman, her history is filled with these exact occurrences of rape, forced carrying of the captor’s children and the removal of children from mothers. While other awakened humans protest the idea of crossbreeding as barbaric and unnatural, Lilith, though disturbed by the idea as well, is able to recognize the similarities in treatment. By casting aliens as the colonizer in this novel, Butler creates a new “outsider” and highlights the power struggles of colonization with an ironic twist—previous colonizers (mainly white men) now find themselves in the minority and under the control of a dominant group. Suddenly these men shift the “us versus them” mentality to “human versus alien,” and band together to make “human only” camps and work to protect their women from the sexual advances of the outsider. They can no longer define themselves as they have in the past nor can they depict these practices as “natural” or “unnatural.”

Jim Miller takes a softer stance on the role of colonialism in the novel. He argues:

Butler does show the Oankali as having colonialist tendencies, but it is too easy to write them off as such without acknowledging the way *Xenogenesis* defamiliarizes the victim/victimizer paradigm and shows it to be an inadequate way of understanding oppression. There are no ‘bad guys’ in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, only bad ways of thinking. The Oankali, human males, and others interested in domination are not shown as inherently bad but as ignorant or ideologically deluded...everyone is

redeemable, even ‘oppressors’—whether they be violent human-males or colonialist aliens. Butler’s novels do not suggest that the process of redemption is easy, only that it is possible and necessary for survival (Miller 343).

I agree that Butler is doing more than creating an “us-versus-them” scenario, but I can’t agree with the remainder of Miller’s argument. The idea of being “ideologically” bad versus “inherently” bad could potentially let oppressive forces off the hook—we’re not bad people, we’re just ignorant—and relieves them of any responsibility. I see the Oankali relying on this type of thinking when they insist that they have to do these things in the name of survival. They could easily claim they aren’t bad aliens; they’re forced to act to this way, therefore clearing themselves of responsibility. I also don’t believe that Butler shows us that everyone is redeemable. While the Oankali do eventually concede to a separate human colony on Mars at the end of the second novel, they never admit that their plan for saving humanity and the earth was wrong. They admit to making some poor decisions along the way in terms of how they convinced humans to cooperate, but I’m not sure this is enough to be redeemable. Redemption is possible, but I would argue that offering redemption is not Butler’s intention. As stated earlier, the Oankali are more of a warning against those who use environmental destruction or ideologies of naturalization as justification of oppressive acts, including colonization.

While the Oankali rely on environmental narratives that require women like Lilith to repopulate the earth, they also rely on narratives that mandate the control of this repopulation. Walker and Morrison have portrayed the environmental narratives that required slave women to produce future generations of workers while scholars like Andil

Gosine demonstrate how environmental narratives have also required that women of color's fertility be controlled to reduce the number of nonwhite bodies on the earth (and ensure control remains in the hands of current power structures). Issues of overpopulation and the depletion of natural resources have been used as justification for acts such as the forced sterilization of women of color.¹⁰ Gosine notes how "Overpopulation discourse has throughout its existence been motivated by and framed around fears of "Others" expressions of sexual desire, including the potential alterity to the dominant order that these expressions are understood to represent" (Gosine 75). One of Gosine's main arguments is that fears of overpopulation are really fears about uncontrolled nonwhite reproduction, so the linking of environmental issues with overpopulation is a guise for monitoring nonwhite sexual practices and expressions of sexuality. He notes "The overpopulation myth also denies expressions of emotive sexual desire to nonwhite peoples, and in doing so reaffirms racialized distinctions between whites and "Others"...overpopulation discourses similarly cast nonwhite people as inferior, lacking the agency necessary for individual expressions of sexual desire" (Gosine 82).

One example of such discourse is Hugh H. Iltis's 1991 article, "The Impossible Race: Population Growth and the Fallacies of Agricultural Hope," that addresses the issues of food production and overpopulation. He relies on classist, racist and sexist rhetoric that deems overpopulation as the fault of developing nations and women. The article section titled "The Population Bomb: Still Ticking, Only Faster!" declares "*the future of nature is grim indeed*" and cites the rapid rate of population growth as the main culprit (Iltis 114).

¹⁰ Andil Gosine's article "Dying Planet, Deadly People: 'Race'-Sex Anxieties & Alternative Globalizations," (*Social Justice* 32.4 [2005]: 69-86) details a history of forced sterilization against nonwhite peoples in Canada and the U.S.

