Beyond Urbanization: (Un)sustainable Geographies and Young People's Literature

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Dedication

To my teachers.
How lucky I am to learn from you.

Abstract

The Anthropocene is an epoch of ecocide. It is also a conceptual apparatus denoting the various systems of exploitation that produce this destruction. Of these systems, urbanization remains popularly celebrated as the ultimate and inevitable expression of global human society. Drawing on Raymond Williams' methodology for cultural analysis, this dissertation explores the values, assumptions, and ideas that constitute a structure of feeling within this urban moment as it is expressed in literature for young people. This study suggests that *distance*—social, cultural, geographic, and cognitive—is a principle element of this structure of feeling. In particular, this study attends to the ways that idealized representations of rurality inadvertently mask the ecological realities playing out in the geographies they purport to depict, thus socializing young readers into the same collective, unarticulated value system that uncritically celebrates urbanization as the future. However, more recent works of literature for young people have offered glimpses at an emergent structure of feeling predicated not on distance but on rural youth action for sustainability. Ultimately, this dissertation suggests that reflecting on deeply held assumptions about the geographical valences of human "progress" may be conducive to revealing possibilities for more plural, inclusive, and ecologically-attuned societies.

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It is difficult to undo our own damage,
and to recall to our presence
that which we have asked to leave.

—Annie Dillard, "Teaching a Stone to Talk"

Preface

I grew up with stories. There were, of course, *Arthur* and *The Magic Tree House* and *Harry Potter*—titles that defined childhood for me and so many others of my generation. There were other stories, too, ones that are uniquely my own. I grew up with stories from my mother, who told me about growing up on her family's farm near the English River: picking wild chives in early summer, hiding in the haymow, drinking the up-the-hill neighbors' homebrew. My father told stories, too: explanations for the horse rings on our barn, about the ritual of morning break for kolaches during shelling season, summers so hot the corn turned white. I loved these stories for the way they made me feel apart of something older and bigger than myself. Still, these stories did not reflect my actual experience growing up on our farm. By the time I was old enough to understand the stories as of a different era, the nature of farming had changed. No more horses, no more shelling corn, no more wild chives. There were tractors and baling hay and ringing hogs, and sometimes there was work with friends and neighbors, but I could sense that even these things, too, were on the middle of a profound transformation.

My ancestors came from Germany and likely also from Ireland. Family lore has it that some came from Italy—how else to explain why we do not burn in the summer? Wherever we're from, we are the kind of Americans who became white over the course of generations. We secured stability on land stolen from the Pottawatomie, Meskwaki, Sauc, Winnegebo, and others —some of the most fertile land on the face of the Earth. We acquired the land for cheap. The government desired for us to help feed a rapidly expanding nation, help turn it into a dynamo, a city on a hill, an empire. In the decades since, we have been told we are good farmers and citizens, and in return we have largely lost the stories that speak to our actual coming here, our coming to be.

Growing up, I apprenticed into this complex of stories as the heir apparent to them. I was taught to bucket feed across the ice in winter, how to feel the 856's shifter lever forward without grinding gears, how to sit on pickup tailgates and bullshit until the lightning bugs. I learned to praise farming and its labors. I did not learn, however, to question the masculinity, the spoken and unspoken racism, and the xenophobia, and the ways that industrial agriculture was systematically destroying the land on which we depended. I come from this, and as I work to articulate both who I am and who I wish to become, I return to these foundations and their harm to clench and grapple with them—to remember in order to unlearn.

I left the farm, and in the possibilities that emerged for me I felt both liberation and loss. In my undergraduate years, I tried to ignore these feelings by busying myself trying on other identities, hearing other stories. I became, at times, a rower, improviser, baker, researcher, cook, writer, traveler, teacher. I am grateful for all of these experiences and their lessons. But throughout those years, I struggled to shake the thought of the farm, which dogged me at peculiar moments: at parties with people who knew the words to songs and how to dress, at scholarship ceremonies, at author readings, beneath the pillars of the Old Capitol building, boarding a plane heading faraway. In these moments, I would feel myself going into myself, away from the lights or lectures or conversation, and back to the stories.

I continue to struggle to explain exactly what it meant to grow up on the farm, and I continue to struggle to explain exactly what it meant to leave. Certain tensions remain. The tensions I describe in the pages that follow, and the theories I read and brought to bear on them, are ones my family and community and so many others like it continue to live out. The tensions shape their days, their dreams, their bodies. To be able to distance myself from these tensions in order to articulate them on a clean page is a privilege. It is ironic, then, that this distance has become the main object of this dissertation's critique.

I have written this dissertation with a profound appreciation for the stories that shaped me—continue to shape me—and which I am unable to leave behind. They provide me with a link to both rurality and the past, and because I carry them with me here, in the city, they remind me of the importance of connections, processes, linkages, and futurity; that change is often nebulous and slow; of the merits of uncommon perspectives. The connections, processes, linkages, and futures I have sought to articulate in this dissertation are difficult to name. They slip easily out of mind, but the stories help bring them back into clearer focus.

In four years, this work has taken me far from home and to beautiful cities: Stockholm, Reykjavik, Seattle, Bozeman, San Antonio, Santiago. I promise you, for what it matters, that I feel, on my skin and in my bones, gratitude for these opportunities these cities provide. I feel gratitude for all the folks who have helped convince me that they are worth exploring. Those places where I have stood slack-jawed at the marvel of me being there—the experience has always, every time, been interrupted by an image: an open corn field just after harvest. In it, the sun is low and clear and burning faint orange-pink, the bite of a settling frost in the sun's last rays. There's bin fan roaring, the rattle of an auger. A space opens. A story works its incantations into me. I hope this work will do it right.

Chapter I: Distance

Going home is a pilgrimage to a changing landscape. Corn and soybean fields, once uniformly clean and clinical, now here and there sport a tangle of organic undergrowth. Solar panels and wind turbines gleam down the country miles. More and more rows of long, low, white hog confinements line the horizon, and the smell of the dust and manure clings to the humidity on calm summer days. The water table is low. Folks say that special, extended bits are needed to drill new wells deep enough. I am cautioned against drinking from outdoor hydrants. Still, there are other changes: the county paved the old nature trail and widened it for bikes. The Walmart closed and became a farm and home store. A Super Walmart opened on the other side of town. The new high school, which took nearly a decade of bond measures to fund, is becoming a familiar silhouette against the fields that border it to the west and south. The changes are felt at home, too. There are no more hogs or chickens or cattle on my family's farm, but the wooden shelters and posts and gates bleaching under the wide Iowa sky are relics to that by-gone labor. I return home, it seems, just often enough: often enough to feel the shock of these developments, but not so often that they coalesce into what some might call expected.

The story is well-worn in its many tellings by many others in many places. Once bustling rural communities, unable to keep apace with prevailing global socioeconomic winds, face an ultimatum: find a way to die with grace or capitulate and move to the city. The choice seems all too obvious. Why delay the inevitable? Why *not* leave rural life behind? Why *not* move away from all the corn pollen, hog dust, and flies? The world is urbanizing anyway.

Growing up, I learned contradictory responses to these questions. One response came from the stories my family and neighbors told me what farming had been like years and generations before. About which farm families that had moved to town. About farmhouses and barns that had collapsed and been buried beneath the dark earth—their bricks and stones and nails and broken beams surfacing, here and there, when the fields thaw in spring. These stories gave me the narratives needed to remain, as well as understand what remaining would entail. Other stories told me what it would mean to leave. Books, movies, music, TV, teachers, school, the

news—all suggested that the city would be vital if I were to realize my potential as a young person in the 21st century. Other stories still remain to be told, and I am only now beginning to learn them: of the prairie grasses and peoples that preceded my own family's coming, and the human and ecological violence rendered unto them.

Stories continue to fascinate me, in no small part because I am keenly aware of their power to shape the expectations we have for ourselves and the earth that we inhabit. The majority of stories I hear make rural America seem far removed from the city where I live now. They make the country[1] seem like a place to love when you're very little, survive for a time, leave as a young adult, and then forget. But I am learning to see these stories differently, realizing that they reveal less about rurality than they do about the pervasive, fundamental assumptions we have about ourselves and our futures. Regardless of where we live, our futures are defined by an ongoing global environmental catastrophe without apparent end, propelled by an increasing cognitive and geographic distance between us and the ecologies on which we rely.

I carry these stories with me, and I am moved by an intuition that we might look to the values and assumptions that underlie them in order to trace the movements that have shaped the course of my life and have transformed the landscape of Washington County. My aim is not so much to measure the actual ecological destruction that occurs in rural places like my own. Rather, my objective is to examine the complex system of values and assumptions that shape our collective experience and insist that we turn our attentions away from rural places. My sense is that these values are deeply felt, diffuse, and yet not so clear and discrete that they can be easily identified. Rather, they comprise a nebulous structure that finds expression in myriad cultural forms. I believe this structure is extensive enough, formative enough, to warrant our sustained attention.

The questions I have gradually learned to ask are cultural in nature: why is the city the assumed referent for most of what we—the so-called mainstream Western culture—think and do? What larger narratives frame this perception, what systems of value support it, and how are these

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[1] In this dissertation, I try to favor "rurality" over more connotatively laden terms like "country", though I do use synonyms when they help clarify meaning. See Williams (1980) for an etymology that demonstrates the nuances across these related terms.

values normalized through the stories we tell? Perhaps more importantly, what will come of the extractive relationship between the urban and the rural as we go deeper into a future shaped by anthropogenic climate change?

This chapter responds to these questions by way of hypothesis: that the ascendancy of an industrial, colonial, and extractivist global society to dominance in the Anthropocene coincides with the rise of a particular set of possibilities for experience that is best glimpsed through cultural products. This structure of feeling (Williams, 1961; 1977) uncritically champions urbanization and upholds a cognitive and geographic distance, which might otherwise be called alienation, between a broad, diverse public and the ecological destruction that plays out in rural geographies. I suggest that literature and media for young people is one of the key spaces where this structure of feeling can be identified through representations of rurality and urbanity that at once replicate and reshape cultural perceptions of the modes of being with the Earth available to us as material-embodied beings living in an era of unprecedented urbanization. Moreover, I insist that reevaluating rurality's place in our collective imagination is a productive starting point for moving beyond rural-urban dichotomies to consider values more worthy of our attention: action and solidarity across geographies that will be necessary to develop a sustainable global society. I will describe the object of this study more fully below. But first, I need to set the stage.

The Anthropocene

My own story, being one of many, is indicative of the social imperative toward, and cultural insistence on, urbanization that marks our precarious epoch. The changes in my community are merely local iterations of ecocidal global systems. In the grim business-as-usual scenario—which has been repeatedly confirmed to be the actual trajectory of the world's development since the Kyoto Protocol of 1992—global capitalism will continue to encourage the intensification of environmental domination and degradation (IPCC, 2014). Data from the NOAA indicates that ocean levels may rise by more than eight feet by the year 2100, uprooting untold human and nonhuman populations (Lindsey, 2020). The US-based National Academy of Sciences predicts that by 2070, nearly 30% of all species will become extinct (Román-Palacios & Wiens,

2020). NASA scientists argue that unchecked emissions will drive temperatures impossibly high for sustained human life in equatorial regions (Lacis et al., 2013). These changes, as the United Nations confirms, are often felt first and most profoundly by Indigenous peoples across the globe (United Nations, n.d.). Still, soon not even the most privileged and affluent settlers will be able to live without climate-related hardships. It is without exaggeration that these dangers should be seen as the defining challenge of our time (Kimmerer, 2013; Klein, 2014; McKibben, 2003).

The name for this moment is the Anthropocene—the era in which human-induced climate change has fundamentally and irreversibly altered Earth's environmental and geological systems (Crutzen, 2002, p. 23). The first stratigraphic indication of this transformation appears in the early 1600's CE, a little over a century after Columbus's arrival in the present day Caribbean that precipitated the deaths of over 50 million Indigenous people in a little over a century (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). Without human interaction with woodlands, 50 million acres of forest regrew across the Americas. The result was a measurable decline in atmospheric carbon, visible in the strata of the Earth itself, "an indexical mark of colonial violence upon Earth itself" (Simmons, 2019, p. 176).[2] Other violences followed: the introduction of the steam engine, the deployment of the first atomic weapons, and the Great Acceleration of economic activity across the globe (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). With this, the fate of global humanity and the biosphere was irrevocably tied to the actions of a few affluent Europeans.

The Anthropocene is both geological fact and a conceptual apparatus. As the latter, it must be flexible enough and big enough (Clifford, 2013, p. 8) to accommodate the myriad developments that have occurred within it while maintaining enough specificity to prevent it becoming a catch-all term for any or all "environmental effects and sensibilities" (Yussof, 2016, p. 7). "Anthropocene" is thus a term with teeth, as it indicates the myriad causes and conditions of our current crisis: the economic and political dominance of the global North and West, widening

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[2] Geologists continue to debate this date as the origin. The list of alternative dates includes the domestication of fire, the expansion of agriculture, the onset of industrialism, and the "Great Acceleration" of post-World War Two consumerism in the West (Lewis and Maslin, 2015). Geologists in favor of the 1600s origin note that these alternative beginnings are too globally and historically varied; the geological change must have global causes and impacts that can be seen at any geographical location in order to be rightly considered an epochal boundary.

socioeconomic inequality, rapid digitalization and automation of labor, alienation from the land and the non-human environment, colonialism, white supremacy, extractivist petrocapitalism, and unprecedented urbanization (Barry & Maslin, 2016). To highlight the interconnections between these systems, I use "Anthropocene" the way others use "modernity": as an overarching term to encompass the whole complex including—crucially, for my purposes—urbanization. But whereas "modernity" is largely temporal in its connotation, "Anthropocene" points both to our era *and* its material reality, including the existential threat that is global climate change.

Scientists and engineers have suggested solutions to the dangers of the Anthropocene. There are plans for atmospheric aerosols to block sunlight and space mirrors to redirect it, floating kelp forests to supply biofuel, direct air capture, ocean desalination, enhanced chemical fertilizers, even more robust crops (see Buck, 2019; Mann, 2018). These solutions are promising in the short term, but they rely on the assumption that human expansionism can continue unabated and that Western technology is the best possible tool available to ensure this. They take it for granted that we, affluent societies, can continue to extract and consume, if only in smarter, more efficient, and perhaps more egalitarian ways. Inadvertently, technofixes communicate that we do not need to radically change the way we currently live, nor do they force us to reckon with our sense of entitlement and presumed superiority over other beings (Bonneuil, Fressoz, & Fernbach, 2016). Technofixes assure us that we may continue to look where we have been looking and to go where we have been going—to extract, build, consume, and urbanize. This attention on the urban obscures other possibilities for interacting with the world that are latent in our history and could possibly shape our future.

My point is that the Anthropocene produces particular social systems that allow for particular modes of engagement and disengagement with the biosphere. Some, as I have noted, are social: the geographies of our lives. Others are cultural: systems of value, assumption, and expectation that can be represented culturally. These representations, in turn, shape human imagination about how we may be in the world. But for all the possibilities that might be imagined, ours has largely been singular: the city.

Stories of Urbanization

The Anthropocene is an epoch of urbanization.[3] In the West, the city is the assumed, if not explicit, referent for all of our actions and imaginations (Ching & Creed, 1997; Jahren 2020). This fixation shapes the physical geographies of our daily life and the imaginary geographies that shape our relationship with and perception of the natural world—especially in obscuring our destruction of it. My aim here is to briefly sketch a history of this attention, and I hope to contextualize our current urban moment within the long history of human agglomeration.[4] I prefer *agglomeration* (at least here, at the outset of my argument) over more specific and fraught terms like farm, settlement, village, town, and city, which cloud the complexity and dynamism of actual human sociogeographical development. For example, under Woolf's (2020) definition, village and city are defined by the relative complexity of their respective social relationships, *not* by their population density. By this metric, Neolithic villages in Mesopotamia may have been larger in size and population than the cities that eventually developed in the same river valley (p. 18)—a fact that upends modern connotations of either term.

The long history of agglomeration is also the history of human interaction with the environment. It is a complex, technological history. Ancient humans first lived in small mobile bands, moving seasonally with the availability of game and forage for sustenance (Fernández-Götz & Krausse, 2017). These nomadic lifestyles did not preclude large gatherings. Archeological records indicate that in many instances nomadic peoples would gather for extended periods in order to worship and to construct monuments such as Stonehenge and Göbekli Tepe—monuments that celebrated a burgeoning collective social identity (Almagro-Gorbea, 2017). Religion's essential role in early agglomerative processes begs a reconsideration of our modern assumptions about the necessary and central relationships between urbanity, residence, and political life. In reality, cities have many origins (Woolf, 2020).

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[3] Some scholars have proposed "Urbanoscene" as an alternative title for our epoch. Although my argument shares their attention to urbanization as a principal development of our time, I opt for the more general "Anthropocene" in deference to the already established body of work using the term (cf Mendieta, 2019).
[4] I use "agglomeration" to refer to any human gathering of any size beyond the family unit and for any duration.

Granted, political systems did emerge central to the formation of many human societies. Within these societies, the development of agricultural systems proved vital.[5] Roughly 10,000 years ago, humans began domesticating plants and animals at sites across the globe, allowing increasingly large human populations to survive at a single locale all year round (Lord, 2014). This new agglomerative mode—sedentarism—required decisions to be made about the distribution and storage of surplus resources, the organization of labor to fulfill distinct seasonal demands, and regulation of relationships to ensure the continued cohesion of the community (Woolf, 2020). As a "new technology of power," agrarian sedentarism enabled possibilities for more centralized social structures, as well as social stratification (Müeller, 2017)—a phenomenon almost unknown in pre-neolithic societies (Kane, 1992)—making inequality both a prerogative and result of human social organization.[6]

The political developments of sedentary societies were prerequisite for further agglomerative possibilities. Unlike the popular historical image of the rural enclave developing into a village, into a town, and into a city—each with increasingly differentiated labor and cultural practices—the actual possibilities were far more varied and dynamic. For instance, societies with efficient transportation networks could develop lightly populated agglomerations spread out over a great area (Müeller, 2017), such as the Mayan megalopolis in what is today Guatemala (Canuto et al., 2018); those in environments that made transportation difficult built more densely populated agglomerations that rose vertically over a smaller geography, such as Tiwanaku in the Andes (Kolata, 1993). Some agglomerations, like Göbekli Tepe, emerged around burial sites that predated the onset of agriculture while others formed around political institutions like the agora (Schmidt, 2001). And not all agglomerations were necessarily agricultural. Indigenous peoples to the Pacific Northwest sustained themselves for an entire year on what could be caught during annual salmon runs (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 25). With a large enough population and surplus resources, sedentary societies invented new labor activities. Brewing,

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[5] Agriculture needs to be taken broadly to connote a formal system of managing and harvesting natural resources. At the time of contact, Native American farms looked far different from European farms—a fact Europeans capitalized on to diminish the social and cultural value of Native peoples (see Isenberg, 2017; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).
[6] These societies remained cohesive insofar as members were nearly uniformly engaged in agriculture.

weaving, shipbuilding, pottery, smelting, and architecture were all reflections of local climate and environment that further organized agglomerations not just by the ruler-and-ruled principle, but by occupation.[7] By 500 BCE, cities had emerged in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe. Ever since then, urbanization has been an ongoing global project, shaping rural agglomerations as much as it has urban ones (Brenner, 2019). It can rightly be said, then, that humans, regardless of their geographies, have been urbanizing for a long time—much of which, until the arrival of global capitalism, has been sustainable.

Urbanization prior to capitalism was eclectic. Two key aspects of human agglomerations illuminate this. First, agglomerations *develop*. They are complex, "interactive organisms" (Fernández-Götz & Krausse, 2017, p. 11) that become more or less populous, centralized, and stratified as community mores and environmental constraints demand. Cities wax and wane. Take the case of ancient Babylon (cf Mann, 2018, pp. 226-9; Wertime, 1983). For centuries, Mesopotamia supported lightly populated agricultural settlements that stretched far up and down the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates. Over time, the irrigation systems carried water further and further from the rivers in support of more intensive agriculture and dense urban clusters. Cities grew. But soon, stagnant water evaporated in the canals, salivating the fields they were meant to hydrate. With poorer harvests, city populations dwindled and dispersed.

While cities might depopulate for long stretches of time, they may also be repopulated by altogether different cultures. Rome, for example, experienced centuries during which its classical temples served as barns and stables before it eventually reurbanized (Greenblatt, 2011). Other cities, like the Olmec's San Lorenzo or the Mound Builders' Cahokia (Mann, 2005) might be abandoned completely. One implication of these findings is that the common understanding of urbanization as a linear, inevitable, and permanent progression toward bigger cities belies the actual dynamism of human sociogeographical history. Better, in my mind, to see urbanization as a tide, ebbing and flowing against the history of individual societies.

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[7] Other means of organization and control fall on constructed sexual, gender, racial, and religious lines.

Agglomerations also *interrelate*. They are contact zones that enable the flow of goods, ideas, peoples, diseases, and stories, all of which, in turn, shape their organizations. For instance, the European colonization of the Americas sparked new and devastating possibilities for these relationships (cf Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) predicated on increasingly extractivist global economies[8] that fueled the expansion of empires far beyond what their native geographies could support (Bonneuil, Fressoz, & Fernbach, 2016). The relatively small islands that make up Great Britain could never have supported the rapid growth and industrialization of its cities without first externalizing resource extraction to far away locales (Hornborg, 2013). Nor could they expand without chattel slavery. The energy required to perform this extraction was provided by, at once, enslaved human labor—a relationship governed by what ought to be referred to as the technology of racism and, specifically, white supremacy (Painter, 2010)—and by enslaved or "cheap" nature (Moore, 2016). Managing the intensifying global trade in resources and human labor required different systems of economic organization and social control all of which gave rise to a system called capitalism (Moore, 2016).

A defining moment in the history of human agglomeration began in the 17th century, when globalization of capitalist economies transformed urbanization processes first in Europe and then across the world. Increased labor and resources entering European markets enabled an ascendent industrial economy, simplified once diverse class relations, and exacerbated the division between extractivist rural and manufacturist urban areas (Marx & Engels, 1848). Many mechanisms drove the capitalist transformation, including the politics and ideologies of confinement that privatized land and resources, stripped local communities of control over their immediate environs, and outsourced control to centralized managers (Foster, 2000). As manufacturing capacity grew, so too did the demand for fuel and other resources. Resource extraction intensified, helped along by advances in extraction technology and a demand for efficiency. Globally, extraction, production, and consumption became distinct and opaque processes removed from what had previously been a largely sustainable social metabolism (cf.

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[8] Bauman (1992) argues that the world has always been global. My use of globalization here refers to the era that emerged following the colonization of the Americas—a globalization that, due to its degree and scale, should (in my mind) be considered categorically distinct from pre-contact globalization.

Marx, 1894; González de Molina & Toledo, 2014)—the flow of goods and resources from one area to another. Capitalism severed this traditional relationship, offering immediate financial incentives for those who were able to produce and consume at the greatest rate.

While capitalism enabled new possibilities for urbanization, these possibilities mostly manifest as the expansion of city size and affluence. Increasingly diminished, however, were the possibilities for diversity of agglomeration structure. Cities' heterogeneity prior to the Anthropocene—evidenced by historical cities known for distinct industries or monuments—gave way to increasing homogeneity (Harvey, 2016). This, coupled with capitalism's oppressive cultural logics that sabotage human capacity to imagine and form diverse systems (Haiven, 2014), standardized agglomerative formations for the sake of productive and consumptive efficiency.[9] This also profoundly increased the distance between urban dwellers and the ecosystems that supplied their food, fuel, and other materials for daily living. Owing to these agglomerative organizations, urbanization under capitalism developed with an unprecedentedly rapid and increasingly accepted pace.