Iltis suggests that the solution involves less people so “We need to stop and reverse human population growth now” (115).

Iltis comments on developed countries’ roles in ecological devastation through transnational business practices and commercial development, yet concludes “nevertheless, let all of us...never forget that poverty, lack of education, and above all overpopulation *in and by itself* are equally responsible for biological extinction” (115). He declares “it is a poor excuse to blame the ‘population bomb’ solely on capitalism or imperialism or to absolve population growth of its increasingly crucial role in the world’s ecological collapse” because there are other culprits such as “the encouragement of large families by leaders of specific religious, ethnic, or racial groups to gain political advantage, to outbreed and so overwhelm their adversaries.” Therefore, Iltis sees population control as the most important solution to environmental destruction and advocates for birth control in developing nations because “although the poverty-stricken people of the world have to have food and firewood, they need birth control even more” (115). At the current rate of growth, Iltis argues that we will never be able to produce enough food to feed the world’s people, so the only way to ensure we have enough to eat, now and in the future is “by decreasing the world’s population, preferably through education and persuasion, especially of women, and always with the ready availability of every form of contraception” (116). Ultimately, birth control and lowered rates of growth are key to saving the environment because, according to Iltis, “preventing famine and disease are noble goals. Ending injustice and poverty are noble goals. But none of these will induce an elusive ‘demographic transition’ to lowered birthrates in time to prevent widespread biological collapse” (116).

Ilkis lays the blame of poverty and lack of education directly at the feet of poor nations and implicates them as the major causes of environmental destruction, contributing to oppressive environmental discourses that to point to impoverished peoples as polluters and anti-nature—if they would just improve their standards of living and care more about the earth, then our problems would be solved. But perhaps the most frightening line of Ilkis’s article is his solution that involves a decrease in population growth “preferably through education and persuasion, especially of women.” His language here particularly disturbing—what exactly does the “persuasion” of women entail? If we use colonial history as an example here, it appears that “persuasion” would involve forced sterilization. He places the role of birth control above the issues of famine, disease, injustice, and poverty in the name of saving nature without any recognition of how all these issues are related. Ilkis divides social issues from environmental ones and stresses saving nature above all else, which is what we see happening in *Dawn* with the Oankali. They continually argue that the remaining humans must cooperate in order to save both species as well as the earth, regardless of consequences. The possibility of a lost Earth informs Ilkis’s argument as well as the Oankali’s, though the Oankali stress the need for the new species while insisting on controlling the means of doing so.

Through their physical control of reproduction, the Oankali also control expressions of human sexuality, linking sex and sexual desire as suggested by Gosine. An ooloi regulates sexual encounters, placing itself between two humans and linking into their nervous systems to stimulate and manipulate pleasurable feelings. It is the ooloi who transfers fluids and genetic materials that result in pregnancy, and it all happens without any physical contact between the two humans. After sexual acts with an ooloi, humans

become strongly sexually attached to the ooloi, but are subsequently unable to endure physical contact with each other. Lilith finds she cannot touch Joseph after sex with him and Nikanj because “His flesh felt wrong somehow, oddly repellant” (*Dawn* 220). It is the same for her with her next partner, Tino. They find they can only stand to touch each other’s hair “because hair was essentially dead tissue...It was the only way left to them” (*Imago* 561). The Oankali induced denial of human touch guarantees that once paired with an ooloi, those two humans will only initiate sexual contact through it, not with each other. Human expressions of sexuality are suppressed and Lilith now lacks “the agency necessary for individual expressions of sexual desire” that Ilkis implicitly advocates as environmentally necessary and Gosine cites as part of agendas of reproductive control. It allows the Oankali to further “other” humans and denigrate their sexuality while imposing their own sexual norms and practices onto human bodies.

Butler’s placement of reproductive control after the destruction of earth exposes the true aims of overpopulation proponents like Ilkis. Now there are too few people on earth yet the Oankali still cite environmental needs as one of the reasons for controlling reproduction, suggesting that any environmental connection with reproduction is less about nature and more about control.

These are also the reasons behind their initial rejection of a human colony on Mars. Much like the mindset of colonizers and proponents of population control, the Oankali believe that humans on Mars will reproduce and pass on their genetic flaws, leading to the destruction of the planet as well as themselves. If slaves/colonized persons are allowed unmonitored freedoms, it will only end in environmental disaster, so they really benefit from the control of the colonizers. Interestingly, the Oankali utilize multiple

reproductive arguments through their need for forced reproduction to also be controlled reproduction.