Urbanization is fed, now as it always has, through socioeconomic processes in the countryside. Today, however, as urbanization continues to globalize, rural areas are becoming increasingly "operationalized" to serve specific socioeconomic needs of a global urbanity (Brenner & Schmidt, 2017). The rows and rows of hog confinements I see in my home community are testament to this specialization. Even in the mid-1990's, pork production in Iowa was so intensive and economically efficient that it was less costly for Taiwanese distributors to ship Iowa pork across the Pacific than it was to produce pork domestically (Thu, 1995). Other locales have their own geographically specific "specialities," which are often imposed on already marginalized communities. Examples include palm monocrop cultures in Central America which destroy the rainforest and push out its Indigenous inhabitants (Mingorría et al., 2014), waste storage facilities and polluting manufacturing centers in Black communities in the American South (Bullard, 2005), dams that flood out ancestral villages in India (Roy, 1998), and prisons in

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[9] Interstates, shopping malls, and suburban housing developments testify to this impulse.

low-income and job-starved communities around the world (Eaton, 2019). Outsourcing undesirable industries to rural sites, locally and globally, is the form of "slow violence" (Nixon, 2011) that frames environmental degradation as an inevitable price of growth—the kind of growth that privileges affluent, mostly urban areas in the Global North and West.

Although urbanization is a particular social technology that allows individuals to engage in activities beyond mere subsistence, cities are one of the many possible iterations of this technology. While agriculture enabled the development of more complex and densely populated social structures, it did not necessitate them. Given this range of potential agglomerations, the current fixation on the city is arbitrary, but it is not random. Cultural celebrations of the city have nearly as long a history as cities themselves, and these celebrations are ubiquitous—specifically, in the Western literary tradition, the tradition in which I was raised. The world's oldest recorded narrative, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, thematizes the tension between the undomesticated wild and the comparatively civilized city of Uruk. In Greek, the urban *polis* was held in contradiction from rural *idiṓtēs* who stood apart from—and, thus, in opposition to—the urban collective, a division that reflects both modern and contemporaneous connotations with either term (Ching & Creed, 1997, p. 8). Eratosthenes, for example, sought to classify humans based on whether or not they were city dwellers or barbarians. Later on, the Latin word *urbs* came to signify both the city and *the City*: imperial Rome (Williams, 2015, p. 22). The conflation between city and nation eventually subsumed additional meanings pertaining to an individual's manner or sophistication: to be *urbane* was to be a city dweller, to be refined, and to be a citizen (cf Theobald, 1997). While this urban bias has not gone unchallenged, it does indicate a longstanding and prevailing cultural assumption that cities are *the* desirable social structure and the inevitable result of linear progress out of the countryside. It is ironic that the technologies agriculture enabled, such as literature, were often mobilized to celebrate the city over its outlying areas.

Today, urbanization is the fact of our time beyond which it is difficult to imagine. While this dissertation will address the social, cultural, and environmental consequences of this bias, I want here to note a few epistemological repercussions. One consequence of this bias that it is easy to regard urbanity as a disconnected, independent monolith rather than an agglomeration that

myriad social processes and environmental pressures constantly produce.[10] For this reason, I use "urbanization" ranger than "urban" to reflect the actual dynamism of human geography. Without this reframing, rurality is also cordoned off to produce a dichotomy that obscures the complexity of historical and dynamic processes that shape all kinds of human social structures. This masking has also stymied scholarship, which has tended to regard rurality as either demographic/ geographic/concrete or discursive/ideological/abstract (Halfacree, 1993; Massey, 1992; Pratt, 1996). While feminist, queer, and Indigenous scholars offer more holistic and intersectional approaches (Pini, Moletsane, & Miller, 2014; Seawright, 2014), geographic reductionism persists in many institutional definitions including the U.S. Census Bureau and Department of Agriculture.

Without the above context, demographic shifts over the past several hundred years would suggest that the city is our future and that this future has very nearly arrived. After all, the United States became majority urban in 1920, (United States Summary, 2010) as did the global population in 2008 (United Nations, 2019). The United Nations (2012) predicts that by the year 2050, over two-thirds of all humans will be city-dwellers. Despite this urban explosion, there is no historical basis for assuming that the current, global urbanizing tendency will sustain either itself as an agglomeration or life on the planet. But there is abundant evidence to show that urbanization will remain central to the geographies of our imagination.

Young People and Their Literature

Urbanization defines the Anthropocene. Physically, urbanization processes have shaped and continue to shape the material geographies of our world. But urbanization also, as I have already claimed, shapes our understanding of the world regardless of where we find ourselves. Key to my argument is that particular literary representations have developed in tandem with urbanization—and vice versa. Both arenas—society and culture—should be considered processes capable of "the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure" on the other (Williams, 1980, p. 34).

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[10] I will explore this social metabolic process, as well as its implications for cultural representations of rurality, in Chapter Four.

From this theoretical framework, literature and the material processes of cultural production enable both imagining and realizing possibilities of interacting with the Earth. These possibilities are inherently ideological in the sense that they can be perceived as deviant and dangerous, or safe and normal (cf Eagleton, 1991; Andersen, 2011). They are also thoroughly shaped by our hopes for the future. As such, given its focus on growth, development, and transformation, literature for young people is particularly useful in examining the ways that representations of rurality and urbanity reproduce and reimagine cultural perceptions of human relationships with the earth.

Young people's literature and its scholarship are ideological projects, too. This is apparent in one of the longest standing debates within children's literature scholarship, which has concerned an appropriate name for the cultural form with which it works (Hunt, 2011; Grubar, 2011b). The current and most popular term is "children's literature," though this is often qualified to include "and young adult literature." Both terms have histories of augmentation and nuance indicative of the field's attempt to move away from terms with connotations that infantilize and trivialize young people's literature, which render it less complex and less important than literature intended primarily for adults (Clark, 2003). So, throughout this project, in the spirit of both valorization and inclusivity, I use "young people's literature" to refer to any text intended for young audiences.

Young people's literature is a broad cultural form defined in large part by its intended audience (cf. Hintz, 2020; Grubar, 2011a). For some, this intentionality manifests in the particular modes of address that distinguish narratives for young people apart from those for adults (Wall, 1991; Knoepflmacher & Myers, 1997). What exactly these modes of address are is difficult to pin down. They may include, for example, common themes like the exploration of justice (Oziewicz, 2015), a text's degree of didacticism (Nodelman, 1998), or—importantly—the developmental cognitive and cultural needs of young people as they begin to practice various literacies. These needs, in turn, define particular formats. The stark colors and simple illustrations of boardbooks are specifically designed to allow infants and toddlers to distinguish objects on the page (Hughes-Hassell and Cox, 2010). Chapter books are structured around short textual segments, often

illustrated, on topics that appeal to early grade audiences, but are different—in complexity, themes and artistic excellence—from the unique format of young people's literature called a picturebook. Young adult novels are written with as much literary complexity as novels meant for adults but are thematically distinct in their attention to adolescent identity development (Bachedler et al., 1980). Of course, the attention to young people's developmental needs does not mean that literature for young people is read only by young people, nor does it mean that young people do not also read literature for adults. The "fuzziness" of the field's boundary allows for an inclusivity that permits engagement with a vast range of texts united by their collective attention to an audience of a specific age. When taken in its entirety, this broad field contains a vast array of literary representations that instruct readers on how to be a young person—and, specifically, how to be a young person in relationship with the natural world in the Anthropocene.

Children's literature as a cultural form developed in tandem with childhood as a sociocultural category. Reconstructing this category is difficult for several reasons including a lack of evidence of historical childhoods (cf Hintz, 2020), the methodological challenge of reconstructing the living values that once filled the category with meaning (Williams, 1961, p. 66), and the danger of essentializing or universalizing childhood across time and place (cf Grove & Lancy, 2018). Still, scholars argue that what anthropological evidence is available[11] nonetheless allows analysts to assume that children, across all cultures, were granted some degree of "social, political, and economic competence" (Crawford, Hadley, and Shepherd, 2018, p. 8). This competence needs to be understood in its sociohistorical context. Ancient Sumerians considered childhood to be merely an apprenticeship to adulthood, ideally achievable through material prosperity (Adams, 1986). Early European literature, by contrast, was not so much for children but *of* children in the sense that it provided young people with the literary content they would need to know in adulthood (Hintz, 2020; Levy & Mendlesohn, 2016). The overt didacticism of these early texts suggests a perception of childhood as an "open" category that needed shaping into a socioculturally appropriate adulthood.

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[11] The majority of this evidence is Eurocentric.

What and how young people read is also historically and culturally contingent. To a large degree, this has been shaped by adult projections of a child's projected social role. The sons of Roman patricians, for example, would have been taught to read by reciting Homer—a staple for any civically engaged citizen (Levy & Mendlesohn, 2016). Children of European farmers and laborers, until the institutionalization of universal childhood education following the Enlightenment, would have at least been exposed to stories intended for them (Kaestle, 1985), though for much of human history these stories would have been oral (Lerer, 2009). In the past two centuries, however, young people's access to literacy expanded to include more children than those born to the elite and clerical classes. The gradual and still incomplete passage of child labor laws and compulsory education has increased literacy rates globally from an estimated 14% in 1820 to 83% by 2012, albeit with continued gender, ethnic, and regional disparities (van Leeuwen & van Leeuwen-Li, 2014). Coinciding with these educational developments were technological ones. Improvements in the printing press, ink, and paper making helped to make literature for young people increasingly affordable and mass-producible (Hinke, 2020, p. 54). In the American context, school primers became an essential pedagogical resource for an imperialist, westward-marching educational system. Overwhelmingly, as this dissertation's bibliography will attest, these texts have been produced in cities.

Linking literacy to social mobility was one of the great promises of the Enlightenment, when theories of secular liberalism sought to reimagine essentialist human categories predicated on class (Graff, 1979). In this new paradigm, children were held to be born into the world not within a particular hereditary caste, but as a Lockean *tabula rasa* that could be shaped independently of historical or genetic processes. The presumed universality of this freedom was belied, however, by its withholding from the non-white majority of the world's population. At least in theory, Enlightenment pedagogues deemed children to be essentially innocent and pure, and while this belief saved some children from abuse and toil, it also limited the agency that adults were willing to grant to them. The lack of autonomy that followed from this perspective

would continue to inform the didacticism of young people's literature even as it lost its overtly religious orientation.[12]

The Enlightenment attention to innocence found, and still finds, expression in three conceptual areas: childhood, nature, and metaphors for human evolution. The innocent child of the Romantic era was creatively open to the world and its pleasures, whereas the Victorian childhood innocence became something more akin to ignorance (Wesseling, 2017). The same trajectory is evident in concepts of nature: at first a force for genius and generativity, eventually a wild place meant to be domesticated, cultivated, and made productive (Williams, 1961; Isenberg, 2017). When these are applied as metaphors of humanity's evolution from the "darkness" of wilderness to the "light" of civilization, their colonial and dominating potential becomes especially apparent (Kidd, 1995).[13] These continue to impact conceptualizations of the geography of childhoods, such as the moral, political, and educational desirability of a rural childhood spent in nature. Indeed, the various values associated with the child throughout history—wild, unformed, uncivilized, etc.—map with strange neatness onto constructions of rurality.[14]

Despite attempts to grant children agency and to understand childhood as a category with its own affordances,[15] both categories remain subservient to that of the adult. Adult desires dominate literature for young people in what scholars see as the literature's prevailing paradox (Hintz, 2020): the desire to end childhood innocence so that children may become adults coupled with a desire to preserve that innocence so that children are protected from inequity and violence (Natov, 2003).[16] Often, this paradox finds resolution when creators err on the side of innocence, a move that tends to obscure both the ideological content of the literature and the ways that ideology shapes the material processes of its production. The consequences of this are manifest. Scholars have pointed out that literature for young people is complicit in maintaining white supremacy (Bernstein, 2011; Nel, 2017; Thomas, 2019); colonization (Reese, 2013; Kohl, 1995), and heteropatriarchy (Clasen & Hassel, 2017). The innocence also negates childhood sexuality

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[12] The ways this innocence is commodified as nostalgia via the pastoral is the subject of Chapter Three.
[13] These three concepts are often racialized in children's literature
[14] I develop this claim further in Chapter Three
[15] See Hunt's (1991) argument for reading literature for young people with a "childist" perspective.
[16] For one critique of this, see Asim, 2014.

(Rose, 1984) and political agency (Reynolds, 2007), rendering young people inert social actors until the adult-determined appropriate moment. In recent years, innocence is also constructed as an obliviousness to the perils of climate change (Echterling, 2016). I will contest this construction this in this dissertation, but I will also add suggest that innocence is also constructed geographically. By and large, adulthood is only achievable for rural youth who migrate to the city and forgo their innocent, "naive" rural knowledge for a more mature, urban experience (Heldke, 2006). In this, I join child advocates who argue that projections of innocence are not only "potentially damaging to the wellbeing of actual young people" (Grubar, 2011b, p. 122), but that they also limit the potential for this literature to be mobilized as a site for social critique (Reynolds, 2007). With the urgency of the climate crisis intensifying, a continued insistence on imagining children as nonactors and presumably nonvictims of climate change constrains the potential for solutions.

The seemingly innocuous nature of children's literature is what makes it invaluable material for analyzing the ideological underpinnings of human relationships with the natural world. In fact, I argue that the tendency to view children's literature as ahistorical and apolitical is exactly what makes it all the more dangerous and revealing (McCallum and Stephens, 2011). As Sánchez-Eppler suggests (2011), "perhaps it is because childhood simultaneously roots itself in both biological and ideological ground that it proves so potent a means of naturalizing cultural formations" (p. 36). The tension between recognizing the developmental needs of the "child-now" and the responsible social actor and soon-to-be-adult allows the content of young people's literature to be read as a sort of temporal triptych (Hollindale, 1997). As it is informed by the historical traditions of literary conventions and as it responds to current sociopolitical mores, young people's literature reveals pervasive beliefs, both author's individual and their society's collective, in an urban future (Stephens, 1992).

Literature for young people remains didactic in the sense that it continues to convey social, political, and ecological expectations, including the expectation that an individual will grow to realize their potential for manipulating the environment as part of a globalized labor force (Cervone, 2017a). This manipulation occurs at sites of both extraction and consumption, though

depictions of the latter are likely to obscure extraction's consequences for the sites where it occurs. Extractivist ideologies can even mask these consequences of explicitly environmentalists texts. Marshall's (1997) anecdote about reading *The Lorax* with his toddler is a case in point. For the infant reader, the stark environmental cautionary tale had nearly no significance—the only worthy parts of the picturebook are those that involve the spectacular, powerful, tree-chopping machinery of the Super-Axe-Hacker.[17]

In my mind, this young reader's misaligned attention is neither the failure of *The Lorax* nor the young reader. Rather, the reader's focus on destruction is indicative of an extractivist, industrial fetishism that is passed on early and often to young people as yet another expectation in the Anthropocene sidelines other ecocentric possibilities. When these representations and expectations are read through a rural lens, they coalesce around even more specific and revealing expressions. These expressions run the gambit from the pastoral innocence of early childhood that depoliticizes both child and nature to the racist, homophobic backwaters of young adult novels that craft rural places into sites of monolithic depravity and danger. Rurality bristles with contradictions: nostalgia and utopia, rejuvenation and destruction, bounty and waste, extraction and sustainability. Stories emerging from these contradictions nevertheless posit a trajectory for their characters: from innocence to corruption, from private to political life, from family to society, from ignorance to education, and—importantly—from rural to urban. Inherently metrocentric, these narratives expect young people to mature into a specific kind of adult—an urban one. The task of literature, in this framework, is to instruct young audiences on who, where, and how they are meant to be (Hinke, 2020). It is in this sense that young people's literature may be the literary form that best reveals the deep sense of an urban future that we, as a human community, feel in ways that defy easy articulation.

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[17] The class and gender dimensions to this will be further explored in Chapter Three.

Structures of Feeling

The Anthropocene is the manifestation of many interconnected social and cultural systems, including urbanization. These systems are social in that they are predicated on actual geographies, infrastructures, and labor relations; cultural in that they are also systems of representation and meaning. And yet these are also distinct from a *structure of feeling,* the relatively stable system of values, ideas, desires, and expectations that comprises a lived, collective sense of a society. As Williams put it,

> [A structure of feeling] is a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or period…. [Structures of feeling] are from the beginning to be taken as social experience, rather than as 'personal' experience or as the merely superficial or incidental 'small change' of society (1977, p. 131).

Williams' own work illustrates this definition well. In *The Country and the City* (1973), Williams explains how British ideas about rurality have come to have little bearing on the actual realities of rural life. Though these ideas may perhaps once had some correspondence to lived experience, Williams found that they had gradually become untethered from that experience to exist almost exclusively in the realm of culture. There was a lag, of sorts, between rural life and its depictions, and between the outdated expressions and the real social structures that underlie them is a structure of feeling, lived and felt by actual human beings.

Williams understood structures of feeling to be social and extensive in that we live within totalizing, global systems that impact all of our lives, even if unequally. For example, capitalism disenfranchises workers across the world *including* those who do not directly participate in capitalist economies. The systems that have given rise to the Anthropocene are common denominators for our collective experience—a single system, as complex as it is, can and does connect experiences across difference to a common base. Still, although a structure of feeling may be extensive, it is not universal. I hold that it is also responsive to the particularities of individual positionalities. By this, I mean that a "particular quality of social experience" also depends "on longer histories of articulation" between our identities and those social structures

(Ahmed, 2014, p. 2-3). As such, when I refer to the structure of feeling, I mean the experiences that extend *across* positionalities. In the same way that capitalism—a single system— produces diverse experiences, so too does urbanization result in a system of values, ideas, desires, and expectations that are commonly felt if not uniformly experienced.

Other affect theorists are helpful in conceptualizing a more flexible structure of feeling. Williams' description of a structure of feeling being a kind of interface between social systems and cultural expression parallels Massumi's definition of affect as a "way of talking about that margin of maneuverability, the 'where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do' in every present situation (2015, p. 2). Granted, there are obvious and immediate contrasts. Williams' focus is firstly on the social, cultural, and historical; Massumi's attention is firstly on the individual, embodied, and relational. Yet, both theorists emphasize the fact that human capacity to *experience* is inevitably constrained by particular systems beyond individual control. Insofar as systems are sociohistorical situated, both would agree that one's positionality shapes, in part, their affective relationship with the world—and, by extension, their individual sense of a more pervasive structure of feeling. The Anthropocene, in that it is a global and both social and cultural, is the foundation of our collective experience.

Structures of feeling, as a concept, as first developed to help Williams examine how historical structures lived on, unspoken, in the present. Showcasing the complexity of this structure requires an extraordinary array of social and cultural data—indeed, evidence from "all the elements in the general organization" of a society (Williams, 1961, p. 69). Today, this evidence would involve excerpts from local newspapers, national newspapers, journal entries, books, films, webcomics, TikToks, Twitch streams, Tweets—but even this wealth of cultural material would not be enough to entirely replicate the lived sense of this era. It is ever only an approximation. For this reason, Williams held that the arts of an era were of major importance for analysis. Literature, in particular, is vital, because literature—more so than any other cultural mode—is able to represent the movement of experience through the complexities of narrative. *The Country and the City* focuses on English literature for just this purpose—to examine changes in meanings, forms, tones, and styles to get a sense of the lived anxieties about industrial

development in England. This affordance, of course, does not give literature any sort of deterministic primacy in shaping the world; instead, I see literature as Williams did, as a specific cultural mode that mediates human thought and social activity. While there are ample debates about the appropriateness of this description, I find it less important to wade into these issues as I do simply to posit that culture and society dynamically shape one another.

Herein lies the importance of articulating a structure of feeling. Doing so allows for an analysis of our deeply embedded assumptions and values that obscure other possibilities for being with the world. In the Anthropocene, these alternative social and cultural structures may indeed be those that are more conducive to sustainability. Thus, analyses of a structure of feeling can reveal both the values that hinder movement toward justice as well as reveal hints at the deep, sweeping transformations that Williams called the "long revolution" toward true social and ecological justice. The measure of this change can be taken through the movements of different structures of feeling within a single society. A *dominant* structure of feeling is that which is most powerful and, often, least visible in its hegemony. In the Anthropocene, in the West, distance is dominant. This dominant structure may either be at odds with or supported by a *residual* structure —meanings and values that were once dominant in but have become abstracted from the society they corresponded to. In the United States, as I will show in Chapters Two and Three, this residual structure is an agrarian sensibility that celebrates an idealized, harmonious engagement with the biosphere. In these cases, as Williams theorizes occurs in principle, the dominant and residual will always be at odds with more *emergent* structures that seek to supplant them. Anti-capitalist movements in the United States have played this role historically but have almost always been assimilated into the same dominant structures they sought to overturn. The countercultural movement of the 1960's and 70's, for instance, failed at its attempted revolution because it was commodified by a consumerist juggernaut of mainstream, dominant culture (cf Williams, 1961). With these nuances, examining the structure of feeling of an era—as it manifests through art and literature—is one way to identify and anticipate change. In the Anthropocene, articulating these various structures helps to clarify where our attention has been misplaced and where, I argue, it might be better directed.

Urbanization in the Anthropocene has generated a system of values, assumptions, desires, and expectations that insist on maintaining a distance between us and the extraction activities destroying rural ecologies. Still, urbanization is not the same as the structure of feeling with which it corresponds. Urbanization, as I will describe below, refers to a particular social system that agglomerates humans into discrete territories, as well as the cultural biases that reinforce it. The feeling that comes from this, in conjunction with the myriad other systems that shape the Anthropocene, is much finer, more nebulous, and *felt* than the social system itself. Because this feeling finds expression through the constraints of particular cultural forms and their respective elements, analyzing a structure must also account for each form's characteristics and conventions. Analyses need specific enough formal parameters to account for the constraints of these forms while also taking examples of enough breadth within them to see the variation of these expressions.[18] A particular cultural form, then, operates a sort of prism through which a structure of feeling is refracted. My work here is to retrace the path of this refraction, understanding that analyses with other forms, and from different perspectives, will reveal different vectors, hues, illuminations.

Although I ground my study in literary evidence, people remain at its heart: living human beings and their communities who feel these structures acutely, daily, even as the social systems that undergird it shape the trajectories of their lives. These trajectories are one particular valence of the structure of feeling I am seeking to describe—the sense we, collectively, are becoming geographically and culturally urban.

Possibilities in the Anthropocene

Urbanization in the Anthropocene obscures possibilities for more ecologically sustainable geographies *and* the cultural expression of those possibilities. I am not, however, arguing that urbanization and the cities that have come from it are the primary cause of climate change, nor that they are inherently unsustainable—far from it. Cities have intrinsic merit in their capacity to

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[18] This includes, importantly, a diversity of authorial voices.

bring together diverse human communities for collective action (Soja, 2010). Cities are monuments to the potential of human creativity and solidarity (Therborn, 2017). Cities have survived and thrived for thousands of years (Woolf, 2020). I am inspired by them, and I have learned from and in them. That said, capitulating the entirety of our attention and imagination to the urban is to ignore opportunities for existing in more diverse and sustainable geographies (Krause, 2013). A focus on rurality is required to imagine plural and sustainable social, political, and cultural possibilities necessary for an ecological civilization of the future.