Many feminists of color, like Lilith, are quite aware of the dangers and inconsistencies behind such arguments. When acts of violence are being committed for the greater good, marginalized groups of women often endure these acts without receiving any of the supposed benefits. In reality, the “greater good” often only helps those already in power, which is demonstrated at the end of *Dawn*. After struggling with the position imposed on her by the Oankali, Lilith is unknowingly impregnated by Nikanj. She reacts with anger and fear, screaming “It’s inside me, and it isn’t human!” But Nikanj insists this is the right thing to do, telling Lilith “You’ll have a daughter...And you are ready to be her mother...Nothing about you but your words reject this child” (*Dawn* 247). Once again, the Oankali ignore verbal protests and maintain that human body language often tells a different story. Nikanj offers the same reasoning earlier when it forces Joseph into a sexual experience. When Joseph later protests, Nikanj simply says “Your body said one thing. Your words said another” (*Dawn* 190). Therefore Nikanj’s impregnating Lilith and assaulting Joseph are justified since, deep down, Lilith and Joseph really did want these things (much like justifications of rape claim) and so, as Holden suggests “the Oankali commitment to their own view of how things are and the ‘truth’ of genetic codes leads them to become imperialistic colonisers [sic] of the remaining remnants of humanity” (Holden 51). Nikanj renders his “reading” of human bodies as absolute truth that negates any verbal protests that may be contradictory.

Lilith's pregnancy fulfills the Oankali plan of breeding a new hybrid species and permanently marks her as traitor to many other humans and sometimes herself. Her body becomes the site of conflict and experimentation, especially since she will be the first human to give birth to a "construct" child. It is deemed her duty to help reconstruct Earth and future generations. For the remainder of the trilogy, Lilith is conflicted about her body and her children. Because she had been genetically altered by the Oankali, she occupies an undefined space—many humans reject her and label her "alien" yet she is still too human to be considered an Oankali. This position leaves her feeling alienated from both groups, and she often leaves the camp to wander alone and grow gardens for humans from the resister camps—attempting to maintain some sort of agency.

Up until this point, the discussion has focused on colonialist rhetoric/behavior of the Oankali, yet the humans in the novel demonstrate colonialist anxieties as well. As discussed earlier, the human response to the Oankali plan reveals their essentialist notions of identity and purity. But it is the idea of hybrid children that horrifies many of the rescued humans (as seen in Lilith's reaction to her pregnancy) and drives them away from the Oankali. Their fear and revulsion at the thought of hybrid children mirrors colonialist anxieties about miscegenation and mixed-race offspring. Lilith's reaction to being forcibly (and unknowingly) impregnated is a mix of anger and repulsion at the idea of something "not human" inside of her. Lilith and resister humans equate hybrid children with the loss of a pure humanity, and while Lilith abandons her repulsion after giving birth, resister humans entrench themselves in their rejection of hybrid children. But, again mirroring colonialist behavior, resister humans kidnap hybrid children and sell them, placing the highest value on those who look more human than alien (much like a

preference for light skin over dark skin). Akin, Lilith's construct son, has predominately human features as a child and is therefore considered valuable by his human captors. Other children who have strong Oankali features, like the kidnapped twin girls, disgust the resister humans and they plan ways to surgically remove the features in order make them look more acceptable, more human. Once again, humans are not purely cast as victims in the trilogy, and while Butler clearly marks Oankali behavior with colonialist tendencies, she also maintains those tendencies in human behavior.

Environmental disaster does not erase past discrimination based on race or gender and Butler seems to suggest that instead of humans banding together to save the planet, certain actions, such as colonization, cause racialized and gendered dividers to become even more explicit. As discussed earlier, the Oankali form relationships with nature that do not result in defined identities. However, the colonizing of women's bodies simply maintains a cycle already begun by humans and leads to reinforced systems of oppression. Critics like Melzer argue that "by destabilizing boundaries and shifting narrative perspectives, Butler challenges the legitimacy of positions of power" (Melzer 65). I agree with this argument (as seen in the earlier discussion). Yet in this instance, positions of power are highlighted with the introduction of a new colonizer: the Oankali.