Reconsidering rurality within capitalist and extractivist systems entails valorizing rural knowledge in a metrocentric paradigm that regardless rural knowledge invaluable. Corbett and Eppley's (2012) story about an elderly Nova Scotian fisherman is a case in point. Although the man regularly read industry magazines and could easily interpret nautical manuals, a standardized, national adult literacy test deemed him illiterate. "The test," Corbett and Eppley write, "asked him to speculate about things he did not know or care about, and asked tricky little questions about the irrelevant details of stories that seemed to him trivial and silly" (p. 3). Heldke (2006) extends this critique beyond rural working class knowledge by claiming that metrocentrists see rural naiveté about urban life not just the absence of knowledge, but rather the presence of another knowledge—"stupid knowledge"—that is incompatible with cosmopolitanism. In formal education, rural knowledge is construed as a potential hindrance to education in a neoliberal system that privileges individual mobility over place-attachment (Corbett, 2007; Carr & Kefalas, 2010; Theobold & Wood, 2010). Young rural people are encouraged to either abandon their ruralness or forgo the possibilities of continued formal education beyond high school. In other words, what counts as "educated" or worthwhile knowledge in the Anthropocene, often based on its capacity to maximize profit, rarely reflects deep, intimate knowledge of the earth and its systems characteristic of "rural knowledge."

Rural knowledge is plural. There are many ways of thinking rurally, and in keeping with my attempt to balance a focus on the local with the global reach of systems, I do not see rural knowledge as universal across rurals or essentially distinct from urban knowledge. In addition, because of its frequent attachment to the land and its resources, rural knowledge is often conflated

with place-based knowledge and can appear similar to Indigenous knowledge (Burkhart, 2019; Seawright, 2014). While these ways of knowing can overlap and intersect, they do not necessitate one another. When rural knowledge manifests in a colonial paradigm, it can be genocidal and ecocidal. Noting this, I cautiously claim that living rurally—in tandem with other sustainable modes of being in the world—can encourage modes of thought that allow for deep awareness of human manipulation of the natural world. Agriculture provides innumerable examples. Michoacán farmers know their land so intimately, for example, that their nuanced knowledge cannot be captured in typologies developed by scientists (Campos et al., 2012). Farmers across the globe mobilize "informal" knowledge based on localized experimentation and experience in more flexible ways than "formal", academic, scientific proscriptions for agricultural practices (Šūmane, 2018). The rural knowledge systems that arise from particular, rural agglomerative formations cannot be imposed on other, distant geographies.

Capitalism helped to create these distances, as well as alienate humans from one another and the earth. One of the tasks in this dissertation is to see the connections between seemingly disparate agglomerations as well as the processes of their alienation. Rural places are particularly vulnerable. Cast as "nowhere places" in popular discourse, rural places tend to be amalgamated into a uniform bloc where "nothing ever happens" and, as such, are undeserving of public attention, empathy, or resources (Azano & Biddle, 2019). Yet the dizzying diversity of rural places, their peoples, and their economies offers a plentitude of examples of how global capitalism wrecks havoc on the land, lives, and hopes of specific rural communities in unique ways. The sheer number of rural places makes engagement difficult, and the range of climate impacts on an equally numerous array of rural communities underscores the extent of the problem. For example, rising global temperatures will render drought and excessive heat that will threaten the crops and health of rural Malawians (Zinyengere et al., 2017), while my home community will face worsening air and water quality as a result of intensifying pork production (ICCIC, 2011). Despite these differences, there are commonalities. For one, rural places are overwhelmingly places of resource extraction: the majority of the world's food and fuel comes from landscapes that host the minority of its population (Cervone, 2017), yet these places are

conceived of as separate from processes of production, consumption, and waste. In my mind, attending to extractive processes in the sites of their enactment allows us to see beyond the limitations of our own geographies to consider social metabolic processes holistically (Foster, 1999).

Rural political and social configurations also reveal alternative possibilities for organizing human activity. For one, rural places exist in a more distant relationship to the state than cities do.[19] Ashwood (2018) argues that rural apprehension about centralized control is less about the conservative populist ideology *du jure* and more a resistance to the state's developmental agenda reliant upon rural exploitation and dispossession. Rural resistance to state oversight and control can otherwise allow for the formation of militant particularisms[20] both enacted and imagined (Williams, 1989). In fact, social movements across the globe have origins in the countryside—Zapatista anti-capitalism in Mexico (Sundberg, 2014), land rights protests in Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2011), farmers protests in India (Ganguly, 2020), and the Indigenous resistance against the expansion of Line 3 in Minnesota are just four of the many.[21] These local efforts insist that solutions are based on social, political, and environmental resources at hand. Even if global legislation were adopted to mandate universal climate policy, these policies would need to be enacted on the ground in specific locales and will rely on the knowledge of those who live there.

Young people will also figure into these solutions. As I have argued, childhood is both a discursive category and a developmental stage subject to adult control—among others via literature for young people. Although it is difficult—or, for some, impossible—to have literature for young people without adult creators regulating expectations for childhood, depictions of rural childhood and adolescence can mitigate some of the constraints placed on childhood from other sources. In the Anglo-American tradition, childhood is imagined as a "disorderly" space (Cloke &

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[19] I borrow Hall's (1985) definition of *state* as being the collection of forces that "bring together or articulate… a range of political discourses and social practices which are concerned at different sites with the transmission and transformation of power" (p. 93). Thus, the state is not limited to the political domain, but includes far ranging means of control—or, to borrow from Hall again—the condensation, transformation, and regulation of a variety of practices into dominant orders.

[20] See Featherstone (1998) for a critique of Williams' masculine conceptualization of local organization.

[21] See also Rosset and Martínez-Torres (2012) for a list of more examples.

Jones, 2005) in which conventional uses of space—including the maximization of profit value—
are ignored in favor of more imaginative, playful spatial potential. Rural childhoods are doubly
disorderly in this regard.[22] Whereas the city suggests a degree of regulation and supervision over
young people's bodies and movement, rurality provides opportunities for the invention of space
and relationships with nature that are not grounded in extraction or commodification. Of course,
these depictions can also fix childhood and nature into a fabricated innocence. Still, their potential
to upend ordered systems governed by adult, civic, and capitalist desires opens a space to imagine
more radical possibilities.

  The conceptual space of rural childhood as depicted in literature for young people
provides openings to imagine beyond the prevailing logics of the Anthropocene. These logics are
numerous, interwoven,[23] and insidious in that they hide their violence in order to reproduce
themselves. Imagination's potential, then, is to defamiliarize these logics so that we may
articulate alternative possibilities that will likely appear illogical under the current paradigm
(Haiven, 2014). For this dissertation, activating imagination involves seeing the mechanisms by
which young people's literature is complicit in upholding the distance that conceals social and
environmental destruction (Moore, 2016), as well as its responsibility to collapse these distances
and reveal ecological connections, commitments, and solidarities.

  Because rurality is so far alienated from urbanity in popular imagination, cultural
representations are a productive place to begin marshaling the empathetic and imaginative
dispositions needed to engage it. And yet representations of rural childhoods, for all the potential
they offer, are still largely figured as masculine, white, and colonial (Powell, 2013; Smith et al.,
2002). They are subject to intense conservative manipulation and liberal scapegoating (Jones,
2019). They can be seen as idyllic, reinforcing the assumption that rural places are outside of

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[22] The extent to which these representations are accurate to actual rural childhoods—and the extent to which this accuracy matters—will be addressed in Chapter Two.
[23] Although the following is a woefully incomplete list of these logics, I do think it worthwhile to mention a few: capitalism insists on enclosure, commodification and financialization (Harvey, 2014); neoliberalism insists on competition and "rugged individualism" (Cervone, 2019); racism insists on fixed and biological conceptions of race (Fields and Fields, 2012); colonialism insists on domination and the superiority of positivist reasoning (Coulthard, 2014); and last, urbanism insists on concentration and compartmentalization of human activity (Lefebvre, 1968/1996).

modern society (Eppley, 2010). These constructions have been millennia in the making—a humbling thought. My hope for this project is humble, too: to suggest three ways that literature for young people both opens and obscures climate realities and possibilities, to identify some of the literary mechanisms that enable possibilities and limitations for engagement, and to highlight the ideologies, assumptions, and values that prevail throughout.

Urbanization and "the city" dominate our moment. Much of this is merely felt, inseparable from the meanings derived from capitalist alienation from labor value, colonial oppression of local lifeworlds, and white supremacist assimilation of racial difference. Still, I believe there are numerous possible descriptions and interpretations of our current predicament, and I offer this exploration as just one attempt from one particular context and viewpoint. But I hold that the depth and complex interconnections of these structures are exactly what make it important to try to tease them apart, to see the changes and possibilities for change latent in these structures.

Exploring expressions of urbanization in literature for young people can allow us to better understand the ideologies structures that hinder more rapid and effective social and cultural change for sustainability. I also argue that this exploration is all the more illuminating when the perspective comes not from the city, but from "the last place you want to look…. in the places that are culturally the most remote: the sticks, in the middle of nowhere…" (Ching & Creed, 1997, p. 1). This, then, is my pilgrimage to those places: witnesses to the ways that the Anthropocene actively shapes the land, ourselves, and our future.

Project Outline and Methodology

This dissertation puts forward a cultural argument: that urbanization dominates the Anthropocene; that this dominance creates a distance that structures our collective values, assumptions, and experiences; and that this structure can be glimpsed in literature for young people. As someone who is well aware of the force of these dynamics, I am particularly interested in geographies and their values: specifically, a belief that the city deserves our fullest energy. My instinct is that this imperative is thoroughly rooted in many, if not all, of American cultural

products, including those that presume to depict rurality on its own terms, to valorize it for its own sake. For all the critiques written of the Anthropocene's elements and processes—modernity and postmodernity, capitalism and neoliberalism, globalization and deterritorialization— urbanization has received surprisingly little attention. But as cities grow larger and even more compartmentalized, and human abuse of the earth proliferates, as economic and racial inequalities continue to worsen, and the distance between country and city widens, I find myself wondering what a focus on rurality could reveal about other possible outcomes.

The chapters that follow journey through this question. The journey begins in the present, in Chapter Two, with boardbooks that purport to depict contemporary animal agriculture. I provide an overview of barnyard friends boardbooks as a discrete genre, turning next to a historical description of the development of pig farming in the United States. From this, I argue that urbanization and extraction economies create ethical, geographical, cognitive distances between the majority of the American population and the landscapes that provide their food. This analysis proves illustrative for the chapters that follow in that it outlines a specific example of how a structure of feeling emerges. While barnyard friends boardbooks resolve this innocence through cute imagery, Chapters Three and Four engage two other modes of representation by which this distance comes about. These chapters, which I conceptualize as a diptych, each engage one particular pole of what Susan Sontag (1966) calls modernity and which I call the Anthropocene: nostalgia and utopia.

Chapter Three examines middle grade and young adult historical fiction novels to argue that nostalgia for a pure, natural past is one powerful element of the Anthropocene's structure of feeling. By providing a history of nostalgia and its relationship to the pastoral form, I suggest that young people's literature is implicated in a long tradition of adult nostalgic works that reproduces a particularly American mythology about an untouched rural world. However, the pastoral can also be used ironically and critically to recognize the unavoidable influence of the pastoral while simultaneously looking beyond it, as I argue Virginia Hamilton does in *M.C. Higgins, The Great* (1974). These critical works can mobilize the pastoral not to mythologize, but to mobilize young characters to ecological action.

Chapter Four examines the Anthropocene's other pole: utopia. I explain that utopia, which began as a literary genre, has become both ideology and method in the Anthropocene. While there is emancipatory potential in utopian visions of the future, these desires can fall short of imagining genuinely radical social transformations that conceive of the end of capitalism. The two novels I analyze, *The Hunger Games* and *Mortal Engines*, capitulate to this difficulty and offer two different versions of the ends of urbanization under capitalism.

In Chapter Five, I turn my attention away from the ways that young people's literature constrains possibilities of engagement with the biosphere to consider how certain texts might actually prove conducive to doing so. Using Freire's theory of dialogical education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) as a departure point, I conceptualize rural youth resistance to ecocide as models of pedagogy in action. These young activists, like their real life peers, are able to enact change on local levels without adult leadership—indeed, without the baggage of adult desires in the Anthropocene. Thus, young people and their literature may be the vanguard of a new structure of feeling predicated not on distance but on action.

As the problem of our time, the global climate crisis is a hydra: lopping off one head will not end the destruction. In order to craft an argument nimble and expansiveness enough to address the problem's scope and scale, this dissertation does not employ any specific traditional research methodology. Rather, I use critical social theory, critical geography, and environmental research to assemble rich readings of the ways young people's literature reflects and reproduces the values, assumptions, and expectations that maintain ecocidal processes. Like Williams, I draw on a range of disciplines, methods, and materials to illuminate these readings as needed. In certain instances, I use a diverse range of textual examples to highlight the extensiveness of the structure of feeling. This is my method for Chapter Two and Chapter Five, especially. In other cases, one or two texts provide a rich enough depiction that they can be taken as representative examples (cf Alpers, 1996). This is more my approach in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. Throughout, I try to privilege young people's literature as the main body of evidence, but I frequently point to political and social examples to support my claims about how a structure of feeling extends across domains of human activity and across human communities. In this, I do also—on occasion—use

personal anecdotes and interviews with others in my community when these stories help to accentuate and illuminate certain points. But I also admit that these stories, in addition to presenting necessary evidence, resonate with my own experiences. Including them here, to serve these two purposes, I hope needs little other justification.

There are many other assumptions I explore in the following pages. Some will prove clear to see and easy to engage. Others will require a bit more time, explanation, and storytelling to make visible. I begin with a larger story in which I am personally implicated: the story of the American hog farm.

Chapter II: Geographies of Dissonance

Introduction

Walk into any bookstore in the United States, and you will find a shelf or two of books with titles so similar they might blur together: *Touch and Feel: Farm* (2011), *Farm Animals* (2011), *Noisy Farm* (2013), *On the Farm* (2016), and *Good Morning, Farm Friends* (2018). The list goes on and on, winding its way across the bookcase. These boardbooks,[24] intended for the youngest readers, comprise a subgenre called barnyard friends (Lawrence, 1989). These books invite readers young and old to "imagine blissful barnyard friends who eat grass all day in the sunshine and go to warm snug stalls at night" (p. 73). The genre includes a culturally familiar and curiously stable troupe of characters: one pig, one sheep, one cow, one duck, one horse, one dog, and perhaps one lazy farm-cat lounging in the hay mow. In my mind, the comfort these books provide is as much in their idyllic farmscapes as it is in their omnipresence.

The common depictions of farmed animals in these books are a far cry from the farming I saw and practiced growing up in Washington County, Iowa—the 571 square miles that are home to 22,000 humans and 1.3 million pigs. The 8,000 pigs per farm outnumber the human residents of the county 63 to one, making it the third largest pig population in the country (USDA, 2017). The confinement buildings housing these pigs are ubiquitous, lined up along the highways and gravel roads cutting perpendicular across the county. Just as ubiquitous, though less immediately obvious, is the havoc the pork industry wrecks: worsening water and air quality, myriad physical and mental health risks, and economic stratification (Gurian-Sherman, 2008; Castillo & Simnitt, 2020). The environmental, social, and moral impacts of animal agriculture on residents of Washington County—and beyond—belies the clean, sunny friendliness of the barnyard friends boardbooks.

Why are these books and their idealized farmscapes so common when the majority of American farmed animals are raised in brutal and exploitative ways? This chapter explores the

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[24] I use "boardbook" rather than "board book" to indicate the necessary relationship between the material and the content.

cause and consequence of this disjuncture. While there has been some research on the ways that children's literature obscures the moral and environmental impacts of the livestock industry (Stewart & Cole, 2009; Cole & Stewart, 2014; Crist 2019), I want to consider one particular mode by which this distancing occurs. Boardbooks—a form of literature intended for infants and toddlers—deploy specific representational strategies that evoke cultural assumptions about agriculture to insidiously reinforce and reproduce the dissonance between readers' concern for the environment and the destructive ecological impacts of the current livestock industry. While the industry provides humans seemingly cheap pork, boardbooks offer peace of mind to a broad reading public. This dissonance occurs through both the discursive objectification of farmed animals and the compartmentalization of their production to rural areas. Be they realistic depictions or cutified illustrations, barnyard friends boardbooks reassure readers that despite what they may already know about the livestock industry, they need to think no further beyond the book's chunky pages.[25]

The readings and analysis in this chapter focus on pigs and the production of pork. The reasons are both cultural-economic and personal. I come from a family of pig farmers. Pigs dominate some of my earliest memories, from the sound of sows lapping at water to the feel of their firm, pink snouts investigating the palm of my hand. Pigs are also particularly salient in American culture. They symbolize greed and stand in for exploitative economic elites, as well police and the white supremacist ideologies that have long informed police practices (Andersen, 2019). Pigs have economic importance, too. Today, pork is the third most consumed meat in the United States (Zeng et al., 2019) and has been a staple of the diets of Black communities, working class communities, and communities of color for generations (Twitty, 2017). Beyond the cultural and economic value of pigs and pork, even beyond the ethical debates of meat consumption, there loom larger questions of the impact of industrial animal farming on climate change. The actual histories and current realities of pig farming in Washington County provide necessary context for identifying the details of how urbanization limits the possibilities of human

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[25] Boardbooks have also been referred to as "chunky books"—an archaic term that I nonetheless find evocative.

experience with the biosphere. As such, I hope to show that barnyard friends boardbooks, in their multitude, might be better understood as indicators of distance rather than the harmony they appear to inspire.

Boardbooks

My focus in this chapter is on boardbooks, despite there being little scholarship on the format (Horning, 1997). I suspect two reasons for literature scholars' wariness to engage. For one, relative to forms of children's literature with longer histories of cultural production, boardbooks have become popular in the United States only in the past forty years. In one of the few treatments of boardbooks in the field, Horning (1997) suggests that the boardbook "boom" may have been a consumer response to contemporary research from early childhood psychologists that indicated benefits of introducing infants to books even before the development of the cognitive tools needed to decode language. Researchers argued that early exposure to books socializes infants into the material culture of reading and facilitates the development of "preliteracy skills" like basic phonics and the ability to distinguish text from image (Hasson, 1991). The relative newness of the boardbook, coupled with the tendency to relegate their functions to the realm of developmental psychology, may have limited some literary scholars' engagement. Another reason I suspect scholars have shied away from boardbooks is due to boardbooks' relative brevity and simplicity. The sheer lack of textual material in boardbooks might lead scholars to believe they are less lucrative sites for analysis say, the picturebook or young adult novel. Knowing that boardbooks are less likely to be "read" by actual children—more so read *to* them by more literate others—may also stymie scholarly engagement. If these are indeed the causes for the lack of attention to boardbooks, then children's literature scholarship has capitulated to the same bias their field has historically sought to fend off: that the literature is too simple to warrant serious academic attention.

I propose the opposite. The elements that make boardbooks easy to overlook are exactly those that invest them with so much cultural power. Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) share this perspective in their overview of racial diversity in boardbooks. As shown in their study, rather

than serving merely to promote basic cognitive processes necessary for literacy development, such as shape and color identification, boardbooks are complicit in perpetuating the overwhelming whiteness of children's literature. "The lack of board books featuring children of color," Hughes-Hassell and Cox write, "denies these children an important resource for developing a positive self concept" (p. 211). Boardbooks are important not only for their materiality and promotion of linguistic decoding. Boardbook *content* matters, too.

Hughes-Hassell and Cox's article is an important critique of the failure of children's literature publishing industry to offer more racially diverse boardbooks. A similar critique could be levied against the industry of young people's literature for their failure to publish boardbooks that more accurately reflect the state of industrial agriculture today. Sure, the thought of reading a book depicting thousands of pigs in a single confinement building will likely seem obscene to the adult consumer[26]—but this is exactly my point. The adult desires for ignorance of the ecological violences of the livestock industry, desires which are culturally dominant, are fundamental to both boardbook content and the reproduction of ideological structures of the Anthropocene. The prevalence of this desire, I argue, is unique to boardbooks in its degree. With other formats and their older audiences—readers who possess greater capacity for metacognition—there are more opportunities for young people to critically engage the content, even if this is facilitated largely with adults.. The infant readers of boardbooks, however, lack the capacity for critical engagement that would enable them to question the narrative they are given. Without this agency, the ideological reproduction that occurs through text selection takes on a greater weight, as does the responsibility of adult consumers.

To grasp the ideological machinations of barnyard friends boardbooks, one needs to have an understanding of the affordances of the boardbook, especially its defining features. For one, boardbooks are intended to be developmentally appropriate for the youngest readers, ages 0-4 (Hughes−Hassell & Cox, 2010). This appropriateness is constructed through both form and content (Horning, 2007). As material objects, boardbooks are often made of durable cardboard

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[26] Depicting the realities of the livestock industry would actually help to racially diversify boardbooks. Currently, the majority of farm workers across the United States are BIPOC (Castillo & Simnitt, 2020).

that can withstand the demands of young readers' still-developing fine motor skills. Physically, the books are relatively small with thick pages, able to be handled and turned by infant hands. The page content is often deliberately simplified. Single words and images against a plain background are meant to help young readers learn to identify both text and image—the preliteracy skills that serve as foundation for further literacy development (Hasson, 1991). Intended to be the first print media that children encounter that is specifically designed for them, boardbooks are crucial to not only literacy development and its attendant social practices, but also for the ways their content socializes young people into particular cultural expressions. In this light, barnyard friends boardbooks are introductions both to early literacy practices and to particular cultural values associated with farmed animals.

rooster

pig

Figure One

Rather than delve into a comprehensive review of the barnyard friends genre, I want to merely highlight the genre's conventional elements and range of sensory media. *Farm Animals* (Dunn, 1984) offers a prototypical example. Each page of *Farm Animals* includes a photograph of a farm animal with its common name below. Set against a white background, the pattern is repeated on every page. Other boardbooks follow the same design, though with slight material and textual variations. While *Farm Animals* is purely visual, "touch and feel" books, such as *Touch and Feel: Farm* (2011), include physical textures overlaying the images of animals that mimic actual animal fur, feathers, or skin. "See and say" books include prompts for young readers to mimic farm

animal sounds, like *Noisy Farm: My First Sound Book* (2017). Despite these media variations, animals represented in barnyard friends boardbooks comprise a familiar canon of farmed animals in Western cultures: one cow, one sheep, one horse, one chicken, one pig, one dog, etc. Contained within a single book, the images suggest a pleasant if tokenized diversity on a single farm.

Barnyard friends boardbooks are coincidentally well suited to meet young readers' developmental needs. Farm animals, by and large, have monosyllabic names, and most produce—when rendered in English—monosyllabic sounds. This provides easy opportunities for several different reading practices. Infants might be invited to match sounds to the animals that make them, mimic animal sounds to develop sonic awareness, and so on. Beyond their ability to spark sonic and lexical development, boardbooks perform important socializing functions. Boardbooks are no different than picturebooks or young adult novels in that they are "works for children [that] attempt to translate adult interests into pedagogical effects on child readers… purporting to amuse the child, the author satisfies adult needs" (Gilead, 1988, p 146). Likewise, while farm animals lend themselves well as accessible boardbook subjects, they too are inherently ideological and framed by adult interests. This is both a matter of representation and material production: barnyard friends boardbooks remain ubiquitous when there might be myriad other topics that better reflect the daily realities of the infants and adults encountering boardbooks: smartphones, cityscapes, or a commute to the grocery store.[27]

Because they serve to socialize infants into the world, boardbooks are expected to represent the values, objects, and practices that are salient for the context in which the infant lives. In my mind, this includes the assumption that they represent, to a certain degree possible in mimetic literature, aspects of lived reality. Thus, like their purported real-life counterparts, boardbook pigs wallow in mud, say oink, and have leathery skin. The accuracy of these depictions is one matter; the absence of the real-life contexts of these depictions is another. As an instrument of socialization, barnyard friends boardbooks socialize young people into an anthropocentric, exploitative culture that is normalized and maintained throughout the child's

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[27] Insofar as young people's literature is often marketed towards, and imagines as its audience, middle class consumers.

upbringing—that is, unless the physical distance between audiences and farmed pigs is collapsed and the realities of the industry cannot be hidden. For the majority of children in the United States, however, farmed pigs remain an abstraction only encountered in the media and as meat or leather products. This makes barnyard friends boardbooks an ideological decoy project, one that conceals the realities of industrial animal farming. This project, however, is only enabled because of a long history of socioeconomic development that has shaped human relationships with pigs and culminated in our current era of compartmentalized, instrumentalized geographies. These developments, and the urbanization processes they support, render human relationships with pigs nearly impossible to maintain for the majority of barnyard friends readers.

Out of Sight...

The current physical and cognitive distance between humans and pigs is a recent development in what was, for most of our mutual interaction, an incredibly intimate relationship. Prior to domestication of animals, "human life in every dimension was controlled by the ebb and flow of animal life" (Lawrence, 1989, p. 66). Beginning 10,000 years ago, after what had been a gradual, reciprocal process of increasing co-existence, humans in Turkey and China independently domesticated the wild boar (Groenen, 2016). "Wild boars might have been initially attracted to human settlements as an easy way of accessing food," Groenen writes, "and it is only after millennia that humans might have actually started to keep pigs as a truly domesticated species" (p. 5). Once domestication took hold, the environmental demands of specific locales shaped both the practice of raising pigs and the pigs themselves. To maximize arable land, ancient Chinese farmers kept their herds in pens, coming to value tamer, faster growing breeds (Jing & Flad, 2002). In contrast, early European pigs were bristly, open-range forest-dwellers that fed on mast: the acorns and nuts that carpeted the forest floor (White, 2011). Consequently, pigs played different roles in the diets of either society. European pigs were inconsistent sources of protein for the peasantry, while the role of Chinese pigs was multifaceted, in that they provided meat, manure, and bristles to a relatively densely populated region of the Yangtze Delta (ibid). For the next several thousand years, the ecological limitations of a locality, in combination with human

and pig's respective biological needs, determined much of the relationship between a society and their swine.

Beginning in the late 15th century, economic imperatives began to usurp ecological limitation as the major determinant of human-pig relations. Specifically, early globalization facilitated two major developments, one being the introduction of pigs to the Americas. Prior to Columbus' arrival, agriculture shaped as much as two thirds of the land of what is now the United States, and Indigenous Americans had long domesticated several animal species including turkeys, ducks, llamas, and guinea pigs (Stahl, 2008). These practices were displaced as European incursions grew in scope and scale. Of the diseases that contributed to the genocide of Native peoples, many were believed to have been brought by pigs—specifically, De Soto's three herd of three hundred hogs taken on his mid-16th century incursion into the Mississippi River Valley (Ramenofsky & Galloway, 1997). Because European pigs were well adapted to forest living, escapees from De Soto's herd could survive in the wild, transmitting diseases to both humans and non-humans alike (Mann, 2005, p. 98). This same catastrophe occurred on the Atlantic coast of North America when European pigs brought to the colonies proved to be ecologically disastrous to the region's Indigenous communities and their agricultures (Anderson, 2005).

The second major development in human-pig relationships was the importation of Chinese pigs to Europe around 1700 (Guiffra et al., 2000). Chinese pigs, bred to grow rapidly off of human refuse, provided European farmers with the "genetic material" that would allow them to raise pigs in increasingly concentrated operations (White, 2011). In this way, Chinese pigs were to European livestock what guano was to European crops: a quantum advance. Coupled with the expansion and entrenchment of capitalism, the introduction of Chinese pigs would allow for economic growth of Europe beyond its ecological bounds.[28] Pig farms came to supply European navies and armies with salted pork, fueling far-flung military campaigns while industries rendering lard and grease produced fuel for lamps and stoves in cities across the continent (ibid).

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[28] The round, jowly pig that would come to symbolize greed in Europe is indeed based on these Chinese breeds. It is only after the introduction of Chinese pigs to European markets that the piggy bank becomes a cultural product (White, 2011).

The primacy of economy over ecology in Europe helped transform pigs from a biological being to a commodity.

The ensuing centuries would see the first widespread separation of people and livestock. Prior to this development, humans had been co-existing—in fact, cohabiting—with the farmed animals they raised for as long as the latter had been domesticated. Humans and pigs—in the eastern hemisphere, that is—would have shared accommodations, food, and other resources throughout the year (Cole & Stewart, 2014, p. 37). As societies industrialized and urbanized, rural migrants sought to bring along their agrarian practices into their new urban agglomerations. In New York City, for example, pigs could be seen roaming Broadway until the middle of the 19th century, and sheep were kept in Central Park until 1934 (Brinkley & Vitiello, 2014). As urban systems became more complex and demanded more centralized oversight over waste removal and sanitation, urban livestock were increasingly regulated and eventually banned (Cole & Stewart, 2014, p. 39). However, these regulations have not always been equitable. For instance, current debates about the permissibility of urban chickens reflect racist and classist assumptions about sanitation, zoning, and propriety. As Reynolds (2015) points out, urban livestock farming is more likely to be permitted for, and associated with, white urban farmers than it is non-white urban farmers. These regulations, while seeking to improve health outcomes for urban human residents, effectively made it impossible for urbanites—and some more than others—to have close relationships with pigs and other farmed animals. With these regulations, cities would come to rely almost entirely on rural areas to supply them their pork.

The history of my own community reveals this trend. In 1850, the federal census counted 11,516 pigs with just under 5,000 humans inside Washington County (U.S Census Bureau, 1850). The first pork-packing plant in the county was built in 1845, "packing some six to seven thousand head annually" (Union Historical Society, 1880, p. 301). By 1879, farmers in the county were shipping as many as 20,000 hogs per year on just one of the four railroad lines crossing the county (p. 407). By the turn of the century, with a population of 20,000, nearly 2,500 farms were raising over 120,000 pigs (U.S. Census Bureau, 1910), shipping live pigs and packed pork to Des Moines, St. Louis, and Chicago (Union Historical Society, 1880).

The economic compartmentalization emerging at the start of the 20th century only solidified as the century wore on, driven by scientific livestock management[29] and new technologies that further distanced pigs from their biology. New vaccines and feed additives lowered pig mortality rates and increased growth rates (Lekagul, Tangcharoensathien, & Yeung, 2019). Without the need for the immunological benefits of biodiversity found in pastures, pigs were increasingly moved to drylot—typically a large shelter that opened to an enclosed dirt or concrete yard. While the ecological harm of these transformations would become increasingly worrisome, the more immediate and obvious on-farm concern was manure management. With pigs in hard-floored shelters, manure and soiled bedding accumulated quickly. A remedy was found in the development of slotted cement floors in the 1960's that allowed manure and other refuse to fall into an open pit below, enabling waste to be stored longer and removed in larger quantities through mechanized pumps. Building size increased, too, as did the number of pigs that could be raised in a single facility. Concurrently, the organization of pig farms themselves began to evolve. Whereas pigs were once raised from "farrow to finish" on a single site, the aforementioned developments drove the industry to segregate pigs into distinct operations that corresponded with stages of swine growth: farrowing houses, nurseries, and finishing buildings were designed and built for each phase. From this farm specialization followed farm consolidation. Farming pigs required less and less human power: between 1955 and 1977, the total number of labor hours in meat production dropped by half, even as the total number of livestock raised increased precipitously (Van Arsdall & Gilliam, 1979, p. 196). My community felt these changes, too. During the same 20 year period, Washington County lost nearly 1,000 farms and gained an additional 30,000 pigs (U.S. Census, 1974).

Activists across Iowa have expressed concern about the expansion of corporate farming and farm consolidation. Although the state legislature passed an anti-corporate farming bill in 1975, it failed to prevent continued intensification of the industry. In 1994, a state-wide Livestock Task Force was convened to garner feedback from Iowans, assess the industry changes, and offer

[29] Another crucially important development is the financialization of capital. In short, future markets and price standardization allowed livestock to be bought and sold anywhere, anytime—even before the pigs being sold were born (cf Bonneuil, Fressoz, & Fernbach 2016).

recommendations. This task force was chaired by the dean of the College of Agriculture at Iowa

State University, an institution that received millions of dollars of state funding for research at the

recommendation of the task force itself. Thu (1995) writes that the joining of industry, political,

and academic interests led to the framing of the social and environmental effects of large-scale

pig production as "hurdles to overcome" subservient to the long-term goal of expanding the

industry (p. 22). A contemporaneous report from Iowa State University researchers makes this

neoliberal attitude explicit:

> It is difficult to summarize all the thousands of individual reasons that small-scale
> producers exit hog production, but it does seem likely that many realized that small-scale
> production was simply not worth the time and effort involved and that many chose to
> concentrate on grain production or on off-farm jobs. To the extent that this is true, Iowa's
> prosperity in both the farm and nonfarm sectors may *have given small-scale producers
> the freedom to choose not to raise hogs...* (Hayes, Otto, and Lawrence, 1996, p. 2,
> emphasis mine).

By positioning pork industry intensification as an economic boon, pro-industry advocates

disguised the industry's profound harm. Under the banner of better profits, state legislation soon

followed to uphold the distance between people and farmed pigs. When, in 2012, the United

States Environmental Protection Agency sued the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for

"inadequately enforcing the Clean Water Act (CWA) in regard to Confined Animal Feeding

Operations" (p. 24). The state responded with a 2017 law that criminalizes attempts to report

animal cruelty and food safety violations on large-scale pig farms (Merchant & Osterberg, 2018,

p. 23). Despite industry and political pressure, researchers have managed to reveal the extent of

the harm these laws seek to mask. The impacts for human health are paramount. In 2004, a

sampling survey of rural wells conducted by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources found

that over half had elevated nitrate levels and nearly a third had detectable levels of coliform

bacteria. In 2018, the same agency found over 700 Iowa waterways polluted, with nitrates from

manure overwhelmingly being the principal source of the pollution (Iowa Department of Natural

Resources, 2020). Other public health researchers have found that individuals who live in close

proximity to concentrated pig farms are more likely to experience a range of adverse health

effects including respiratory disease, hypertension, bacterial infection, and cognitive impairments (Casey et al., 2005). The intensification of the livestock industry has been directly linked to increased reports of cyanobacteria content in drinking water near livestock operations and to destructive algae blooms across the nation, particularly in the lower Mississippi River delta (Burkholder et al., 2007). Despite ongoing efforts by lobbyists and politicians to work to distance consumers from the ecological realities of the industry (cf National Pork Board, 2019), those who live in proximity to pig farms cannot ignore the environmental and health costs these operations generate.

Today, there are fewer people raising more pigs in smaller areas than ever before in human history. Yet the distance between humans and pigs is the farthest it has been since their domestication.[30] "This physical absence," White claims, "has in turn paved the way for anthropomorphized pigs of the imagination to supplant the original, as far more modern Americans and Europeans have experience with the cartoon version than the living creature" (2011, p. 111). As pig rearing and pork production became compartmentalized to specific rural areas, the growing physical distance between producer and consumer has become the primary mechanism to hide the environmental and biological costs associated with the industry. This distance allows for efficient urbanization under capitalism, and unless individuals live in close proximity to pigs—or pig farms—they face myriad barriers in developing intimate relationships with them, let alone in forming a general understanding of how the industry works. This distance is both a problem of human social organization and human ethics that cannot be easily resolved but can, however, be ignored through the cultural objectification of pigs.

...Out of Mind

The physical distance between humans and the animals they farm is a relatively recent development. So, too, is the cognitive distance. Both types of distance work in tandem to promote a prevailing dissonance in individuals between animals and the practices that exploit animals and

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[30] Proximity to pigs does not necessarily cause individuals to have more intimate relationships with pigs. Those who work with pigs in Washington Country, for instance, are likely to do so with hundreds or thousands of pigs.

the environment. Just as the relationship between humans and pigs became domesticated out of physical closeness, so too humans can be socialized away from an innate curiosity about and affinity with non-human life that Wilson (1984) has famously called biophilia. In Wilson's definition, biophilia is humanity's "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (p. 1).[31] Cognitively, it is helpful to think of biophilia as humanity's "built-in ethic" (O'Sullivan, 2011)—an evolution-designed system that provides humans with the cognitive rules needed to understand and care for non-human life. According to evolutionary psychologists, these cognitive traits allowed ancient humans to differentiate between animals that were potential dangers (snakes, spiders, etc) and animals that humans could live with in mutually beneficial relationships, such as dogs and other mammals (Kellert, 1997). Importantly, these cognitive capacities are filtered through cultural structures that allow for contextually-specific expression and enactment of biophilic traits. In the Western cultural paradigm that defines the Anthropocene, biophilia is an obstacle to anthropocentric utilitarianism that reduces animals to their use-value (Singer, 2002). From this perspective, people in the West are not socialized into a readiness to understand the lives of animals, but rather socialized *out* of it—and at an early age.

The current Western cultural mechanisms that socialize individuals away from biophilic predispositions are just that—current. Ancient humans expressed biophilia through myriad cultural modes, including representational visual art. I find it incredibly important to note that animals are ubiquitous among the oldest examples of human representational art (Mithen, 1996). In fact, the oldest known representational art in the world, estimated to be over 44,000 years old, is a depiction of a pig found in a cave on the island of Sulawesi (Brumm et al., 2021). The cave paintings of Bhimbetka, India, from the Upper Paleolithic era, are "dominated by the depiction of wildlife" (Singh, 2014, n.p.). The oldest human art found in the Americas, dating roughly to 11,000 BCE, depicts a mammoth in stride (Purdy et al., 2011). So, too, does ancient Aboriginal art in Australia—the longest unbroken aesthetic tradition in the world dating back to perhaps 30,000 BCE—represent animals (David, 2017). Across the world, Indigenous cultures continue to

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[31] Perhaps it's no coincidence that Wilson opens the first chapter in *Biophilia* with a paragraph praising pig intelligence.

maintain biophilic and biocentric social and cultural practices, in spite of the violences of settler-colonialism, white supremacy, and anthropocentrism (Montford & Taylor, 2020). In short, the biophilic perspective that was once universal and evolutionarily adaptive is now seen as radical only from an urban, anthropocentric Western perspective (Singer, 2009).

Western culture entails specific ways of relating to and valuing specific animals. Rabbits, for instance, are seen as pets, whereas in other cultures they are seen as vermin (Martin, 2010). As individuals learn what it means to be in relation with animals—in most cases, a virtual relationship—they also learn to incorporate these practices within the complex of other identities, which has consequences for intra-human relations. Meat consumption, for example, is gendered as masculine, a transposition that reinforces patriarchal and heteronormative gender relations (Rothgerber, 2013; Adams, 1990). The Western identity work extends to species identity, too. As Bastian and Amiot argue, human identity in today's dominant cultures is overwhelmingly constructed according to the differences between humans and other species, rather than in accordance to their similarities (2019, p. 22).

The ascendancy of anthropocentric thought dramatically altered human-animal relations. One particularly harmful outgrowth of this paradigm has been speciesism, or the bias toward favoring members of one species over another (Singer, 2009, p. 6). Consequently, the biological needs of other species are subservient to the needs of one's own species—in this case, human. While speciesism is not limited to Western culture, in its Western iteration, speciesism conceptualizes animals primarily through their perceived utility for human use (Cole & Stewart, 2014). This utilitarianism leads to the objectification of animals, though the values associated with these objectifications are culturally specific. In China, pigs remain traditional symbols of wealth and luck (Kim, 1994), while in Europe pigs' cultural connotations has developed away from pagan associations with the feast toward more medieval Christian anti-Semitism (Enders, 2002). As Cole and Stewart write, "to 'know' other animals in our cultural context is to be familiar with the enactment of those claims about utility and disutility" (2014, p. 16). In other words, to "know" an animal is less about knowing its innate biological needs but rather to recognize its discursive value. By extension, in the absence of actual relationships with animals,

to be socialized into a specific culture is to come to understand the cultural values given to specific species (Bastian & Amiot, 2019).

Objectification enables categorization. As Cole and Stewart argue (2014), anthropocentrism and its subsequent objectification allows humans to categorize animals according to the use-value that we attribute to them and the degree of sensibility we feel toward them. Cole and Steward visualize this as a grid bisected by two axes representing continuums. The x-axis represents a spectrum from subjectivity to objectivity, while the y-axis represents sensibility to non-sensibility. Curiously, where humans locate an animal on this discursive map is not solely determined by the fact of that animal's species. Instead, representations of individual animals are largely defined by the context of their representation rather than by their intrinsic biological needs. In Cole and Steward's example, an individual rat may be placed in the lower quadrant of low sensibility and high objectification if their use is perceived firstly as a laboratory animal. In contrast, Templeton the rat from *Charlotte's Web* would be placed in the upper quadrant of high sensibility and moderate subjectification, since he is seen in the text as a friendly (if mischievous) wild animal. Importantly, and a point that I'll return to later, Cole and Steward note that "the most intense forms of objectification are meted out to the greatest number of animals who regularly encounter human practices: the confinement, execution and dismemberment of 'farmed' animals" (p.16). The differentiation of individual animals according to their perceived use is thus not only culturally and contextually situated. It also serves to legitimize continued insensibility, objectification, and exploitation of animals. In this light, human-animal relationships in the Anthropocene are contradictory: we simultaneously love animals and exploit them.

How, then, should depictions of farmed animals in barnyard friends boardbooks be categorized? Presumably, they would be categorized as they are described in the title—as farmed animals. But the actual positioning of the animals is closer to pets. Take the cover of *Baby Touch and Feel: Farm Animals*, which includes photographs of a recently shorn sheep, a yellow duckling, and a border collie arranged on a green mat. The title suggests to readers that these animals live on a farm—presumably, the same farm, given how intimately close they are

depicted. But to call them all *farmed* animals would be a misnomer. Dogs in the United States are not farmed; they may be work animals on a farm, but they do not exist on farms for the same purposes as sheep or ducks, which are raised so that their wool, down, and meat might be harvested. These ambiguous categories are perpetuated beyond the cover. On one spread, the verso depicts a photograph of a cow, photoshopped to stand in relief against a stark white background and among illustrated shocks of green

Figure Two

grass. The word "cow" at the bottom of the page tells us what the animal is; "moo!" above its head tells us what it says. Recto, readers see a calf "sitting among the flowers" as the arching text above the calf describes. Illustrated flowers populate the entirely green background. On this and other spreads, the text and illustrations distance readers from the intentions behind raising these animals and from the realities of the conditions in which these animals are likely to live.

It is important that these animals are portrayed realistically. Photographs insist that the scenes they depict be understood as fact. In doing so, they portend to teach the reader about the actual animal (Coon & Cantrell, 1985). In fact, what few pieces of scholarship exist on depictions of farming in literature for young people have unequivocally called for more realistic depictions of farm animals (Biser, 2007; Coon & Cantrell, 1985; Czarney & Terry, 1998). These calls tend to decry the pastoralism and stereotypes of literature for young people, which they propose can be resolved by situating more depictions of agriculture in the present (Biser, 2007). They ask that tractors be shown with roll bars, farmers utilizing computers, and other technological signifiers of modernity. Including these, the argument goes, would show a more accurate portrait of farming, insofar as accurate is taken to mean contemporary. But accurate is not necessarily the same as comprehensive; the fact that barnyard friends boardbooks show actual animals does not make them representative of the livestock industry at all. The realism of *Baby Touch and Feel: Farm Animals* amounts to an inadvertent sleight of hand which replaces the actual reality of the animal

livestock industry with an image of happy, contented animals that lead happy lives in an alternative universe spared from the ecological destruction the industry causes. By purporting to be realistic, barnyard friends boardbooks (re)assure the reader that their realism is total.

Granted, a case can be made that these farm animals *should* be seen as pets—perhaps the imagined farm is meant to be taken as a petting zoo. To me, this amounts to a willed ignorance about the meaning of "farm," which in all but the most nuanced of uses refers to the site and activities that comprise the production of food or fuel. The depictions of animals in *Baby Touch and Feel: Farm Animals* bely such a definition. The categorical elision between farmed animal and pets that allows readers to engage with the animals as they are imagined, rather than the moral and environmental costs associated with the actual farming of livestock.

Categorizing animals and allocating contextually varying value is a specific process by which humans maintain exploitative relationships between themselves and non-human animals— a relationship that requires suppression of human biophilia (Bastian & Amiot, 2019). With increasing urbanization and the regulation of animals within city spaces, biophilia became interrupted by the physical distancing between humans and animals. From this distance, biophilia comes to be interpreted anthropocentrically. Hierarchies of use-value become entwined with the complex belief systems that comprise particular cultural and individual identities. These belief systems are resilient. When a particular perception threatens these systems, humans have the capacity to improvise cognitive caveats that maintain the soundness of these dominant perceptions. Cognitive dissonance can thus be understood as a sort of defense mechanism for belief systems (Festinger, 1957). For Westernized children, this can begin to be tripped early, and adult caregivers are often complicit in maintaining this conceptual distance. Rothgerber's explanation of a "meat epiphany" is a case in point (2019). When children vocalize their confusion about eating the meat of some animals while including other animals as part of the family, adults see this as an unfiltered expression of their own internal, silenced moral qualms. Adult responses tend to shut down this questioning, and in doing so adults uphold the contradictions that cause their own adult unease.

There is another powerful mode by which this cultural dissonance is maintained for young people: adult enforcement of their own dissonance. In a similar vein to my current argument, Stewart and Cole (2009) note that children's media "socializes children to conceptually distance the animals they eat from those with whom they have an emotional bond" (p. 458). Again, children's media encourages young people to categorize animals into specific roles that suggest different animals should receive different amounts of attention and empathy. These representations serve adults, too, in that they ease the cognitive burden on individuals to reconcile their own dissonance (Bastian & Amiot, 2019). Boardbooks thus become cultural artifacts that mediate—or, in this case, buffer—adult understanding of the moral and ecological harm of factory farming and the cultural and economical need for cheap, available meat. For this reason, although barnyard friends boardbooks appear superficially as though they might promote biophilia, they actually are complicit in distorting and stomping it out.

Pigs are frequently mobilized to uphold this dissonance, and one way that barnyard friends boardbooks do so is by infantilizing pigs. In her critique of perceptions of farmed animals in American culture, Lawrence (1989) describes the danger of seeing animals as infants. She writes:

> We teach our children from infancy to imagine blissful barnyard friends who eat grass all day in the sunshine and go to warm snug stalls at night. Farmer Brown of children's books is not a farm operator using intensive methods, but a caring steward. He provides not only life's necessities to his dependent and allegedly happy charges, but even leisure, affection, and an opportunity for socialization with their fellows. Meat animals, especially pigs, are sometimes depicted as jolly folks, indulging in hedonistic activities and glamorous escapades... it is significant that even in our modern world few parents fail to recite "This Little Piggy Went to Market," with appropriate gestures, to delighted offspring. Tacit duplicity assures all but the most ruthlessly honest that the pig is going on a trip for groceries, not making its final trip to the slaughterhouse (p. 73).