So what does Butler want her readers to come away with? The previous chapters have discussed literature's transformative abilities, yet Butler's goals may not be readily apparent, as demonstrated by scholar's widely varying critiques of the trilogy. While Morrison and Ozeki offer clear counter narratives in response to oppressive environmental practices, Butler's is more complexly mediated. Through all of Butler's twists and turns, a number of ideas become clear. First, despite their more positive

understandings of nature, ultimately, the Oankali are flawed – they were not intended to be the antidote to human problems as discussed earlier. The relations between the Oankali and the humans challenge power positions but do not eliminate them. Second, narratives and hierarchies are shifted but new ones are created. Environmental disaster magnifies them and the Oankali participate in the discourse. The trilogy cannot be labeled utopian or dystopian. Instead it is a complex investigation of power structures and slippery nature.

What is consistent is Butler’s rejection of the “natural.” It is through a fluid concept of nature that Butler is able to destabilize scientific discourse, colonialist oppressions, and essentialist notions of race, sexuality, and reproduction that have all relied on “naturalized” knowledge and behaviors. She also demonstrates that if we always look to nature as something good, pure, and unchanging, then environmental narratives created by slave masters, transnational corporations, and gene trading aliens will go unquestioned, revealing the dangers of first wave ecocriticism’s constructions of nature. At the same time, Butler demonstrates similar caution when nature is seemingly sidelined in order to solve social problems.¹¹

¹¹ In another post apocalyptic Butler novel, *Parable of the Sower*, the United States of the future is in a state of near anarchy. Unemployment and poverty are rampant and environmental destruction has plagued much of the country, especially in terms of clean water which has become one of the most expensive commodities. The book begins in the midst of a presidential election and social improvements are the hot topics. One of the candidates has “a plan for putting people back to work. He hopes to get laws changed, suspend ‘overly restrictive’ minimum wage, environmental, and worker protection laws for those employers willing to take on homeless employees and provide them with training and adequate room and board.” But the novel’s main character, a young African American girl named Lauren, wonders what the true results of such a plan would be. For example, would it be legal “to poison mutilate, or infect people—as long as you provide them with food, water, and space to die?” (*Parable* 27). The poor are already suffering from the spread of disease in the South, where many are “illiterate, jobless, homeless, without decent sanitation or clean water. They have plenty of water down there, but a lot of it is polluted” (*Parable* 53).

In the name of helping people, environmental and worker protection laws are deemed too restrictive, which opens the door to environmental exploitation of people desperate for work. Here we see how Butler’s

Like Morrison and Ozeki, Butler demonstrates how environmental narratives are employed in order to further political agendas of colonialism, racial or ethnic superiority, and a privileging of scientific discourse over epistemological understanding. Butler takes this agenda and transfers it to an alien species—puts these narratives in the hands of a new colonizer—and the distance afforded by this transfer allows the reader to see these motives for what they are. Outside of its context, this agenda becomes more transparent, less muddled by everyday complexities, and the layers of rationalization are thus stripped away. By putting these ideas in the mouths of aliens, Butler is able to question what is human, what is natural, and thus arguments based on assumptions about the human and the natural cease to function, proving them false or invalid all along. This recontextualizing of oppressive environmental narratives in a post-earth world is her counter-narrative because it reveals the failures of the original narratives.

dismissal of the natural is not a dismissal of nature/environment and the consequences as a result of its destruction.

CONCLUSION

Patrick Murphy notes how “fiction is probably the terrain in which the least codification of a nature writing canon or mode of representation has occurred. Even so, traditional realism tends to be emphasized, in part due to an opposition to the philosophical implications of postmodernist forms and in part due to a penchant for seeing the fiction approximate the factuality of nonfiction nature writing. A major problem with such an orientation is its failure to acknowledge the popularity of different genre conventions across cultures and that ‘traditional realism’ is largely an Anglo-American invention of the nineteenth century” (32). Murphy’s observation summarizes one of the major problems faced in first-wave ecocriticism. By privileging universal, realist constructions of nature within fiction, ecocritics privileged Anglo-American genres/fictions. Literary depictions of “true” nature were actually the depictions limited to one cultural experience. Moreover, depictions of “true” nature often led to ideals of nature as “truth.”

William Cronon discusses how this notion of nature as truth pervades in many mainstream environmental movements, and how it leads to dangerous binaries associated with the “natural”:

Popular concern about the environment often implicitly appeals to a kind of naïve realism for its intellectual foundation, more or less assuming that we can pretty easily recognize nature when we see it and thereby make uncomplicated choices between natural things, which are good, and unnatural things, which are bad. Much of the moral authority that has

made environmentalism so compelling as a popular movement flows from its appeal to nature as a stable external source of nonhuman values against which human actions can be judged without much ambiguity. (26)

The novels discussed in this project, especially Butler's, reveal how "naturalizing" lends itself to dividing people, places, identities, and actions into "good" and "bad" categories. But, by deconstructing monolithic notions of nature and the natural, these categories crumble, and "If it now turns out that the nature to which we appeal as the source of our own values has in fact been contaminated or even invented by those values, this would seem to have serious implications for the moral and political authority people ascribe to their own environmental concerns" (Cronon 26).