The intense entanglement of childhood and depictions of farmed animals is more pronounced in illustrated barnyard friends boardbooks than it is in boardbooks with realistic depictions. Two mechanisms facilitate this entanglement: neoteny and cutification. Lawrence defines neoteny as a condition in which "youthful characteristics are retained in the adult form of an animal" (1989, p.

60). Biologically, humans are a neotenous species in that there is little difference between our adult and infant bodies. Although human bodies will change in proportion as they develop, we— unlike pigs, who develop longer snouts and broad heads in full maturity—maintain our round skulls and flat faces well past infancy. These lingering childhood features may have tapped into caregiving instincts in ancient humans, encouraging them to extend social support to individuals who were not yet old enough to support themselves. While the notion that infant-looking individuals need support has clear evolutionary advantages, in Lawrence's mind, our innate drive to infantilize becomes thoroughly problematic when it is extended to other species. "Juvenilized creatures offer people no competition," she writes, "and relieve us of the responsibility to understand and respect them for qualities intrinsic to their species" (1989, p. 71).

Neoteny is closely related to another cultural process: the construction of cuteness, also called cutification. As Cole and Stewart describe, cutification is the "synthesis of aesthetics and infantilism" that disproportionately awards certain types of animals worthy of affection and attention (2014, p. 100). Cute animals are infantilized or explicitly depicted as infants, rendering animals more furry or with softer contours, and including other "cute" attrapments: flowers, hearts, etc. Pet animals tend to be cutified more often than farmed animals, though when the latter are made cute, they are positioned as "honorary cuties" or "pseudo-pets" (ibid) that inspire the same categorical collapse that occurs in barnyard books with realistic depictions. Although these cute images may function to socialize children into caring for others,[32] the depiction that appears so lovable is, again, a fiction.

All of this is at play in *Good Morning, Farm Friends* (2018). With more literary complexity than Dunn's *Farm Animals, Good Morning, Farm Friends* includes a narrative that depicts diverse farmed animals' eclectic responses to the rising sun. On the first page spread, the soft blue and pink light at sunrise illuminates a red barn, silo, farmhouse, windmill, and cows and horses asleep on low, rolling hills. The text, presented in rhyming couplets, begins: "The morning sun is on the rise. It's time to open weary eyes. The farm is full of sleepyheads. Let's help our

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[32] This has an overwhelmingly feminine connotation. See Adams (1990) for a sustained and nuanced exploration of the ways that gender and human-animal relations are co-constructed in interlocking systems of oppression.

friends get out of bed." The page spreads that follow each feature a different species of farmed

animal waking up in their particular way and for their particular purposes. Pigs, illustrated as

softly contoured and colored, need to wake up so that they can wallow in mud. Those that remain

asleep in the pasture are illustrated with closed eyelids shaped in arcing *u'*s of deep and restful

contentment. The one pig who has abided the call to rise lies in chocolatey mud clearly delineated

from the firm sod speckled with little white flowers beside it. The bathing pig's plump belly and

hooves poke out of the mud, extending skyward in a position of reposed comfort and safety

(though the flying flecks of mud also suggest a bit of rolling around). The scene is, simply put,

overwhelmingly cute.

Figure Three

This scene is similar to other spreads in this and other boardbooks in that it includes both

adult and infant animals living together. Seeing as this relationship is denied to the majority of

farmed animals in the United States, the intergenerational depictions are thus taken to parallel the

relationships between the assumed adult and infant reader. In Lawrence's framework (1989), the

infant farmed animal becomes a surrogate for the human infant. Of course, there is much to be

said about the implications of this for the individual. As they leverage cultural assumptions about

childhood innocence, these boardbooks play to the desires of adult readers to see infants as pure

and uncorrupted. I see this innocence working in a broader social and historical sense, too, in its nostalgia for an imagined, bygone era in American agriculture where red barns and diverse livestock frolicked across green pastures. I will develop this claim further in Chapter Three, but the claim is tenuous, here, because the contents of boardbooks are dehistoricized. No boardbook mentioned in this chapter includes humans. The farms and their animals are ahistorical, positioned entirely independent of the human activity that brought them into existence. They leave a critical reader wondering about when and where these boardbooks are set, and perhaps where the confined animal feeding operations must be hidden.

It should, I hope, be evident by now that the farms depicted in these books are fictions. These fictions rest on a desire for a less intensive, less extractive, and more knowable agriculture. While agriculture has indeed become more intensive and extractive under neoliberal capitalism, it has never not had ecological impacts. The introduction of pigs to the Americas, as noted earlier, destroyed countless human lives and devastated the biosphere. Nor has the small American farm ever been as bucolic as these barnyard friends boardbooks would suggest. Still, I find it vital to note that the emergence of an industrial, compartmentalized, intensified agricultural system—one that produces some of the cheapest food in the world—coincides with a literary form that is hellbent on ignoring this reality in favor of a cuter one. So for as jejune as barnyard friends boardbooks may seem, I do not take them lightly. I see them instead as part and parcel of a structure of feeling that masks the ecological and social violence in geographies beyond an urban attention.

The moral consequences of this are paramount, as are the ecological risks. On local scales, intensive animal livestock operations can disrupt air quality for miles and irrevocably damage water systems if manure is improperly disposed (Gurian-Sherman, 2008). On larger scales, the livestock industry is the single largest contributor to atmospheric ammonia production, a key cause of the greenhouse effect (ibid). Still, this and other environmental dangers can go ignored when observers live far from farms. The compartmentalization and stratification of economic activity, increasing geographical distances between urban consumers and rural producers, and the proliferation of pro-industry policies that limit information sharing render

ecological harm invisible even to those who live proximal to the industry itself (Jakubiak, 2017). And yet, this proximity is also that which can provide a powerful asset for analysis, critique, and protest.

Seeing Pigs
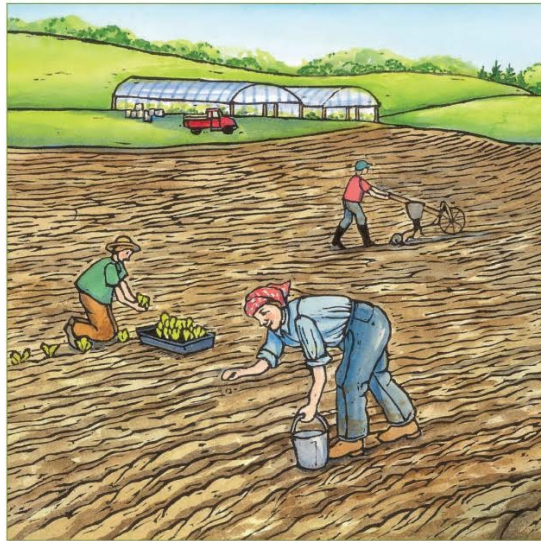
They plowed the ground

Figure Four

There is a particular page spread in Pat Brisson's *Before We Eat: From Farm to Table* that gave L and H,[33] two young adults from my hometown, pause. The boardbook, which depicts various stages and sites of the American food system, includes a spread of rolling fields freshly plowed. In the foreground, three farmers plant seeds by hand. In the background, off to the left, tucked over the swell of a hill, are two long, low buildings. As L explained:

> The greenhouses in the back… I might just not be paying attention when I'm driving, but I don't see those a lot. What I think should go there instead is a hog shed or a turkey barn or something, you know? Something to keep animals. Not a garden. That's the first thing. That's what that should be to me.

In effect, L and H projected a confinement building onto a greenhouse. I can understand why. They grew up, as I did, in Washington County. Though they lived in town, the facts of the pork

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[33] I have named each participant with a random letter to maintain their anonymity.

industry were not hidden from them, and they mobilized their lived experience to make analytical

connections between what is seen on the page and not true to their experience, and that which is

not seen but would better approximate their lived reality. They bridged what Loughnan and

Davies (2019) describe as a wariness to make moral contact with our actions. As a specific

mechanism of cognitive dissonance, this wariness is shored up by geographic distance. The

further we are from witnessing the effects of our actions, Loughnan and Davies write, the less

likely we are to see them as immoral and the more likely we are to engage in them (p. 181). Out

of sight is indeed out of mind.

The effects of distance on an individual's actions is not limited to relationships with non-

human animals. After L and H pointed out the mirage, they went on to describe what else was

missing both on the page and in the minds of many in our home community:

> My parents and I were talking the other day about migrant workers, about how people
> don't even know that they exist, that people don't know their significance. And they were
> talking about [a] friend that was a doctor. She had no idea that people lived in trailers—
> never went to the doctor, you know, because they couldn't get there, because they are
> migrant workers. She had no idea that this other world existed, like right near her. And so
> I think that's interesting, too, is that there's a lot to the story. I don't know all the
> production things or whatever. But we're missing these pieces. And we're missing these
> narratives, and we don't even know what we're missing even though we're in this rural
> place.

Migrant workers and workers of color comprise a disproportionate percentage of agricultural

workers in Washington County and the country as a whole.[34] For instance, workers who identify

as Latinx comprise over half of all agricultural workers nation-wide while making up one-fifth of

the labor force writ large (Castillo & Simnitt, 2020). While the exploitation of these rural

communities is hidden from urban view, it is obscured even for those who actually live in and

among these communities. How could this be given the intimacy[35] of the community? One

answer lies in the way rural communities tend to segregate recently arrived residents—which, for

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[34] Demographic data on the race and citizenship status of agricultural workers is not disaggregated at the
county level, but my statement here is based both on the application of national data to a local level and buy
own experiences.
[35] I use "intimacy" to suggest the sense of knowability that comes from frequent interaction across multiple
social contexts. "Intimacy" does not suggest cohesion or support.

Washington County, tend to be Latinx—and those who are more established (Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino, 2016). Another answer, and one that I find more generative, is that Western being-in-the-world is defined by distance (cf Jameson, 1991).

The distance that L and H point toward is indicative of this particular sociohistorical moment—one in which the majority of humans have become alienated from the ecologies that support them and the communities they live within. As I have described in this chapter, there are several social systems that promote this distance: white supremacist colonialism, industrial capitalism, scientific positivism, and urbanization processes based on the compartmentalization of economic activity. These social systems and their corresponding ideologies have geographical expression. The geographies of pigs and pork production is the concentration of livestock industrial activity into a small territory, thus limiting the number of humans who interact directly with the animals that are slaughtered for their meat. Phrased differently, the geographic distance between the majority of barnyard friends readers and the animals they consume predicates cognitive dissonance. In short, geography—in that it is socially produced—shapes structures of feeling.

My argument here—and one I have been building toward this entire chapter—is that the prevailing relationship between social systems, geography, and human interaction with the ecologies that sustain is defined by distance. This distance is specific and unique to the Anthropocene. This is not universal, as I hope the example with L and H demonstrates. I do not assume that all humans experience these effects similarly, but I do insist that the prevailing social systems that dominate the biosphere are also those dominating humanity's collective experience. The Anthropocene, as both a geological epoch and harbinger of distance between humans and their ecologies, entails a structure of feeling that can manifest as desire for ignorance. My aim in the chapters that follow will be to outline three more possibilities for this structure of feeling: nostalgia, utopia, and action.

Proximity to animal life allows for an immersive understanding of human relationships with the non-human world. As global urbanization continues under capitalism, the opportunities diminish for these relationships to develop in actuality. Literature, which has long been believed

to allow readers to vicariously experience reality, can also exacerbate the distance between readers and actual ecological processes. When adult consumers purchase barnyard friends boardbooks, they insulate both themselves and young readers from the ecological and moral harm of the pork industry. Without grounding in actual experience, the bucolic representations of cute, innocent pigs become surrogates for the millions of pigs raised in confinements. Boardbooks substitute the experience of reading a representation with an experience with what the representation purports to depict. American cultural anthropocentrism, speciesism, neotenism, and barnyard friends books thus become objects of a collective reading experience, shared between and across generations, that shapes the feelings of a broad public toward animal agriculture.

The following two chapters comprise what I envision as a diptych that interrogates Sontag's claim that "the two poles of distinctively modern sentiment are nostalgia and utopia" (1966, p. 311). In the next chapter, I closely consider the first of these poles, nostalgia, as well as one of its literary expressions: the pastoral. In the pastoral, as is the case with barnyard friends boardbooks, ideology masks what could otherwise be understood as factual descriptions and depictions of real ecological processes and situations. Indeed, pastoral poses several challenges for analysis, including long histories of Western cultural production, the tension between discourse and experience, and the changing geographies of an expanding reading public. For ecocritics like Laurence Buell (1995), each challenge must be addressed before one can begin to see beyond the ideological trappings to catch a glimpse of what it obscures. In the pages to come, I will engage more deeply with Buell and other pastoral critics to show how young people's literature, as a cultural form, reveals another desire of our collective experience: the return to innocence.

Chapter III: American Green

"The two poles of distinctively modern sentiment are nostalgia and utopia."
Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*

Coinciding with the longing to ignore the precariousness of today's ecological reality is a desire to return to a fictitious, pristine natural world of yesterday. This latter desire is acutely felt in the United States, simultaneously a nation that constructs its identity from its landscapes and a nation that is disproportionately responsible for climate catastrophe (McKibben, 2020). Despite its past and ongoing ecological sins, American culture is incessantly nostalgic.[36] It is a white, patriarchal nostalgia—an imperialist nostalgia—and also a capitalist, urbanist nostalgia in its longing for an undefiled rural landscape (Cronon, 1996; Guha, 2013; Rosaldo, 1989). One of this nostalgia's most nefarious consequences is that it replaces the historical processes that gave rise to the actual and ongoing ecological destruction with innocence. These two phenomena, nostalgia and innocence, comprise a second iteration of the structure of feeling I am seeking to articulate. Whereas cognitive dissonance limits engagement with representations of environmental realities in boardbooks, nostalgia and innocence reify and reproduce an American pastoral ideology that mystifies attempts to imagine actual sustainable engagement with the non-human world.

In the previous chapter, I explained how a particular format and genre upholds cognitive dissonance in its refusal to depict the livestock industry. In this chapter, I shift registers, turning from the individual and cognitive to the sociohistorical and ideological. This zooming out allows for a more expansive consideration of histories of cultural production that have buried a pastoral ideology deep into the fabric of our structure of feeling. While the pastoral also has implications for the barnyard friends boardbooks previously described, in this chapter I focus largely on middle grade and young adult novels published before 1975, paying particular attention to those set on the "frontier" of the postbellum United States. In doing so, I hope to show that the American pastoral ideology emerged at a particular sociohistorical moment. Born alongside

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[36] Politically, Trump's incessant calls to return to a mythical, glorious past are a hallmark of a longing to return to an unchallenged patriarchal white nationalism. But those on the left are prone to nostalgia, too— namely, for the Obama years, and in so doing tend to forget that administration's militant enforcement of borders both domestically and abroad.

American colonial and nationalist dreams, the American pastoral continues to live on within both the selective tradition of beloved American children's literature and as a residual structure of feeling that sanctifies the rural. When rurality is made so holy, it exists outside of time—changeless, safe, and presumably protected from the ravages of the Anthropocene. But, as my analysis of *M.C. Higgins, the Great* will show, these same values and assumptions can be used ironically to subvert these abstractions and in doing so represent rural sites as real sites of conflict and, perhaps, activism.

The pastoral is a well-worn object of literary scholarship, but it is by no means obsolete. It is one of the most active influences on American attitudes toward rurality. Yet, for all of its pervasiveness, there remains a lack of clarity as to what exactly the pastoral is. If the pastoral is, as Buell sees it, "almost synonymous with the idea of a return to a less urbanized, more 'natural' state of existence" (1995, p. 31), it is also as Cosslett sees it: synonymous with childhood in being "a sheltered space outside the serious adult world" (2002, p. 92). Likewise, the pastoral can be a desire to return to nature (Natov, 2003) and a critique of industrial expansion (Marx, 1964). Indeed, the pastoral hinges on correspondence between youth, nature, and nation that cannot be unified as a monad. The homologies that emerge from this are profuse: youth are innocent like the unspoiled countryside, America is as youthful as its untouched nature, and rurality is far more pure than the industrial urban geographies that threaten it. As such, this triad and its homologies are a useful point of departure—an entry into the complex ideological entanglements that render ecological knowledge difficult to cultivate in rural places that, apparently, have no need for the ecological benefits these knowledges provide.

The Pastoral and Young People's Literature

The pastoral has had a rich and long life. Born in ancient Greece, it has since traveled across myriad geographies, and transmuted from genre to mode, tone, and ideology. The pastoral is, as Buell writes, a piece of "cultural equipment that western thought has for more than two millennia been unable to do without" (1995, p. 31). Its valorization of purity, innocence, and greenness is a direct precedent for literature for young people in the West. In collapsing the

categories of nature and child into a pool of common images, the pastoral offers a seductive possibility for return to a simpler, more innocent, harmonious time and place before the disasters of extractive capitalism. When the pastoral is intended for young readers, these possibilities are made all the more obscure by the veil of an adult nostalgia, adult insistence on childhood innocence, the challenge of reading nature writing as actual description, and the confusion between the pastoral for children and pastoral as childhood. However, examining the history of pastoral literature and the ideological development of pastoral values can help clarify the relationship between young people's literature, the pastoral, and environmental knowledge.

Pastoral scholars have attended to the ways that that particular literary forms shape and reflect particular cultural modes of engagement with the environment. Scholars like Raymond Williams (1976), Leo Marx (1964), and Lawrence Buell (1995) provided three pivotal departures from a formalist canon that had previously been focused on constructing definitions for the genre. These definitions, as Alpers (1996) and other formalist scholars before him have noted, trace the pastoral's origins to Greco-Roman poetry, and in particular to Theocritus' first idyll and Virgil's first eclogue. For Alpers, Theocritus' opening lines serve as synecdoche for the genre as a whole:

> Sweet is the whispering music of yonder pine that sings
> Over the water brooks, and sweet the melody of your pipe,
> Dear goatherd… (quoted from Alpers, p. 21).

In Theocritus, the pastoral hinges on the celebration of a rustic life marked by music, tranquility, and natural beauty away from the city. Virgil's opening is a direct echo of Theocritus: two goatherds "under spreading, sheltering beech/ tune woodland musings on a delicate reed" (Alpers, p. 23). These two representative examples provide the five elements essential for the pastoral: idyllic landscapes, landscape as setting for song, tranquil atmosphere, conscious attention to art and nature, and herdsmen that sing (p. 22). Over time, these motifs would develop in tandem with social change, but they also continue to be objects of allusion and reference in pastoral works through the present. Indeed, these images and values inform common impressions of pastoral literature: easy going rural folks, abundant greenscapes, and a latent critique of urban life.

Like other cultural analysis, exploring the full importance of the pastoral requires understanding the historical contexts of its production. One such history can be found in *The Country and the City* (1973), in which Williams describes the development of the pastoral from its Greco-Roman roots as a specific poetic form, to its Romantic resurrection as an ode to natural beauty, to 18th century aristocrats appropriating the form as dedication to their country estates, to finally an industrial and post-industrial nostalgia for by-gone social formations. While the context of my study obviously differs from Williams', I share his view about the origins of the pastoral— that is, as a specific literary convention that arises in response to specific socioeconomic conditions. Urbanization in the Anthropocene creates distances—both cognitive and geographical —between the reader and the representations of ecologies that the pastoral purports to describe. In this gap, ideology transforms rural imagery into a set of *values* independent of actual sociohistorical and ecological processes. As such, when reality is only encountered through literary representations, values come to stand in for actual rurality itself. The values thus become the common experience of rurality in the Anthropocene. In this way, ideology hinders literature's ability to portray actual environments without the trappings of symbolism.

There are several different literary mechanisms by which these values are conveyed, and although the ideological import of these images provides a fruitful area for considering representations of nature, it is only one of many possible areas for doing so. Buell suggests that with enough environmental knowledge on the parts of both author and reader, environmental descriptions might be read as *descriptive*. This argument is provocative in that it rejects poststructuralist privileging of language in favor of a more materialist investment in the world that language seeks to describe. The failure of literary scholarship to recognize actual environmental description, in Buell's mind, stems partially from the lived geographies of the Anthropocene. Scholars tend to live and work in urban settings, and without the reminders that come from immersion in nature, they tend to understand thick, detailed environmental descriptions as allegory or symbol. Any rigorous engagement with deep, factual, environmental knowledge is considered eccentric in contrast. But outside of academic settings, this knowledge remains necessary for the survival of communities whose existence continues to depend on

environmental engagement (Lopez, 1986)—as it may indeed be for any attempt to arrive at widespread movement for sustainability. As such, Buell insists scholars might read the pastoral as being dually accountable to both the imagination and the ethological facts of experience (Buell, 1995, p. 108). In order to recognize these dual accounts, readers are responsible for cultivating deeper knowledge, via immersive engagement, of the ecological processes they see represented in literature.

Understanding how dual accounts of the environment impact narratives for young people is a continual analytical project for the reader. One example comes from Jason Reynolds' *As Brave As You* (2016). Early in the novel, Genie spies a bird the morning after arriving at his grandparents' home in rural Virginia. He's enraptured by the bird, and his observations comprise what is one of the longest paragraphs text by that point in the narrative:

> A small bird hopped along one of the wooden floor planks. It had deep-blue feathers along its back all the way down to its tail, which seemed to split in two like a snake's tongue. The blue of the bird came up over its head and eyes like a hood, but under the beak and all along the chest the feathers turned reddish-orange. Genie had never seen a bird like it. (Reynolds, 2016, p. 69)

Readers are meant to attend to the details of the bird, but it's unclear as to whether the bird should be taken to be as a symbol or as actual bird. Ultimately, it is both. As the narrative develops, the bird becomes a symbol for grandfather's fear and grief over the loss of his son. But the bird is also an *actual* bird whose biological materiality is vital to the resolution of the novel's central conflict. When Genie is obliged to catch a swallow before returning to Brooklyn, he needs to be able to identify the correct species among dozens swooping in the cool air of an abandoned house. The text recounts Genie's earlier observations as he works to identify and catch the correct species, showing readers that the detailed environmental knowledge included in the beginning of the narrative is essential to its narrative's conclusion.

While certain works should rightly be considered explicitly and generically pastoral in their use of specific conventions, these comprise only a small subset of the total uses of pastoral. Ettin (1984) argues that the pastoral has many manifestations, seeing it as not just a genre but also

as tone and mode, which can appear as discrete insets that intentionally present pastoral elements in brief, contained moments. These insets occur even in works that are "not explicitly linked with the pastoral tradition" and can produce an ironic contrast or "counterforce" to the main themes of the text (1984, p. 64). Book Fourteen of the *Iliad* is Ettin's case in point. In the middle of battle, Zeus retreats from the fighting to lay with Hera on "dewy clover… and drew around them a gold wonderful cloud" (cited in Ettin, p. 70). The peaceful, pleasurable shelter is a stark contrast from the carnage and noise of battle. Seeing this moment as a deliberate and conscious pastoral inset rather than as merely a description of more general calm forces readers to compare the values and feelings of the pastoral tradition with those of the text's dominant narrative.