Jennifer Heinert, in her studies of Toni Morrison's novels, recognizes how "claims to 'authenticity' and comprehensive reporting of human experience are problematic because, as multicultural critics and Morrison's own work shows, the 'truth' of any given novel, especially canonical novels, has been largely determined by the narrative conventions of the dominant culture" (76). When looking specifically at *Beloved*, Heinert argues that Morrison reconstructs the genre of slave narrative because, historically, "Most slave narratives...are not slaves' narratives. Rather, they are the dominant culture's edited versions of the narratives of enslaved African Americans, constructed for specific purposes and specific audiences in the dominant culture" (78). *Beloved* becomes a type of counter-slave narrative that does not represent the "truth," but instead explores the multilayered facets of slave's experiences. In the context of this dissertation, we see how *Beloved* challenges constructions of nature as well as genre. Chapter one discusses the privileging of realism by first wave ecocritics and how that led to a privileging of white

authors. Here, that critique is expanded as Murphy and Heinert point to dominant genres being accepted as more authentic than others, so a privileging of realism also results in a privileging of certain truths.

As discussed, Ozeki is suspicious of anyone's ability to tell the truth, and her novel is constructed in a way that defies simple categorization into one genre or another. Her discussions of environmental narratives are layered by faxes, memos, camera angles, and multiple points of view. Jane tells some of the story, Akiko tells some more, and other women's voice crop up throughout. Butler's use of aliens and a new generation of hybrid Oankali-human constructs definitely pushes boundaries of "reality" as she questions uses of the "natural." Together, these novels not only challenge constructions of nature, but also literary constructions that claim to be authentic.

But can this literary move be problematic for activist groups like ecofeminism and environmental justice? Does it lead us too far astray from the actual problems and the actual work? Specifically addressing environmental justice, Sze argues "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 movement. 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" (Sze 173). Because these links are multiple and complex, literature is well suited to tackle them in similarly complex ways. Without "boundaries of realism and temporality," literature can shed new light on environmental issues and offer imaginative and creative possibilities.

The chapters of this dissertation explore the oppressive practices as well as the imaginative and creative possibilities. “The Evolution and the Future of Ecocriticism” reviews the growth of ecocriticism as a literary field and the problems it faced with its mainly white composite. By privileging white authors, first wave ecocriticism relied on static, monolithic versions of a celebrated nature that ignored other cultural and ethnic understandings. As the other chapters demonstrate, unquestioned representations of a pervasively “good” nature is dangerous because when they are co-opted by oppressive environmental narratives, static understandings leave no room for questioning and such narratives go unchallenged. Therefore, ecocriticism, with the help of ecofeminism and environmental justice, must continue to include multiethnic literature and complex understandings of nonhuman nature.

“*Beloved* and African American Environmental Relationships” examines how white culture created oppressive environmental narratives in order to privilege whiteness and a white, traditional view of nature needing to be conquered and subdued. This resulted in a naturalizing of whiteness that rendered slaves to be “unnatural” savage beings there were also in need of domination. However, understandings of a fluid nature reveal inconsistencies in white framings of nature, and Baby Suggs’s revivals in the clearing turning that supposed negative space (unnatural, savage, animal, subhuman) into a positive space for healing fragmented African American environmental relationships.

“Corporate Greenwashing and Environmental Justice Narratives in Ruth Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats*” looks at how environmental narratives are used in order to privilege corporate power and profit, through a compartmentalized, controlled view of nature that relies on essentialized racial and gendered identities. The co-optation of environmental

language/rhetoric and images by corporations manages to greenwash their practices while manipulating consumer desires and consumptions. *My Year of Meats* illustrates how women, children, people of color, and the poor are being consumed by these narratives and gives voice to people who are injured by corporate practices. While Ozeki questions the ability to convey truths through media, she effectively demonstrates how media can be an important tool in creating transnational alliances and constructing environmental justice narratives.