Skillful writers can make deft use of pastoral insets to evoke meaning beyond the scene itself.[37] Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976)—a brilliant, sprawling narrative of a Black farming family fighting to keep their land in the face of racist landgrabbers and Depression-era financial pressures—offers a beautiful example. While not a pastoral novel in the generic sense, *Roll of Thunder* nonetheless includes pastoral insets to comment ironically on the failure of Reconstruction to equalize the South. One inset offers crucial insight into the stakes for the Logan family. After Mr. Granger, a racist white neighbor, threatens to muscle the family off their land, Big Ma and Cassie walk through an old forest to the Logan pond. There, by the quietude of the "glassy gray and calm" water, and to the "soft swish of falling leaves," Big Ma recalls with "a tender smile" how Cassie's grandfather, born into slavery, purchased the land from a Northern speculator, who had previously purchased it from the Granger family (p. 93-94). While the scene tempts readers—and Cassie—to be lulled into comfortable reminiscing, Big Ma immediately shifts to recounting the hardships of the past, including the loss of four of her six children. Even the physical setting of the pond itself is transformed to reflect the intrusion of unease. Although the pond had once been surrounded by an old growth forest, many of the trees had been felled following an "offer" from a neighbor to purchase the lumber, which had merely been a ruse to destroy the trees. The felled trees were left to rot at the pond's edge as a reminder

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[37] In contrast, other writers can also reduce the form to mere tone, as Marx (1964) notes in his distinction between popular and complex pastorals.

of human treachery. In this setting, sandwiched between Mr. Granger's threats of racist violence and Big Ma's reminder of the costs, the pastoral moment becomes less a respite from labor as it is an unnerving pause before the next, inevitable threat. The innocence and serenity associated with the pastoral are used to subvert themselves.

The pastoral can manifest as genre and as narrative insets. It is also profoundly ideological, burdening rural images with value. These values are myriad, and I want to focus here on just one: the American pastoral ideology. I distinguish it as American in that it is a settler-colonial pastoral distinct from European pastorals (Sayre, 2013). The difference is one of histories, landscapes, and values. European pastorals are defined by their fantastical settings—the mythical Arcadia of bountiful, pristine nature—whereas the American ones were shaped by the belief that pastoral landscapes might have correspondence with actual landscapes in the colonies (Marx, 1964). The dream of a "New Eden" untouched by human hands required the physical and cognitive removal of Indigenous peoples from the land (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Mann, 2005). Disease, war, and the colonial insistence on "improving" land shaped imaginative and geographical borders between white settlers and the "waste" land beyond (Isenberg, 2017). As Isenberg describes, "waste" in the Biblical sense meant desolate or unattended by God; in the agricultural sense, it meant uncultivated or fallow. These two meanings converged in early colonial America to offer the protocapitalist colonists a divine imperative to own and work the land in God's name. Indeed, one of the earliest American imperatives was to cultivate—a particular interaction with the land involving tillage, row-cropping, and fencing. As such, the distinction between Old World desires for, and New World possibilities of, an abundant Arcadia reinforced early American cultural nationalism predicated on extraction of its natural resources (Buell, 1995).

The American pastoral ideology has been a dominant, determining element of the national ethos since initial colonial incursions, felt as "a want to represent America as essentially rural, green, and wild" (Buell, 1995, pp. 32-33). Politically, this finds its most acute expression in the form of Jeffersonian agrarianism, espoused as patriarchal social structures, a yeoman agricultural economy dependent on chattel slavery, a connection between the health of the body

and the health of the nation, and an individualist adherence to self-reliance—social values that matured along with social practice in the course of the nation's history. Here again the republican idyllicism Jefferson championed should be seen in contrast to American desires to create itself after its own image, based on its own natural landscapes, by means of contrast to an increasingly urban, increasingly industrial Europe and, specifically, England (Hagenstein, Gregg, & Donahue, 2011).

The American pastoral ideology further distinguished itself from Europe by its projected youthfulness. There are myriad descriptions of both American nature and American culture as jejune, green, unconfined by the Old World conventions. Early writers like Tom Paine saw this as a clean break: "We see with other eyes, we hear with other ears, and think with other thoughts than those formerly used" (Paine, 1776, n.p). Jefferson saw in the "young continent" a land not yet "plagued with pathetic stocks of animals or people" (Isenberg, 2016, pg. 93). Yet, as the century progressed, agrarian worries about urbanization came to include fears about the economic, aesthetic, and environmental consequences of industrial urbanisms that would defile America's pristine landscape with the smoke and sound of heavy machinery (cf. Marx, 1964). In other words, the creation of an American identity depended on the blank slate of what the colonists imagined as a pristine natural landscape.

Although the pastoral was used to help herald a radically new American identity, it is also used to conservative maintain this image. This latter tendency becomes apparent in moments of rapid sociocultural transition. On the cusp of America's entrance into the Second World War, Virginia Burton published *The Little House* (1942), which crystallized American longing for the countryside. "Once upon a time," the book begins, "there was a Little House way out in the country." The narrative then describes the gradual urbanization that swallows the house—city lights creep closer, the air fills with smog and noise, and life becomes simultaneously monotonous and busy, all to The Little Houses' chagrin. However, one day, a descendent of her[38] original builders moves her back to the country. The book ends with a vow: "never again would

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[38] The text uses this pronoun to gender The Little House.

she be curious about the city… never again would she want to live there….” The blatant, nostalgic, almost militant celebration of the comforts of rural life stands in direct contrast to the era's miasma. Although mass rural-to-urban migration in the 1920's and 1930's had been imbued with a sense of utopianism, post-war weariness began to imagine rurality as a site of healing and rejuvenation. This rural turn of the early 1940s, Lenz writes, "epitomizes part of the American dream from the beginning of European settlement on this continent—that when one space becomes too urbanized, crowded, and unbearable, people can simply move to an empty, rural one" (1994, p. 160). Moynihan saw in this a reactionary retrenchment against New Deal policies that, coupled with wartime anxieties, tapped into "a nostalgia for the past and the rural innocence of snow and stars and apple trees and daisies" (1973, p. 168). When times get tough, the feeling seems, simply move to the countryside.

A final challenge in reading the pastoral is the nebulous distinction between pastorals *for* children and pastoral *as* childhood. It's a fine line. Some, like Natov, see the pastoral is a "central mode of the poetics of childhood" (2003, pg. 91) in that adult authors of young people's literature must invariably contend with their own cognitive and affective journeys to their youth—to a time and place, in memory, removed from the present. Others, like Russell (1994), see the pastoral as limited to "a literary work that celebrates the agrarian life and places it in opposition to a less-satisfying, urban, industrial society" (p. 123). This genre-based approach often renders pastoral as solely a matter of historical fiction. The implication seems here to be that the pastoral is a stable and solely a genre whose works are uniformly set in or published before 1940. Rather than opt for either pastoral *as* or pastoral *for* children, I propose a third approach: a claim that American pastoral ideology and conceptions of childhood share a core set of values (innocence, experience, purity, etc) that allow one to be easily mapped onto the other as a general greenness. In this view, green—youth, jeunesse, innocence, purity—encompasses the American pastoral attitude toward nature *and* American cultural nationalism, with its notions of newness, opportunity, growth, and virginity. These nouns brim with youthful connotations that pastoral authors have given both the American countryside historically and nation as a sociopolitical entity. While Buell and Marx make a point to underscore this, they do not so much attend—as I will do, now—to the fact that

youth is the common denominator of the varying depictions of the American countryside. That youthfulness in the pastoral manifest as a child character is one thing. Just how the pastoral reveals or hides the connections between youth, innocence, environment, and rurality is another. This under-examined nexus is key to understanding the complexity of American unwillingness to acknowledge their destructive ecological past and present, as well as a defining element of the structure of feeling that hamstrings ecological attention.

America redefined the pastoral after its own image. Whereas Greco-Roman pastorals centered on herdsmen and their music, Marx (1964) sees the iconic American pastoral image as an environmental scene interrupted—specifically, interrupted by a train and its horn. The pastoral interruption becomes a fulcrum around which two competing values pivot: a pronounced love and appreciation for nature, and a celebration of industry and progress. The interruption reminds the adult reader that retreat from the real, industrial, extractive, urban-expansive world is not possible except, perhaps, by a return to childhood. Indeed, the defining break does not only entail the intrusion of progress into natural tranquility, but also the intrusion of adulthood into childhood. In literature for young people, the interruption occurs in the same moment and with the same effect: departure.

Departures from nature and childhood converge in Wilson Rawls' *Where the Red Fern Grows* (2016). Billy, the son of poor farmers in the Ozark mountains, ventures into town for the first time as a teenager. Once there, he wanders through what is portrayed as a strange and unfriendly place. "More kids than I had ever seen were playing around a big red brick building," Billy recalls, seen a school for the first time. "I thought some rich man lived there and was giving a party for his children" (Rawls, 2016, p. 35). While he is not initially ashamed of his ignorance, the students viciously mock and beat him for it. And yet, despite this, Billy's parents try to convince him that living in town and attending school are desirable. "A man's children should get an education," his father tells him. "They should get out and see the world and meet people" (p. 59). The novel concludes with Billy in tears saying goodbye to his childhood and his rural home as the family departs for town.

Some scholars have suggested that the connections between the pastoral and childhood do more than merely overlap. Cosslett, for example, sees childhood as pastoral in and of itself. Drawing from Empson (1935), Cosslett claims that the pastoral is defined by its capacity to "put the complex into the simple" (2002, p. 23). At face value, this might be easily transposed as a definition for literature for young people. A second point from Empson only bolsters this equivocation. Empson held that the pastoral was defined by its central conflict: the meeting between persons of "high" and "low" status. When this class conflict is compared to the central tensions in young people's literature, "high" and "low" are easily rendered as "big" and "small" or "adult" and "child." But Cosslett is wary of such a simple homology and insists that the literary pastoral intended for adults differs from pastorals for young people. So too do other scholars see the overall tone differ between the two. The tone of adult pastoral is one of nostalgia and longing, either for an imagined and elapsed "rural landscape where the cares and pressures of the city can be set aside" or merely "a very specific nostalgia for childhood" (Chatton, 1982, p. 10-11). But for pastorals occupied by children, there is a "forward-moving, redemptive direction" that suggests welcomed yet inevitable growth (Cosslett, 2002, p. 92). From this, it is easy to see how the pastoral becomes conflated with the countryside, as both are seen as outside of modern space and time—"nothing changes" is a positive attribute in books for younger children, but for older children and young adults it is a negative—stagnation rather than preservation.

Another of the few direct treatments of the pastoral in children's literature comes from Russell (1994). In his view, the pastoral as "that quality of a literary work that celebrates the agrarian life and places it in opposition to a less-satisfying, urban, industrial society… frequently espoused in historical fiction for children" (p. 123). In Russell's mind, the pastoral is exemplified in a specific genre: adult novels of the American frontier published in the early 20th century such as *Caddie Woodlawn* (1935), his favorite example. The Woodlawns, descendants of English aristocrats, migrate to Wisconsin to try their hand at homesteading. When they receive word that they have inherited a landed estate across the Atlantic, they ultimately forsake their gentry status. Instead, they embrace what they see as a "free country" distinct from England where "all men are not free to pursue their own lives in their own ways" (p. 89). Importantly, even the potential for

departure to a more cosmopolitan, urban England coincides with Caddie's realization of her adulthood: "...Caddie knew that her old, wild past was ended. But suddenly she knew, too, that she wanted the future... to be here in the country she loved" (p. 259). Russell thus sees *Woodlawn* operating along the same lines as James' *The American* (1877), as a commentary on the tensions between apparently competing cultural values. Still, James' novel occurs entirely in Europe and features adults who have largely come into their understanding of citizenship; Brink's novel, by contrast, takes place entirely in North America and features a young protagonist who sees the environmental and human cost of expansion in greater relief than the adults that surround her.

Brink considers immersion in nature as the supreme setting for childhood. Indeed, experience in nature is a defining feature of a new, rustic American youth distinct from the experiences of Caddie's parents—and most pointedly those of her mother in Boston. Her mother believes that "the real beauty and meaning of life centered in the churches, the bookshops, the lecture rooms of Boston" (p. 19). Caddie's father articulates the generational difference by noting how important they felt it was "to let you run wild, because I thought it was the finest way to make a splendid woman out of you" (p. 245). This immersion in nature grants Caddie a degree of ecological and political awareness. She bemoans, for instance, the declining flocks of passenger pigeons and the persistent threat of white racial violence. However, her awareness never leads to her disavowal of the colonial systems that cause them to be (Reese, 2018). Again, Caddie's opportunity to play and learn on the American frontier is predicated on both colonial violence against Indigenous peoples and ecological violence against non-human nature—a small price to pay, the novel suggests, for young, white Americans to have the opportunity to become hardy, independent adults.[39]

The fact that these novels—particularly those depicting stories of American colonization —continue to be read and to be written begs several questions about the process of cultural

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[39] The novel's final sentence is a powerful reminder of this commitment: "[Her face] was always to be turned westward now, for Caddie Woodlawn was a pioneer and an American" (p. 275).

production.[40] To what degree is the nostalgia in the pastoral derived from personal memory and to what extent is it merely a reproduction of an inherited cultural form? Moreover, to what degree is the nostalgia of the pastoral a reflection of adult desires or an interest of the young reader? Russell (1994) offers one response:

> The child's interest in the pastoral is decidedly not nostalgic; however, the pastoral may represent an escape (in the sense of a liberation from mundane cares) for the child. Drawn by the pristine quality of the rural images, the seductive feeling of comfort and security, and the exuberant sense of freedom, young readers may see in the pastoral landscape a respite from the ceaseless pace of the adult world, and they may relish a pastoral world in which children and adults live harmoniously (p. 123).

Russell's sense of a child's attraction to the pastoral depends on states of innocence—both the child's and the countryside's. By leaning on assumptions of innocence, this view of the pastoral necessitates a withdrawal from both social and ecological relationships. The risk here is that the overlap of both forms of nostalgia doubly distances both character and reader from awareness of actual environments and the systems destroying them. While escapism has its merits in other contexts, pastoral retreat denies possibilities for actual ecological engagement and social critique, even—especially—in works for young people. There are more generative uses of the pastoral for young people—and, indeed, ones that turn on a more acutely activist environmental knowledge than on nostalgia.

Nostalgia and Innocence

Despite its classical Greek roots, *nostalgia's* modern meaning is thoroughly Euro-American. Although recent, this regional history is not simple. In 1688 CE, doctors first described the stomach pain, fever, and depression of campaigning soldiers as physical symptoms of an intense longing for home (Sayers, 2020). They recognized nostalgia as a medical condition with a geographic basis. But nostalgia evolved, and by the late 1800's it came to connote a

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[40] *Little House on the Prairie, Caddie Woodlawn* continue to best-selling back-listed paperbacks. The popularity of more recent frontier novels, including *Sara, Plain and Tall* and *Prairie Lotus*, suggest that reader interest in these pastorals is not necessarily for a specific title itself. See any recent edition of the *Library and Book Trade Almanac* for specific statistics.

psychological, rather than physiological, malady with a social, rather than geographical, cause (Hutcheon, 1998). Social changes—including the shift from cyclical to linear time, social stratification, booming urbanization, etc.—caused individuals to feel alienated from their own experience as members of a greater human collective (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). The resulting nostalgia for a pre-industrial, "simplified" life that could never be regained was thus a culturally specific reaction to the "velocity and vertigo of modern temporality" (Jameson, 1991, p. 281). In the wake of the birth of digital communication and the culture industry, nostalgia has become a more pervasive cultural phenomena (ibid). Whereas *cultures*—namely, the urban, affluent, white West—might feel imbued in nostalgia, cultural *products* channel this mood into what Jameson terms as a nostalgic *mode*. American Western films are especially prone to this—a sheriff's badge, swinging saloon doors, and John Wayne's slow drawl conjure up a fictionalized time and place that parades as reality. These nostalgic cultural products express "pastness" without any engagement with historical realities of the past, resulting in an ahistorical stylization in which "the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (p. 21).

Nostalgia is pervasive in the United States insofar as it is largely a product of a white, affluent, urban class. For many, nostalgia is neither prized nor desirable. Traumatic dislocations, such as those that mark refugee experiences, often require individuals to seek emotional grounding in new experiences and homelands (Boym, 2001).[41] For anyone who is subject to colonization, nostalgia can naturalize the violence of oppression and destruction through its backward-looking, rose-tinted glasses. Rosaldo (1989) argues that American nostalgia operates in this manner, as a prevailing cultural mood that "yearn[s] for what [it] has destroyed" (p. 107). This nostalgia sanitizes colonial, racial, and ecological violence via mythical imagery, such as the proud frontiersman and brave pioneer—white, masculine, and pious icons. Curiously, it was just as the frontier was being "closed" that these characters emerged as active cultural figures—and that both nature and Indigenous peoples were deified. Depictions of an evergreen, pristine nature

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[41] Boym is among several scholars who have convincingly argued that nostalgia also has a utopian, future-oriented axis.

has and can assuage American guilt about the violence wrought through its national expansion predicated on territorial dominance and resource extraction. Imperialist nostalgia is thus able to "transform the responsible colonial agent into an innocent bystander" (p. 109) while simultaneously obscuring the historical realities of colonial, ecocidal processes.

While nostalgia can take many forms, it inevitably emergences with what Tannock calls discontinuity—a breakage from a previous state that becomes desirable in retrospect (Tannock, 1995). For the Swiss mercenaries to be the first to receive diagnoses of nostalgia, the discontinuity was geographical. Separated from their homes, they longed for it. For Freud's patients, it was a temporal separation from their experience of time. And for contemporary Western cultural consumers, it is a separation from a sense of history. In this way, discontinuity is similar to the pastoral interruption in that both are breaks—distances—that appear in multiple arenas. Nature, childhood, and nation are each defined by a break that divides the concept into stages: a prelapsarian world of Arcadia, childhood, or the countryside; a transitional world of catastrophe, migration, or adolescence; and a present, postlapsarian world of destitute nature, adulthood, and the city. Of course, prelapse, lapse, and postlapse are abstractions. Specific cultural and historical settings determine how these stages appear in cultural representations. But their abstract generality also allows nature, childhood, and nation to be seen as conceptually proximal—including the nature of the breaks that constitute them.

In the white-washed lore of the United States, the first mythical break was the break from Europe. The first colonists saw in the new continent an opportunity to realize the Arcadia that had long been imagined by European writers and painters (Isenberg, 2016).[42] The mythical landscapes of European pastorals were geographies of perfect preservation and divine bounty that could not exist in locales where the history of human interaction with nature was so well understood (Buell, 1995). Arcadia needed a clean, ahistorical slate. Even today, the American countryside and its rural communities continue to be imagined mementos of a bygone, pre-digital and pre-modern era (Ching & Creed, 1997). But, paradoxically, these images are also tempered by an equally

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[42] The fact that these visions of promise are remembered instead of the equally (if not more) common depiction of the Americas as "wasteland" is testament to the power of nostalgia (cf Isenberg, 2016).

dominant petrocapitalist celebration of progress and industry.[43] The tension between nostalgia for

a fictive preserved countryside and the desire for the liberties of a technological future is a

dialectic I will return to in the following chapter. For now, I want to propose that the tension

between nostalgia and progress also informs conceptions of the category of childhood.

Nostalgia's discontinuities are not just geographical, but temporal (Pickering and

Keightley, 2006). On a societal level, these breaks insist on the existence of a pre-urban world in

which humans possessed greater knowledge of their communities and the ecological processes

that sustained them (cf Williams, 1976, "Knowable Communities"). Even when this nostalgia is

sociohistorical in its register, it can also contain an individual longing for a return to personal

pasts (Natov, 2003). Romantic thinkers defined nostalgia primarily as the later, as "an elegiac

desire for the child one once was and wants to become again" (Wesseling, 2017, n.p.). Although

specific childhoods might be longed for, Romanticism also considered childhood as a metaphor

for an idealized state of openness to the world, purity, and creativity—that is, a metaphor for

innocence. The cultural legacy of this metaphor becomes apparent when considering the ethical

and pedagogical requirements of educating young people in the Anthropocene. An insistence on

innocence makes it as difficult to see children as guilty of committing environmental destruction

as much as it likewise complicates seeing them as victims. And yet, in adopting this willed

blindness, we nonetheless expose young people to literature that socializes them into that same

system of value.

Childhood innocence is a culturally specific production.[44] Prior to the 18th century,

European thinkers held that humans were born into original sin and thus were already

"corrupted." Consequently, childhood was not a state to be preserved, but rather one to be

hurriedly sped so that an individual might achieve "enlightened piety" and salvation (Grubar,

2011, p. 122). By the late 1700's, Romanticism began to reject this in favor of a philosophy

succinctly captured in the opening sentence of *Émile*: "Everything is good as it leaves the hands

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[43] Picturebooks set on farms, for example, tend to harken to an agricultural era before intensification and digitalization while still including images of fossil-fuel burning, cabless tractors as symbol of a more harmonious time (cf Koller, 2013).

[44] It is also power-laden. Innocence, like nostalgia, is more likely to be projected onto white youth than young Black and Indigenous people, as well as young people of color (Bernstein, 2011).

of the Author of Nature, but degenerates in the hands of man" (Rousseau, 1896, p. 4). In rejecting the Enlightenment celebration of reason, Romantics held that reason would compromise the promise of childhood—that is, a sensuous openness to a likewise idealized nature. Enlightenment-era science insisted that nature was largely quantifiable through the assumedly clear lens of human rationality, and by the early 19th century this doctrine had largely supplanted the last vestiges of more mystical ecocentrism in the Euro-American world (Bennett, 2001). Just as childhood was deified for its innocence, nature was celebrated for its "primordial, paradisiacal freshness" (Wesseling, 2017, n.p.). But Rousseau's romanticism remained anthropocentric in that its foremost aim was the benefit of human thought. In face of rampant urbanization and industrialization, more positive assumptions about the ideal nature of rural life could take hold (cf Storey, 2010). Indeed, for an increasing number of thinkers and writers, the countryside, while becoming more and more distant, was an attractive alternative to the apparent and immediate inequities of urban life (White, 2013; Buell, 1995).

The valorization of rural life and the valorization of childhood coalesced in Enlightenment Europe into a particular view of the ideal child as one immersed in nature. Free from the complex rules and structures governing an urban industrial society, rural childhood took on a moral geography of freedom. As Cloke and Jones (1992) write, an image of rurality liberated from social control is built into "romantic frameworks which assume an innocence within nature, and which make for a palatable and nostalgic chiming with dominant adult discourses of childhood" (p. 321). Indeed, country childhoods were prized so long as they reflected white, colonial, bourgeois values—that is, of cleanliness, purity, and liberal individualism in the service of human comfort (cf Kidd, 2002). These conceptions not only restrict value to particular types of engagement with nature, but they also mask the realities of rural childhood. Rural poverty, isolation, and boredom are often concealed in discourses of childhood idylls (Powell, 2013). So, too, are the realities of human-induced ecological havoc also hidden from view.

Contemporary scholars have replaced these views of childhood with ones that regard it as psychologically complex and culturally contingent (Andersen, 2016). Still, innocence remains influential in popular conceptions of the child and in representations of young people in their

literature. In fact, despite these scholarly breakthroughs, the simmering crises of the

Anthropocene have caused some to cling to the idea of the innocent child and an abundant nature

—much the same as Burton did in *The Little House*. As Giroux argues,

> the notion of childhood innocence serves as a historical and social referent for
> understanding that the current moral panic over youth is primarily about the crisis itself
> and its waning ability to offer children the social, cultural, and economic opportunities
> and resources they need to both survive and prosper in this society (2000, p. 21)

If modernity threatens "the sacred pastoral of childhood," then some authors have doubled down

on that same pastoral promise (Sánchez-Eppler, 2011, p. 41). Persevering childhood innocence—

indeed, expanding it ever further into adulthood—has become a primary cultural project for the

affluent West (Cross, 2004). Preservation also continues to inform cultural conceptions of rurality.