And finally, “Rejecting the Natural in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy” examines the use of environmental narratives to further political agendas—anti-immigration rhetoric, colonialism, racial or ethnic superiority, privileging of scientific discourse over epistemological understanding. By taking these agendas and transferring them to a new species (the Oankali), Butler manages to immerse the trilogy in them while also creating distance which allows the reader to see these motives for what they are. Outside of its context, naturalizing narratives become more transparent, less muddled by everyday complexities. Butler is able to question essentialist notions of identity and arguments based on assumptions about the human and the natural cease to function, proving them false or invalid all along.

Each novel discussed takes on a different strain of oppressive environmental narrative that has been co-opted or apportioned for a specific agenda, be it racist, capitalist, or colonial. Through fiction, Morrison, Ozeki, and Butler are able to expose these narratives, to call attention to the damage wreaked by these narratives, and to produce counter-narratives which disrupt the idea that nature is a static monolith which can be looked to to justify an agenda and solidify an identity. All of these novels prove that

nature is not a stable foundation on which to rest an identity or power structure. Nature is too fluid, too changing, too complex—thus the oppressive narratives crumble when examined/exposed. By looking instead to this fluidity and inconsistency, women of color writers reclaim relationships with nature that challenge reductive and oppressive practices and allow for healing and transformation. The goal is not to replace one narrative with another. Instead, the goal is to find those spaces where multiple voices can be heard and multiple points of view and experiences can be shared and considered.

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Carol J. "The Feminist Traffic in Animals," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, Greta Gaard, ed. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993: 195-218.
- The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000.
- Adamson, Joni, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein. "Introduction: Environmental Justice Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy." *The Environmental Justice Reader* Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans and Rachel Stein, eds. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002: 3-14.
- Adamson, Joni and Scott Slovic. "The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism," *MELUS* 34.2 (Summer 2009): 5-24.
- Alaimo, Stacy. *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as a Feminist Space*. New York: Cornell UP, 2000.
- Ammons, Elizabeth. "Material Culture, Empire, and Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*," in *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*, ed. June Howard. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994, 81-99.
- Arnold, Jean, Lawrence Buell, Michael P. Cohen et al. "Forum on Literatures of the Environment." *PMLA* 114.5 (October 1999): 1089-1104.
- Biehl, Janet. *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991.
- Birkeland, Janis. "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, Greta Gaard, ed. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993: 13-59.

- Black, Shameem. "Fertile Cosmofeminism: Ruth L. Ozeki and Transnational
Reproduction," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 5.1 (2004): 226-56.
- Blum, Elizabeth D. "Power, Danger, and Control: Slave Women's Perceptions of
Wilderness in the Nineteenth Century" *Women's Studies* 31 (2002): 247-65.
- Branch, Michael P, Rochelle Johnson, Daniel Patterson, and Scott Slovic, eds. *Reading
the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment*. Moscow:
University of Idaho Press, 1998.
- Branch, Michael P. and Scott Slovic, eds. *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*.
Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the
Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard
University Press, 1995.
- *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary
Imagination*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Bullard, Robert D. *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics
of Pollution*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005.
- Butler, Octavia. *Lilith's Brood*. New York: Warner Books, 1989.
- Butler, Octavia, Marilyn Mehaffy, and AnaLouise Keating. "'Radio Imagination':
Octavia Butler on the Poetics of Narrative Embodiment," *MELUS* 26.1 (Spring
2001): 45-76.
- Campbell, SueEllen. "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-
Structuralism Meet." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*

- Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996: 124-36.
- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962.
- Chae, Youngsuk. *Politicizing Asian American Literature: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Chiu, Monica. *Filthy Fictions: Asian American Literature by Women*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004.
- “Postnational Globalization and (En)Gendered Meat Production in Ruth L. Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats*,” *LIT* 12 (2001): 99-128.
- Chozick, Amy. “Nolan Ryan Pitches Virtues of U.S. Beef to Dubious Japanese,” *Wall Street Journal* August 16 (2007): B1.
- Cohen, Michael P. “Blues in the Green: Ecocriticism under Critique.” *Environmental History* 9.1 (January 2004): 9-36.
- Crèvecoeur, J. Hector St. John de. *Letters from an American Farmer*. New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1904.
- Cronon, William. “Introduction: In Search of Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, William Cronon, ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995: 23-68.
- Daniels, Jean. “The Call of Baby Suggs in *Beloved*: Imagining Freedom in Resistance and Struggle,” *The Griot* 21.2 (Fall 2002): 1-7.
- Dixon, Melvin. *Ride Out the Wilderness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