Characteristics ascribed to rural people are often "rooted in nostalgia rather than any recognition

of the rural as vital, dynamic, and of the present" (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003, p. 247). These

nostalgic depictions can be either positive or negative. The innocence of rural people may

manifest as a lack of political and cosmopolitan savoir-faire, which grants them a unique

forthrightness or naive honesty. On the other hand, rural innocence is easy to construe as rural

ignorance of appropriate civic behaviors and beliefs, including inclusivity and cosmopolitanism

(Heldke, 2006).

In literature for young people set in the countryside, the "operative theory seems to be

that exposure to nature itself provides the cure for children's problems, and natural consequences

are, appropriately, once again stressed, rendered more dire by the rural framework" (Mills, 2011,

p. 193). Of course, this belief was enabled by a blindness to a long history of human ecological

engagement, but also an anthropocentric blindness to ecological life beyond human interaction.

"[In] the masking and displacing of environmental pillage and political conquest by nostalgic

valuations of the very spaces and biosystems that are being destroyed," Gifford writes, "these

literary tropes nevertheless express a yearning for ecological wholeness" (2014, n.p.) The pastoral

blindness to destruction, a constituent element of the structure of feeling, can thus manifest as a

belief in nature's innate power to "heal" itself regardless of the degree of human violence against it.

Innocence absolves children of the capacity for wrongdoing; so too does it absolve extractivist societies of their ecological sins. It does so by insisting on the absence of corruption —that is, on the lack of environmental degradation. After all, the most cherished environmental figure is the one that "leaves no trace" (François, 2014). This sentiment may be a worthwhile ideal, but it is also an impossibility. Humans depend on ecological interaction for survival; we are always leaving traces, even when these traces were ancient and posed no threat to the survival of the biosphere (Monks, 2017; Redman, 1999). The issue is rather where and how these traces manifest: a camping trip may leave behind no litter, but the carbon emissions used to transport humans to the site produce a more invisible, more dispersed trace. The call to "leave no *visible* trace" helps maintain innocence by focusing attention away from the exceedingly expansive geology and chronology of slow ecological violence (Nixon, 2012), as well as obscuring the systems that cause this violence. The desire for a pure, green world limits the potential for individuals to recognize the environmental destruction already wrought. As a pedagogical problem, the difficulty is all the greater (Cecire, 2015). What are the stories adults tell to young people, if at all, about their position in an increasingly compromised ecology? What are the roles adults ask young people to play in correcting the damage, if adults are even willing to grant them that agency? As it turns out, the pastoral is conducive to eliding answers to these essential questions—but, in the hands of attentive authors, can provide some answers.

Pastoral, Interrupted

M.C. loves the mountain he lives on, but he knows his time there may be short. Poisoned by leakage from the strip mines on the now-bald summit, the gully that had supported his family's farm has grown too rutted and spoiled to cultivate. The deer, turkey, and elk that once roamed the woods are gone. Worse still, a spoil heap perches precariously above the family home. Its slow descent fills M.C.'s dreams with an apocalypse in which he is "rooted to the mountainside as the sour and bitter mud of the spoil ooze[s] into his mouth and nostrils" (Hamilton, 1972, p. 65). As

the visions continue, M.C. grows increasingly desperate to move the family off the mountain and to a far away city, but his father refuses both to leave and to acknowledge his role is alleviating the risk. "We've always lived here," his father says. "But you are the one responsible" (p. 77). M.C. feels the pull of this legacy in himself as a "rope within that bound him to the mountain. It was always there, like a pressure on the mind" (ibid). But there's another part of him that sees hope in staying: "I'm old now but I can still get around. Never did leave the mountain. None of the others did, either. But buried here. Ghosts. Just like Great-grandmother Sarah and the other old ones" (p. 25). But the arrival of musicologist James Lewis and his student assistant Luhretta Outlaw help M.C. to contextualize his experience and to build a relationship with the Higgins' white neighbors, the Killburns. At just fourteen years old, M.C. comes to understand his fate is tied with that of the mountain—its human community, ecology, and stories.

Life on Sarah's Mountain is threatened by three impending breaks: the potential for an urban migration, the threat of the spoil heap hanging above their home, and the inevitability of adulthood. As described early in this chapter, these breaks comprise a tripartite transition that structures childhood pastorals. Each break can be read as a "pastoral fall"—a break from the secluded world of childhood, rurality, and nature. The complex resolutions of these threats, however, complicates the linear development within each pastoral mode. Just as Hamilton resists the whitewashing of the American pastoral, so too does M.C. resist these threats and contests the inevitability of the breaks. Through his struggle to reconcile home, identity, and environment, readers are given a case study in how these tensions may allow for proximity to rural ecologies and young people's inspired defense of them.

M.C. Higgins is neither a pastoral novel in the generic sense nor in its dominant ideological positioning. It's far too rich and nuanced a novel for simple labels. But reading it for its pastoral elements illuminates the racial, environmental, and social dynamics of rural adolescence in a way that other novels cannot. Hamilton grew up and lived most of her adult life in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where her grandfather had come as an infant escaping slavery. In both her novels and essays, Hamilton's writing brims with an intense familiarity with that landscape. "I have always felt my rural Ohio landscape was eccentric," Hamilton wrote, "as is the history of

my people prospering on it. Most of my books hold some element of fantasy" (1983, n.p). These fantastic details are buoyed by rich awareness of the actual consequences of extractive corporations. "Appalachian hills are flattened; the Belmont counties of Ohio are decimated by the GEMs (Giant Earth Movers) of Hanna Coal Co. In truth, acids released by mining destroy wells, crops, livestock and land. Because of them, people starve and people die" (Hamilton, 1975, n.p). In *M.C. Higgins,* the landscape is alive with spirits of ancestors and "witchy" neighbors, while also being subject to the realities of environmental degradation in southern Ohio. Although Sarah's Mountain preserves a pastoral sense of isolation and retreat, it is by no means an abstracted Arcadia. Rather, it is specific, actual place imbued with history, grounded by its own mythology.

The complex history of Sarah's Mountain is also that of Ohio. The ancestral home to Indigenous nations ranging from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Algonquian north of the Ohio River to the Cherokee in the south, Euro-American conquest of the region vested Ohio with new geopolitical significance (Mancke, 2018; cf Fletcher et al., 2020). Situated on the edge of Appalachia where mountains give way to rolling fields, it is both Northern and Southern, industrial and agrarian, rural and urban. It is a border state in both a literal and metaphorical sense. This dualism is partially the result of Ohio's diverse landscapes, but it is also the consequence of petrocapitalist expansion into the region. Since the early 1800s CE, Euro-Americans have mined coal from the ranges in southern Ohio. Initially, the majority of these mines were underground and small in scale. Following World War Two, with the invention of new earthmoving technology, it became more efficient to access surface-level seams in a process known as strip mining or mountaintop removal (Ohio DNR, 2020). The social and ecological devastation resulting from these practices is paramount. All told, strip mining remains the single largest driver of landscape change in southern Ohio (Hopkins et al., 2013; Palmer et al., 2010).

M.C. is acutely aware that his family history is innately tied to these broader systems and histories.[45] M.C.'s great-grandmother, Sarah, escaped slavery while carrying her infant son in her arms to find refuge in the seclusion of the mountain. In the events of the novel, Sarah's spirit lingers on the mountain, granting M.C an immediate connection to his ancestors and the land. M.C.'s father explains:

> "When you are resting quiet. Trees, dusty-still. You can hear Sarah a-laboring up the mountain, the baby, whimpering. She says, 'Shhh! Shhh!' like a breeze. But no breeze, no movement. It's only Sarah, as of old."
> "I know," M.C. said, simply.
> "You know?" Jones said.
> "When I'm all alone," M.C. told him, "up on my pole, all of a sudden, I know she is coming." (Hamilton, 1972, pp. 76-77)

Knowledge of family history bolsters M.C.'s environmental knowledge, which he puts to frequent use. He excels at stalking through the woods, tracking humans and non-humans alike. The small game he traps helps supplement his family's pantry. He can swim and climb better than anyone in his family, a point that M.C. uses to distinguish himself from his siblings and parents. These skills are thoroughly rural skills, and the novel takes care to point out how these are undervalued in contrast to formal education:

> Boys M.C.'s age endured school in the steel town of Harenton. Awkward, with twitching hands and no pine needles to touch or branches to hang from. In class, tongue-tied, they thought themselves stupid. The teachers thought them slow. They endured it all. Until time to go home, to live again, ingenious in the woods (p. 16).

It is through M.C.'s eyes that readers experience the details of the natural world of Sarah's Mountain, though these descriptions are also appropriate for the form of the young adult novel. Whereas Buell (1995) suggested that adult readers might engage with thick environmental descriptions in order to engage with environmental knowledge, the demands for the same degree of detail cannot be made of young readers. Developing readers often benefit from more limited

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[45] On this topic, Hamilton once reflected: "I seem not to be able to create a character in one dimension of time. I don't know why, but my people live in more than one time. That's just the way I see it; that's the way I feel about myself even. I think that living on the land that supported my ancestors has a lot to do with it" (Apseloff, 1983a, p. 205).

descriptions that help sustain comprehension and engagement (Tankersley, 2003; Santi & Reed, 2015). Still, sparsity of description can risk transforming actual landscapes into symbols. Hamilton expressed a similar worry, suggesting that environmental writing for young people is especially susceptible. As Hamilton saw it, "when symbols begin to build" writers must make them "yield at once to the things they stand for. In other words, before one can see the mountain, one must know its heat, its flies, its wind and its place against a total breadth of sky" (1975, n.p).[46] Sarah's Mountain is alive with these details, though in a prose style more easily received by adolescent readers.

One vividly described ecological detail is the spoil heap that direct threatens M.C.'s life on the mountain. Two years before the events of the novel, a mining company began clearing land at the top of Sarah's Mountain, pushing trees and subsoil into a large pile so as to better expose the coal seam. The pile grew as the work went on, and although the mining operation had moved on, the pile lingers.

> It holds the water… just hanging on up there. It'll rain again and it'll grow just like it was alive… it'll tear loose, maybe just a piece. But without a warning. Maybe a roar, and sliding into the yard and trying to climb my pole (p. 74).

M.C. understands that the seclusion the mountain has offered his family in the past will not necessarily protect them from this ecological threat in the present. His father, on the other hand, pays more credence to his own faith in history. When M.C. finally confronts him about the danger it poses, his father demurs. "Since the [heap]'s been there, has any bit of it ever fallen?" (p. 78). In some ways, Jones' blindness might be read as a willed desire to remain innocent—naive—of the impending danger. While this may be the case, I see Jones' refusal to move as much his faith in the continuity of tradition as it is in his willful.[47] It's a fine line, that between memory and nostalgia, but such is the way Jones knows the environment. This differs

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[46] I see a striking similarity between Hamilton's note and Buell's call for modern environmentalists to decolonize their sense of nature as an ideal concept and instead "look past the mythical vision as well as through it" (1995, p. 55).
[47] The Higgins family graveyard is in the yard of the home. Tellingly, when M.C. begins to build the retaining wall, Jones gathers materials for it—including Sarah's gravestone.

from MC's developing knowledge—a living understanding not yet shaped so much by nostalgia that stems instead from his first-hand experience in nature. Without a job that takes him frequently down the mountain and into Harenton, he devotes nearly the entirety of his days to nature. Without an adult nostalgia for the past, experience remains his primary mode of ecological engagement.

Still, the intrusion of adulthood is right around the corner, a fact that weighs on M.C. "Nothing, not even his pole, could keep away the sad feeling, the lonesome blues of being grown" (p. 81). M.C.'s physical prowess had come to exceed that of his father's. M.C. asserts his adult masculinity by beating his father in wrestling matches; M.C. relishes these, much to his father's chagrin. Coming of age is thus as much about supplanting the father as physically dominant as it is in claiming responsibility for family safety. Despite having more formal authority over the family, as his parents still do, he assumes the role of family protector. He conspires to have Lewis visit the family home with his tape recorder, believing that his mother's voice is good enough to secure her a record deal—and, thus, the financial and cultural capital needed to comfortably resettle in the city. By the novel's end, he also takes it upon himself to build the retaining wall that will prevent the spoil heap from descending on the house. Not only is he aware of his responsibility to do these things, but he is also aware of his agency and ability to make decisions independent of his parent's approval. In fact, his father worries that M.C. will take the family savings and leave the mountain in order to save himself (p. 78).

M.C. is on the cusp of leaving both childhood and the mountain, but he lacks sufficient awareness of the urban, adult world to understand what this future might actually entail. Luhretta Outlaw, an urbanite, provides this for M.C. The gift is surprising. Although she is older than M.C., she moves through the mountains with less skill than even the youngest Higgins children. She can't swim, doesn't know how to fish, and struggles on hikes. But her outsider perspective, bolstered by her maturity, also allows her to show M.C. that his deep distrust of the Killburns is unfounded. She presses M.C. to provide some proof of their wrongdoing; he can't. Their subsequent trip to the Killburn farm only bolsters Luhretta's point. The Killburn patriarch adds to this, too, revealing himself and his family to be potential allies.

> Mountain is body… We [Killburns] don't own nothing of it. We just caretakers, here to be of service… if you could think about it every day, you never could own a piece of it. Wouldn't want to. And if you don't think about it everyday, you get to believing you have a right to own it. You become a sore growing on the body… a scab on the sore, getting bigger, hurting, causing pain. (p. 222)

Luhretta's guidance allows M.C. greater understanding of the human ecology of the mountain suggests that the pastoral's insistence on preservation and isolation limits those who reside in it. Breaking the seclusion offers both Luhretta and M.C. a mutually beneficial relationship: they each learn from the other. While Luhretta learns the ways of the mountain, M.C. realizes that escape to the city would be irresponsible. He must stay in his rural home and strive, despite his parents' unwillingness to reconsider, to keep the spoil heap at bay.

Both in the novel's unresolved conclusion and throughout the narrative as a whole, the city is never far off. The arrival of the Chicago-based researchers help M.C. to see both the possibility of city life and reinforce his desire to remain on the mountain. Once word of Lewis' project reaches M.C., he understands that his mother's voice could grant them a ticket to the city. Indeed, Banina Higgins' voice is renowned all across the region. When she first sings for Lewis, "his whole body came alert to the sound, not just country and odd, but fine and strange" (p. 113). He's enraptured, but M.C. wishes that Lewis would record her yodeling. Used as means to communicate across the hills, when Banina yodels, "there was no sound other than that voice of hers which seemed to fall from the sky" (p. 82).[48] Importantly, the yodeling and singing are a Black American and Applachacian tradition that Lewis realizes he cannot extract from the locale. As Russell (1990) described, "Lewis, it turns out, is a preserver—not a promoter—of the rural life enjoyed by the Higginses… to make Banina Higgins a performing star would also be to destroy her ingenuousness, and undoubtedly her soul" (p. 256). Unlike the commercialized, standardized,

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[48] It's tempting to read this as a more contemporary manifestation of the singing shepherds of classical pastoral. While the novel's musicality lends itself to this, the songs themselves suggest a more pointed social critique. When Jones sings one of "Sarah's songs," both he and M.C. struggle to make meaning of it. "Even Great-grandmother Sarah never knew. Just a piece of her language she remembered" (p. 75). Tellingly, Banina's dominance of the sonic landscape of the novel is contested by the quotidian sound of heavy machinery from far off hills.

and place-less culture exemplified by post-modernity, Banina's voice is as much a product of the mountain as M.C. himself.

Still, the city is not unequivocally evil. Once M.C. learns what the city might entail for him, he entertains the idea of it. Lurhetta's stories of Harlem, for instance, inspire him with thoughts of a majority Black urban community (p. 183). Lewis' stories of "hill folks" leaving Appalachia for Northern cities cause M.C. to worry that he'd "never seen any kind of big city" (p. 52). Yet, for Hamilton, moving to the city did not necessarily "mean losing one's identity, nor does the country embody good unambiguously. In her variation on these themes, Hamilton renders for young adults the complex interchange between past and present, stasis and movement" (Wood, 2010, p. 163). Hamilton suggests that the loss of environmental knowledge suffered by leaving one's traditional, rural home could be offset for the individual by access to culture, community, and other resources. Still, doing so would mean acquiescing to ecological destruction and rendering the wealth of M.C.'s environmental knowledge useless.

M.C. Higgins, *the Great*, for all of its ability to describe environmental realities, also includes bits of prophecy. M.C.'s visions, always of the mountain, are visions of a future and past bound by place. He can imagine forward and back through time, but he cannot transcend locale. Ultimately, the land proves to be the basis for his resistance to destruction, though not necessarily out of a desire to preserve the ecology. Rather, the thing that needs to be saved is legacy, family memory, and the security these provide. M.C. realizes he can have tradition and a love of home so long as he asserts his own vision of what that home might be: actively protected against outside forces of extraction, grounded in an interracial community, and vigilant against the sociocultural forces that encroach upon it. The uphill battle is thus both literal and figurative: as much in the staving off of environmental destruction as it is in staving off the lucrative potential of an industrial, urban society unmoored from personal and collective memory.

Pastoral Trajectories

Conceptions of childhood, increasing urbanization, and Anthropocene desires for individual and social innocence remain active in pastoral works for young people. The dominance

of these pastoral elements in American ideology render them difficult to escape entirely. Indeed, reading *M.C. Higgins, the Great* for these pastoral influences better illuminates the novel's stakes and possibilities. For one, M.C. convinces his father that the spoil heap is a threat. To what end? Migration to the city is on the horizon. Already the path off the mountain has been made available to him, and as both history and Lewis' anecdotes show, the Higgins would be part of an urbanizing nation. In contrast, other Black American literature for young people includes numerous narratives thematizing a return to the countryside with real-life corollary (Stack, 1996; Cromartie & Stack, 1989). Hamilton's own *Zeely* (1967) is structured on this narrative. More recent examples of Southern journeys include Kelly Starling Lyons' *Going Down Home with Daddy* (2019), Kwame Mbalia's *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky* (2019), and Jason Reynolds' *As Brave As You* (2016). In these narratives as in actual journeys, Black youth from the urban North visit family on traditional land in the rural South. In so doing, they come into closer communion with family history and its entanglement with the region's ecology. In these narratives and others for young people, the degree to which rural places are subordinated to an imagined, pristine, natural past hinges on the ability of the author to make connections across generations and geographies.

Pastoral ideology can interfere with the ability of young people's literature to present rural places as active, real sites—let alone the potential for the youth of these places to linger there. While the examples I give in this chapter are largely not contemporary, works published in the last few years include these exact same elements. I will turn to these examples again in the final chapter, but I find it important to mention them here to suggest that M.C. 's orientation toward the city is consistent with the ways that other rural works include an urban trajectory. *Me and Marvin Gardens* (King, 2017), for instance, paints its protagonist, Obe, as more in tune with the destruction wrought by housing development than his parents and older sister. His predilection for the non-human world allows him to befriend a previously unknown animal species. So, too, is this the case for *Eva on the Farm* (Calhoun, 2012). Eva's family farm faces financial difficulties in the wake of a blight affecting their fruit trees, but Eva actively seeks out the help of a local artist to help rectify the farm's misfortunes. In both middle grade novels, the

protagonist is shunned by former friends who have sought to adopt more urban lifestyles, seeing immersion in nature as undesirable. Importantly—crucially—these protagonists, like M.C., advocate for the protection of traditional family land against industrial interests that would wreak havoc on the ecologies that sustain them.

The ecological ethics of the American pastoral ideology are comprised. Although the pastoral might be explicit in its attempt to cultivate an environmental empathy in its young readers, its more lasting effect is to contribute to the nascent distances of a structure of feeling of the Anthropocene. The city is as much a pressure on rural environmental knowledge as is the environmental threat itself. Politically, the pastoral ideology obscures the possibilities for what might be a more generative ecological activism across diverse geographies that would otherwise collapse distance. That these novels imagine a hard and irreconcilable split between urban and rural is indicative of this failure. Of course, this has an obvious and acute parallel in current American political discourse. The de facto labeling of rural as "red" and urban as "blue" masks the broad diversity of geographies between the two poles, as well as more nuanced understandings of rural political commitments (Ashwood, 2018). These political ramifications, importantly, the degree to which adults grant young people agency—and complexity, fallibility, and responsibility—to bring about change. This question will be a central concern in Chapter Five. But first, I will address the second half of Sontag's dictum that opened this chapter in order to complete the conceptual diptych it suggests.

Scholars have poured so much sweat into their concern about the pastoral's future. While I have the sense that these discussions often conflate pastoral with environmental sustainability, the more interesting question for me—and one that will lead into the next chapter—can be made by merely replacing a preposition with a conjunction. Rather than ask about the future *of* the pastoral, let me ask instead about the future *and* the pastoral: that is, how does literature for young people, with its pastoral foundation, convey social dreams for ecologically sustainable and complex future agglomerations?

Chapter IV: Future Cities

The previous chapter concerned, largely, the past. This chapter will concern the future. Both, of course, are predicated on a claim that the Anthropocene—our present moment—gives structure to a collective experience defined by distance. One pole of that distance looks backward: the nostalgia that desires a return to an idealized time or place untouched by human activity. This is, as I claimed, a fiction. The other pole looks forward: dreams for a break from our present, fraught reality to a time beyond climate destruction. In this chapter, I pivot to this second pole and its respective fictions: utopia, and the conditions of the Anthropocene that inspire—demand—yearning for sustainable tomorrows. My exploration of this area stems from a question about how urbanization and its ecological impacts play out in depictions of future agglomerations. First, I provide an overview of current calls to reconfigure human geographies toward a more ecocentric relationship with the earth. I then provide an overview of literary and ideological history of the utopian genre, arguing that it must be considered in tandem with its kindred genre, dystopia. Two young adult novels, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008) and Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* (2001), are then examined for the ways in which they project socioecological relationships onto futuristic social agglomerations. In both cases, human social orders remain predicated on systems of resource extraction and capitalist accumulation. As such, despite positing a radical break from the present, these future dystopian worlds—inheritors of a landscape post-climate catastrophe—offer thoroughly conventional if differing depictions of how capitalist extraction survives the apocalypse to shape urban and rural geographies alike.

The Process of Utopia

In a 2018 article in *The Guardian*, Kim Stanley Robinson laid out a vision for what he believes is the most ecologically sustainable option for global human society: bigger, denser, greener cities. Drawing on E.O. Wilson's argument in *Half Life* (2016), and noting humanity's history of urbanization,[49] Robison argues it is time to manage these already ongoing processes

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[49] See Chapter One for a summary of this history.

"properly" (Robinson, 2018, np). The ecological benefit would be greater areas of depopulated landscapes that allow for "new kinds of agriculture and pasturage, kinds that include habitat corridors where our fellow creatures can get around without being stopped by fences or killed by trains" (ibid, np). These more compact human cities would need pull out every green stopgap measure: white roofs to capture solar energy, gardens in former parking lots, total capture recycling. Urbanization done right, the argument goes, is humanity's best hope.