- Evans, Mei Mei. "'Nature' and Environmental Justice," in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, & Pedagogy*, Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002: 181-193.
- Fish, Cheryl J. "The Toxic Body Politic: Ethnicity, Gender, and Corrective Eco-Justice in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* and Judith Helfand and Daniel Gold's *Blue Vinyl*," *MELUS* 34.2 (Summer 2009): 43-62.
- Gaard, Greta. "Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach," *Organization & Environment* 14.2 (2001): 157-72.
- Gaard, Greta and Patrick D. Murphy. "Introduction." *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998: 1-13.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Gerhardt, Christine. "The Greening of African-American Landscapes: Where Ecocriticism Meets Post-Colonial Theory," *Mississippi Quarterly* 55.4 (2002): 515-33.
- Gersdorf, Catrin and Sylvia Mayer. "Nature in literary and cultural studies: defining the subject of ecocriticism – an introduction," in *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations of Ecocriticism*, Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer, eds. Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2006: 9-24.
- Gifford, Terry. "Recent Critiques of Ecocriticism." *New Formations* 64 (Spring 2008): 15-24.
- Glave, Dianne D. "Rural African American Women, Gardening, and Progressive Reform in the South," in *"To Love the Wind and the Rain": African Americans and*

- Environmental History*, Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006, 37-50.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll. "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996: xv-xxxvii.
- Gosine, Andil. "Dying Planet, Deadly People: 'Race'-Sex Anxieties and Alternative Globalizations," *Social Justice* 32.4 (2005): 69-86.
- Grebozicz, Margaret. *SciFi in the Mind's Eye: Reading Science through Science Fiction*. Chicago: Open Court, 2007.
- Grewe-Volpp, Christa. "Octavia Butler and the Nature/Culture Divide: An Ecofeminist Approach to the *Xenogenesis*-Trilogy," in *Restoring the Connection to the Natural World: Essays on the African American Environmental Imagination*, Sylvia Mayer, ed. Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003: 149-74.
- Gruen, Lori. "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection Between Women and Animals," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, Greta Gaard, ed. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993: 60-90.
- Haraway, Donna. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Hayashi, Robert T. "Beyond Walden Pond: Asian American Literature and the Limits of Ecocriticism," in *Coming Into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*, Annie Merrill Ingram et al., eds. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007: 58-75.

- Härting, Heike. “‘Chokecherry Tree(s)’: Operative Modes of Metaphor in Toni Morrison’s ‘Beloved’,” *Ariel* 29.4 (October 1998): 23-52.
- Heinert, Jennifer Lee Jordan. *Narrative Conventions and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Heise, Ursula K. “Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies.” *American Literary History* 20.1/2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 381-404.
- “Greening English: Recent Introductions to Ecocriticism.” *Contemporary Literature* 43.2 (2006): 289-98.
- Holden, Rebecca J. “The High Costs of Cyborg Survival: Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* Trilogy,” *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* 72 (Spring 1988): 49-57.
- Iklis, Hugh H. “The Impossible Race: Population Growth and the Fallacies of Agricultural Hope,” in *The Fatal Harvest Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture*. Andrew Kimbrell, ed. Washington: Island Press, 2002.
- Ingram, Annie Merrill. “Telling News of the Tainted Land: Environmental Justice Fiction by Women,” in *Such News of the Land: U.S. Women Nature Writers*, Thomas S. Edwards and Elizabeth A. De Wolfe, eds. Hanover: UP of New England, 2001.
- Ingram, Annie Merrill, Ian Marshall, Daniel J. Philippon, and Adam W. Sweeting, eds. *Coming into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007.
- Jewett, Sarah Orne. *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. New York: New American Library, 2000.

- Kerridge, Richard and Neil Sammells, eds. *Writing and the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. London: Zed Books, 1998.
- King, Ynestra. "Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and Nature/Culture Dualism," in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, eds. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992: 115-44.
- Krech, Shepard. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999.
- Krumholz, Linda. "The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *African American Review* 26.3 (Autumn 1992): 395-408.
- Legler, Gretchen T. "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, Karren J. Warren, ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997: 227-38.
- Lionnet, Françoise, and Shiu-mei Shih. "Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally," in *Minor Transnationalism*, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds. Durham: Duke UP, 2005, 1-26.
- Love, Glen A. "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. Athens: University of Georgia Press: 225-40.
- McHugh, Susan. "Flora, Not Fauna: GM Culture and Agriculture," *Literature and Medicine* 26. 1 (Spring 2007): 25-54.
- Melzer, Patricia. *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction as Feminist Thought*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.
- Miller, Jim. "Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision," *Science Fiction Studies* 25.2 (July 1998): 336-60.

- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: NAL Penguin Inc., 1987.
- *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.
- *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Murphy, Patrick D. “‘The Women Are Speaking’: Contemporary Literature as Theoretical Critique,” in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998: 23-48.
- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1967.
- Norwood, Vera. *Made from This Earth: American Women and Nature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Ono, Yumiko. “U.S. Beef Group Raises Stakes in Japan,” *Wall Street Journal* April 11 (2002): A15.
- Oppermann, Serpil. “Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice.” *ISLE* 13.2 (June 2006): 103-28.
- Ozeki, Ruth L. “A Conversation with Ruth Ozeki,” in *My Year of Meats*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998: 6-14.
- *My Year of Meats*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.
- Palumbo-Liu, David. “Rational and Irrational Choices: Form, Affect, and Ethics,” in *Minor Transnationalism*, Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds. Durham: Duke UP, 2005, 41-72.
- Peach, Linden. *Toni Morrison*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000.

- Peppers, Cathy. "Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler's *Xenogenesis*," *Science Fiction Studies* 22.1 (March 1995): 47-62.
- Phillips, Dana. "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology." *New Literary History* 30.3 (1999): 577-602.
- Phillips, Dana. *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003.
- Potts, Stephen W. and Octavia E. Butler. "'We Keep Playing the Same Record': A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler," *Science Fiction Studies* 23.3 (November 1996): 331-38.
- Reed, T.V. "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism." *The Environmental Justice Reader* Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002: 145-62.
- Sanders, Scott Russell. "Speaking a Word for Nature." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. Athens: University of Georgia Press: 182-95.
- Sandilands, Catriona. *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Schiebinger, Londa. *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.
- Schwab, Gabriele. "Ethnographies of the Future: Personhood, Agency, and Power in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*," in *Accelerating Possession: Global Futures of Property and Personhood*, Bill Maurer and Gabriele Schwab, eds. New York: Columbia UP, 2006.

- Slocombe, Will. "Littered with meaning: the problem of sign pollution in postmodern, post-structuralist and ecocritical thought." *Textual Practice* 19.4 (2005): 493-508.
- Smith, Kimberly. *African American Environmental Thought*. Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 2007.
- Stein, Rachel. "Bodily Invasions: Gene Trading and Organ Theft in Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson's Speculative Fiction," in *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism*, Rachel Stein, ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004: 209-24.
- "Introduction" in *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism*, Rachel Stein, ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004: 1-20.
- *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' of Nature, Gender, and Race*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997.
- Stewart, Mart A. "Slavery and the Origins of African American Environmentalism," in *"To Love the Wind and the Rain": African Americans and Environmental History*, Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006, 9-36.
- Sturgeon, Noël. *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Sze, Julie. "Boundaries and Border Wars: DES, Technology, and Environmental Justice," *American Quarterly* 58.3 (September 2006): 791-814.
- "From Environmental Justice Literature to the Literature of Environmental Justice," in *The Environmental Justice Reader* Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans and Rachel Stein, eds. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002: 163-180.

- Tallmadge, John and Henry Harrington, eds. *Reading Under the Sign of Nature: New Essays in Ecocriticism*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000.
- Thoreau, Henry David. "Walking," in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*, Robert Finch and John Elder, eds. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002:180-205.
- "U.S. Meat Export Federation" www.usmef.org
- Vint, Sherryl. *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.
- Walker, Alice. "Am I Blue?" in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*, Robert Finch and John Elder, eds. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002: 863-66.
- Wallace, Kathleen R. and Karla Armbruster. "The Novels of Toni Morrison: 'Wild Wilderness Where There Was None,'" in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds. Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2001.
- White, Deborah Gray. *Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985.
- Zagarell, Sandra A. "Country's Portrayal of Community and the Exclusion of Difference" in *New Essays on The Country of the Pointed Firs*, ed. June Howard. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994, 39-60.
- Zaki, Hoda M. "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler," *Science Fiction Studies* 17.2 (July 1990): 239-51.
- Zapf, Hubert. "The state of ecocriticism and the function of literature as cultural ecology," in *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations of*

Ecocriticism, Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer, eds. Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V.,
2006: 49-70.