Robinson takes care to note that this vision would rely on reimagining the geographies of social metabolic processes, particularly in the relationship between urban consumers and rural producers of food and fuel. But as I have already argued in this dissertation, the nuances of these analyses can be lost within metrocentrism. There are several dissidents shouting this very critique. Philosophers such as Rupert Read and Helena Norbert Hodge counter that a sustainable future lies not in mega-cities, but in small communities and in mass return to the land (cf Read & Alexander, 2019; Norberg-Hodge, 2019). The localization movement, especially the UK's Transition Town Network, strives to downscale economies and extraction to produce "communities with the practical capacity to be resilient in the face of these externally generated shocks over which local communities have little control" (Barry and Leonard, 2009, p. 3). In the United States, the back to the land movement of the post-War decades, which was predicated on an American pastoral ideology of self-sufficiency described in the previous chapter, continues to find expression in the Cottagecore subculture that idealizes do-it-yourself food production and rural seclusion (Brown, 2011; Sloan 2020). Certainly, Wendell Berry's invocation to "think little"—to turn toward small-scale economies, communities, and relationships—continues to be a powerful encapsulation of this vision (Berry, 1972).[50]

Despite their differing emphases—concentration and diffusion—the two sustainable visions share a common desire to reimagine the relationship between social agglomerations and the ecologies that sustain them. Of course, actualizing either vision requires intimate knowledge of the logistical and material demands associated with these agglomerations: the technical know-

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[50] Several critics have pointed out that these calls remain rooted in a Western perspective of the world; indeed, these calls are most directed at the societies of which their advocates are members (cf Guha, 2013; Roy, 2015)

how to rig solar panels, cultivate organic crops, or organize social services to scale. I will not discuss this knowledge too deeply in this chapter. Instead, I will focus on the theoretical foundations that underscore these two visions. After all, urbanization has been ongoing since human communities began conglomerating for extended periods of time. So, in this chapter, I examine the assumptions embedded in our structure of feeling that shape speculative visions of future agglomerations—namely, whether urbanization will continue to be shaped by extractive capitalism. Substituting the current post-industrial city with an techno-elitist ecocity, or merely replacing industrial agriculture with a class-stratified permaculture, without also replacing global capitalism with a more egalitarian and sustainable socioeconomic system, would fail to realize a truly ecotopian society (Brenner, 2019). Methodologically, then, the task is not to investigate urban and rural as independent entities, but rather to examine the social and ecological processes by which they are produced (Lefebvre, 1973/2003).

In this chapter, I return to some of the theoretical and historical foundations laid out in this dissertation's opening pages. These foundations posit that urbanization processes have been ongoing since humans first began conglomerating in groups for extended periods of time. In this history, urbanization processes themselves have been diverse, supporting likewise diverse modes of ecological interaction and political organization that affect urban and rural communities alike. Indeed, these communities depend upon one another in that are interdependent, linked by economic, cultural, and social exchanges. The collection of raw materials in rural areas allows for the urban production of other technologies that enable complex and extended human and ecological relationships: medicine, transportation, literature, politics. The interaction between urban and rural communities is thus neither fixed nor bound. It is fluid and profoundly ideological.

Understanding the historicity and contemporaneity of urbanization processes is one matter. Projecting these processes into visions of the future is another. Bound by the "imaginative resources" at one's disposal (Bradley & Hendrén, 2014, p. 7), attempts at imagining futures are also shaped by literary convention: namely, utopia and dystopia—conceptual categories that suggest either an ideal or non-ideal society (Levitas, 2010). In this way, future visions emerge

from the same literary and ideological building blocks as visions of the past described in the previous chapter. Still, despite their shared lineage with the pastoral, utopia and dystopia are themselves complex. Each has a unique history and offers unique opportunities for social critique. But for all their internal variations, utopia and dystopia each assume a "break"—a distance— between immediate human social orders and those of either the future or the geographically far-away present. This distance provides authors an opportunity to reimagine the sociospatial ordering of ecological relationships—that is, the ways in which human interaction with the environment plays out in physical landscapes. Despite this distance, however, the current extractivist, capitalist order can carry through to dominate the liberatory potential of these visions, even when the world itself is imagined to become almost unrecognizable through environmental catastrophe.

Future Visions: Utopia and Dystopia

Visions of the future are born in the present and the past; they are both a matter of contemporary desires and literary tradition (Levitas, 2010; Jameson, 2004). In Western literature for young people, two primary categories of this futurity are utopia and dystopia (Hintz & Ostry, 2003). Ideologically, these visions can either present views of radically different worlds, or— because we are all bound by the limitations of our own imaginations—reproduce the ideological status quo of our current global society (Bradley & Hendrén, 2014). For these reasons, utopia and dystopia are useful areas from which to base an exploration of the social values, fears, dreams, and structures of feeling contemporaneous to their production.

Conceptually, utopia has expanded beyond its original definition as a bound literary genre. Now, it can be used with a range of meanings that include tone, setting, mode, feeling, and political agenda (Bradford, 2008). This conceptual expansiveness can cause analytical confusion (Levitas, 2010), but I argue this breadth also allows for a richer, more dynamic framework—one that can encompass not just its own internal variations, but also its antithesis: dystopia. For this reason, I do not see utopia and dystopia as categorical binaries. As I'll show below, they are instead conceptually contingent, rising within and out of one another. Still, I will refer to each

when it is thematically dominant, but I assume that the other is always "inside." Last, while utopia and dystopia can be imagined as chronologically contemporaneous to the actual societies that imagine them, I defer to the popular conceptualization of either as visions of the future.

Speculating about tomorrow is one of humanity's oldest and most common pastimes (Oziewicz, 2017), but as a distinctly non-mimetic literary genre, however, speculative fiction is relatively new, emerging in the first half of the 20th century (ibid). In its current Western usage, speculative fiction is a literary super category that encompasses all non-mimetic literature, which includes the dystopian and utopian narratives that are the subject of this chapter. Of the two, utopian narratives have received much more scholarly attention, but even this attention has been stymied by conceptual confusion and pessimism about utopia's promise. Levitas (2010) argues that the dismissal of utopia as being naive or callow stems largely from early Marxist critiques that saw it as escapist fantasy, based on narrow definitions of utopia as compensatory, unrealizable blueprints for an ideal world. But this compensatory function is only one of many, and defining utopia solely for its escapist potential ignores the genre otherwise functions as social critique and catalyst for change. Insofar as utopias are imagined, they are fictitious; but, since they "have material, pedagogical, and ultimately political effects," they also have real consequences for both thought and action (Wegner, 2002, p. xvii).

The interaction between imaginative text and society is evident even in the ur-text of utopian literature, Thomas More's *Utopia*. Written in 1516, More drew on stories of Amerigo Vespucci's travels to imagine Utopia, a fantastic city in the Americas that has achieved social harmony and material security for its residents. Famously, the word "utopia" plays on two different Greek prefixes: *o-*, meaning "no", and *eu-* meaning "good" or "happy." Translated literally, "utopia" is a good place that exists nowhere. For being a nowhere place, Utopia was active in spawning others: Christian cities like Campenalla's *City of the Sun* (1623) and Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627); socialist societies of Cabet's *The Voyage to Icaria* (1842) and Morris' *News From Nowhere* (1892); and feminist utopias like Gilman's *Herland* (1915) and Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974).

There is a difference between this generic tradition—a specific cultural form—and what might be called an innately human cognitive impulse. Levitas is wary of claiming the latter. Instead, she sees utopia as "a social construct which arises not from a 'natural' impulse subject to social mediation but as a socially constructed response to an *equally* socially constructed gap between the needs and wanted generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it" (2010, p. 210; emphasis original). It's a fine point, but an important one. The desire for ideal worlds is universal, but the inequalities that produce utopian visions are socially created (cf Levitas, 2010). From this stems one of the major fault lines in utopian visions: the distinction between utopias of abundance and utopias of sufficiency. As de Geus (1999) claims, utopias of abundance are predicated on a world in which nature provides *more* than enough to fulfill human needs, whereas utopias of sufficiency provide *just* enough. Whether resource accumulation is garnered or restricted hinges also on the distinction between human productivity or natural plenty, and whether necessity entails freedom from want or guaranteed affluence is largely a matter of ideological perspective.

In addition to being historically contingent, the meaning of utopia was also in the eye of the beholder. The Land of Cokayne and its more recent cousin Big Rock Candy Mountain imagine a hedonistic world of abundance, where "farmers' trees are full of fruit" and "little streams of alcohol / come trickling down the rocks" (quoted in Rammel, 1990). In contrast, More's Utopia, among others, was one of moderation—everything from food supplies to population density was kept at a static, predetermined level in order to maintain economic efficiency and equality. The Western values informing this imposed sufficiency are anthropocentric: scientific positivism, linear progress, and social evolution culminate in a belief that human society might achieve a perfect, final state (Bauman, 2016). What this suggests is that whereas humans may share a collective capacity for imagining ideal societies, the particular generic tradition that is currently associated with utopia is specifically a Euro-American production.

Like the pastoral, these visions demand a radical break from the here and now. Whereas *Utopia* imagined a geographical break from 16th century England, more contemporary utopian

narratives suggest a chronological break from the 21st century. Again, the form and content of these narratives are shaped in part by literary convention and in part by the sociocultural desires contemporaneous with their composition. In the Anthropocene, desire for climate security and guilt for the destruction already wrought inspires utopian narratives that increasingly grapple with the dire risk posed by anthropogenic climate change (Curry, 2013). Still, imagining sustainable futures that are not predicated on global catastrophe remains a difficult creative task.[51] As Jameson writes, these difficulties demonstrate "the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped and confined" (2004, p. 46). In the Anthropocene, extractivist capitalism diligently reinforces its own logics.

Speculation is not a mystical arena of unlimited possibility. Utopian visions and their visionaries are ideologically situated in a particular sociohistorical context, and the visionaries who produce them are prone to reproducing the underlying systems and structures contemporaneous to these visions' production. The struggle to see beyond ones current system is why utopias, despite purporting to be harmoniously ideal, often benefit from the absence or oppression of certain communities. This exclusion and marginalization is evident from even the first utopias. More's Utopia was a slavocracy and relied on extractive colonialism to maintain its economy (Sargent, 2016). In addition, despite the fact that aspects of *Utopia* were inspired by early descriptions of Incan society, European colonists reported carrying the book on their quests to conquer other Indigenous Americans (Sargent, 1983; Sanford, 1961; Soule, 2014). In a specifically perverse dialectic, the original American utopia was predicated on Indigenous dystopia (Dillon, 2012; Whyte, 2017). So, too, did these early utopias depend on a patriarchal structure of government in which women were subservient to men. Wagner-Lawlor (2013) argues that masculine ideals of dominance have historically shaped utopian visions for the world, hoping to impose a universal and anthropocentric hierarchy of value. Feminist and Indigenous critiques of Euro-American utopian visions, then, call for revising utopia away from its colonial

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[51] I have in mind here Jameson's (2003) dictum that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism; so, too, is it easier to imagine ecocide than it is to imagine its solution.

universality and toward more local, xeno*philic* communities in more intimate relationship with the natural world.

Scholarly opinion varies on the relationship between utopia and dystopia, but for the purpose of this argument I define dystopia as utopia's antithesis: a future, nonideal society. As a subgenre, dystopia has dominated the young adult literary market since at least the publication of Lowis Lowry's *The Giver* in 1993, which helped to "establish a specific subgenre of adolescent dystopias, setting the stage for wildly popular young adult texts and series" (Macaluso, Macaluso, & Evans, 2019). Sales figures make this abundantly evident. *The Hunger Games* was the most popular novel in 2011 and 2012, selling 9.2 million and 27.7 copies respectively; the following year, *Divergent* sold 6.7 million (Roback, 2014). These narratives are not only blockbuster novels, but both titles and their series have also been adapted into films. Their staying power lingers. Collins' *The Hunger Games* prequel, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, sold 1.1 million copies in the second half of 2020 alone (Milliot, 2020). Although the majority of young adult book sales are actually made by adults (Publishers Weekly, 2012), critics argue that themes of dystopian young adult novels—rebellion, political action, the struggle for equality—have particular resonance with their adolescent readers (Scholes & Ostenson, 2013).

Imagined orders are central to both these dystopian and utopian visions. By "order" I mean the full breadth of ideological and economic relations that structure human interactions with one another and the environment. These orders may purport to be liberatory, as utopias often do, but they can also repress diversity in their insistence on harmony and hegemony (Kumar, 1991). Tension emerges between cooperation and conformity, peace and repression, and—importantly— between planning and organic growth. These tensions have correspondences both in the false binaries between urban and rural (Jameson, 2004) and in that between adulthood and childhood (Kraftl, 2009). Herein is a central problematic in utopian dreams in the Anthropocene: the need to address local utopian expressions while also maintaining an awareness of their global implications. We might imagine a global utopia squashing local culture, just as the neoliberal capitalist system is currently striving to do. We can also imagine—and indeed do see imagined in literature—hegemonic systems demanding that young adults conform to their particular brand of

universal norms. But we can also imagine a local utopia that depends on the over-extraction of natural resources somewhere else to supply its abundance: say, Dubai, Las Vegas, ancient Babylon, and other cities that rely on water and other resources hauled across the desert. One way of addressing this problematic is to analyze the depictions of future agglomerations—that is, the relationship between rural and urban populations—in order to get a sense of how we in the present imagine relationships between adolescence and adulthood, and nature and human society, scarcity and abundance. These have myriad facets, including the conceptualization and organization of existing social categories of identity including gender, race, ability, and sexuality. I attend to the intersection of these categories in the analyses that follow, though I focus firstly on how future visions organize ecological relationships, developmental stages, and social agglomerations.

If utopian and dystopian visions emerge in tandem with historically contingent scarcity, then ecologically stable utopias are merely one of many possible iterations of an ideal society. The dominant utopian paradigm has traditionally been predicated on an adherence to productivist ideals of linear industrial progress and industrial expansion. The resulting utopian representations hinge on the reproduction of a system "that insists (culturally) and depends (structurally) on limitless expansion and permanent growth without end" (Robinson & Canavan, 2014). "Space Empire" narratives are quintessential examples of this—future humans colonize extraterrestrial bodies and extract their resources, having never learned economic restraint. Instead, these "green utopias of abundance" imagine human societies that have developed adequate technology to continue living in extractive affluence (Garforth, 2005). These ideals shape global climate policy, too. In the past few decades, ecological agendas have been depoliticized, sidelining questions of environmental and social justice in favor of what is posited to be objective technological management of the crisis (Bradly & Hedrén, 2014). These systems of management are no less fraught than the scientific management of the Industrial Revolution. In fact, Bradley and Hedrén argue that the ecological crisis has actually been a boon for certain sectors of capitalist economies, as it has spurred the development of the so-called "green tech" industry that rely on inequitable labor relations (2014, p. 4). Under capitalism, even green tech production is "always

and everywhere a matter of uneven distribution in global society" (Hornburg, 2014, p. 78). In obvious contrast are ecological dystopias in which capitalism's growth imperative and extraction mandate has resulted in a desolate Earth where the last vestiges of humanity struggle to survive.

Ecotopias and green utopias can also offer visions of the future in which humanity has reorganized its relationship with non-human ecology in sustainable ways without the use of technology. In these ecotopias of sufficiency, future human societies have learned "universal restraint and the substitution of nonmaterial for material satisfactions" (Garforth, 2005, p. 395). Wagner-Lawlor argues that feminist and Indigenous insistence on ecocentrism allows these utopias to espouse greater respect and care for the non-human world in local ecologies. These utopias, in my mind, are reflective of Gómez-Barris' description of geographies that resist "the ethnocentrism of speciesism, scientific objectification, [and] extractive technocracies" (2017, p. 12). For these critics, ecotopias cannot be predicated on resource extraction. Nature is not a thing to be managed, but rather a living entity to be "proliferated" (p. xviii).

The management of nature—both human and non-human—is also the management of geographies, and for many cultures the ideal society has been imagined as a city (Mumford, 1965, p. 271). In Ancient China, city planners strived to reproduce the harmonious order of the universe in a rigid urban layout predicated on nested squares of both distance and social value (Liao and Yang, 2012). For Renaissance Europeans, the city "performed all political, social, and economic functions" necessary for social survival (Kumar, 1991, p. 15). It is no wonder then that the first generic utopias were urban, and in them social value was mapped topographically. More's Utopia again offers the quintessential example with a city divided into discrete zones of labor and worth. The center of the city, and of highest value, consisted of theologians and scholars. The further from the city center, the more material and embodied the labor became. In short, utopia often offered readers an imagined opportunity to transcend their material-embodied existence on earth.

In the 17th century CE, with the development of nation-states in an increasingly global and colonial economy, the nation began to supplant the city as the primary organizing principle for societies. And yet, the city retained its primacy in the social imagination. Even today, cities are marketed as a "desirable place to live" in an increasingly global, financial economy

(Gunnarsson-Östling, 2014). While rurality is seen as irrelevant, undesirable, or even backwards, cities—as a particular agglomerative manifestation of urbanization processes—are projected as "humans' dominant habitat in the future" (Heise, Christensen, & Niemann, 2017, p. 8). This all-or-nothing binary infuses our current thinking about ecotopia: the future will either be mega-city or rural Eden.

Here is a key point to this overview: the utopian/dystopian axis of future visions intersects with a rural/urban axis that can be visualized as a matrix of possible agglomerations. Samuel Delaney (1990) suggested four terms for each of the quadrants: Arcadia, Land of the Flies, New Jerusalem, and Brave New World. Arcadian visions draw on pastoral themes to suggest a utopian abundance in a rural life close to nature. Its counterpart, Land of the Flies, natural bounty is denied in face of hostile climate and scarcity. New Jerusalem, by contrast, is an urban technotopia in which human-made machinery provides affluence, whereas Brave New World is the burned-out shells of high-rises and wastelands of concrete deserts. Delany held that any futuristic narrative could be seen as "a concert of these four images: all four, either through their presence or their absence, always spoke" (n.p.; cf Fisko, 2012).[52]

Any order of the future includes the organization of territory and the life-sustaining ecologies therein. Early representations of utopia featured autarchic cities, presumably able to sustain themselves on local resources alone (Mumford, 1965). In the Anthropocene, however, post-industrial cities cannot survive as they currently are without the vast and complex social metabolic systems that transport material resources across the globe. In the present day, the proliferation of localization movements across the globe suggest a widespread desire to provide sustainable alternatives. As Guha suggests, "If colonial and capitalist expansion has both accentuated social inequalities and signaled a precipitous fall in ecological wisdom, an alternative ecology must rest on alternative society and polity as well (2013, p. 430). Guha's critique points specifically to Euro-American societies, arguing that undoing capitalist urbanization is truly their

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[52] Delany qualifies these four with two additional images: Junk City and Junk Wild, in which either landscape is a "technochaos of off-strewn consumer electronics" (n.p). Jameson (2003) saw junk spaces already being created by urbanization, commercialization, and utilitarian planning. For Jameson, the mall was the harbinger of junk space.

prerogative. Rethinking these agglomerations and their ecological relationships across multiple

scales is necessary for rethinking how we might attempt "belonging differently in the

world" (Gibson-Braham, 2014, p. 38)—both ontologically and geographically.

Here again is the question I have sought to thread throughout this section: how might

future visions balance the need for local utopian dreams while attending to the ongoing global

impacts of extractive economies? Let me now offer a more nuanced question: how might these

future visions imagine social agglomerations beyond the current rural-urban/extraction-

consumption matrix? I will turn shortly to examples of young adult speculative fiction, but as a

final and necessary point, I want to propose that young adult novels are an effective site for these

visions to be imagined and critiqued primarily because they thematize adolescence.

Children are often central to popular utopian thought (Curry, 2013). Drawing from the

same Romantic ideologies of innocence and harmony described in the previous chapter, there is a

long tradition of assuming childhood to be an innately utopian stage of development (Hintz &

Ostry, 2003). Mills argues this conflation is what allows young people's literature to be an

effective "vehicle for the expression of our collective hopes and fears about what the future will

look like, the envisioning of the utopian and dystopian possibilities for the world our children will

inherit from us" (2009, pp. 121-122). While this may be true as a cultural assumption, Kraftl

argues that childhood remains an "intentional point of articulation for poignant, powerful

statements whose goals are to promote global values such as peace and tolerance" despite

scholarly attempts to "deconstruct the assumption that children are simply future adults" who will

willingly opt into the systems they inherit (2009, p. 83). In this collective guise, children are

universalized as much as the utopian societies they represent. Despite the elision between

childhood and utopia, there has been relatively little scholarly treatment given to the intersection

(Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2017).

Young adults exist in a liminal social position. Simultaneously both child and adult,

knowing too much and not enough, untamed and tamed enough, young adults are categorically

othered (Campbell, 2019). This in-betweenness grants young adults both the awareness of

injustice and the know-how to resist it, making them a major threat to the harmony of the

imagined, dominant social order. Be it utopian or dystopian, narratives of resisting or subverting future social orders can be understood as a metaphorization of the transition from childhood to adulthood. They complicate the presumed break between childhood and adulthood—that is, into both a developmental category and totalitarian order.

Imagined future societies, whether utopian or dystopian, are adultist orders—by this, I mean that adults both control and firstly benefit from the order. This is no different than current state systems that are controlled by a narrow group of adult lawmakers (Oziewicz, 2015, p.11).[53] Sambell echoes this, noting that the majority of speculative fiction for young people presents "worlds that radically critique adult ethical legitimacy" (2004, p. 250). Curiously, in representations of dystopian social orders, totalitarian regimes attempt to infantilize their citizenry in the sense of conforming to hegemonic social structure on which they depend (Campbell, 2019). The highly-structured, static societies constrain the enactment of childhood (dis)orders based on fluidity, egalitarianism, spontaneity, and individual expression (Bradford, 2008, p. 4). In spite of this, or perhaps because of this, young people in their literature tend to have a more acute sense of injustice—and are also more quick and willing to act against it—than adults.

In what follows, I examine two dystopian young adult novels—Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2009) and Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* (2003). Both are set on a post-climate catastrophe Earth in which ecological destruction has led to the spatial reconfiguration of social agglomerations. With different degrees of attention to the ways that urbanization processes are entwined with extractivist capitalist relations, both novels also offer distinct visions for how their respective agglomerations manifest and are organized in relation to the ecological processes that sustain them. In short, I wonder: how do these novels and their adolescent protagonists imagine the relationship between social agglomerations, ecological interactions, and political resistance?

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[53] Who are predominantly white, male, straight, and abled.

"It all comes back to coal"

Centuries from now, on the broken landscape that was once North America, the nation of Panem hosts an annual tournament. Commemorating The Capitol's victory against rebelling outlying districts, the Hunger Games pits two young people from each of the twelve remaining districts against each other in broadcasted blood sport to earn allotments of food, fuel, and resources for their community—and to compete for their own survival. Katniss Everdeen, a teenager from the coal-mining region of District 12, volunteers as Tribute in her sister's stead. Along with Peeta Melark, District 12's second Tribute, Katniss' performance during the Games inspires hope in oppressed districts across the nation. When they ultimately emerge victorious— the first pair to ever do so in the Hunger Games—it is to The Capitol's deep chagrin. For the urban elite in The Capitol, the sting comes not just from the fact that *two* Tributes gamed the Games but also because these Tributes—residents of an ecological sacrifice zone (Klein, 2014)— refused to be sacrificed themselves.

Suzanne Collins' vision of Panem's totalitarian oppression is predicated on a previous society's—presumably the United States—catastrophic collapse. The collapse was, as Katniss summarizes, a story of "disasters... the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained" (Collins, 2008, p. 17). Out of what is insinuated to be this anthropogenic climate disaster, surviving communities reorganized themselves as Panem, so named after the "shining Capitol" at the geographical center in a mountainous place once known as the Rockies. The communities across the remaining territory were structured into discrete districts, each reduced to a single identity tied to a single economic activity. In this, it is similar to the ways that contemporary nation-states establish and maintain geographically compartmentalized zones of economic and ecological activity (Lefebvre, 1973/2003, p. 94). Undesirable, yet necessary, labor is both earth-based and distal.

The spatial reorganization of American society into Panem has ecological and social consequences. District 12, the focal district of Collins' narrative, is *the* coal-mining region. Like

the grain-growing, lumber-milling, and livestock-raising districts geographically elsewhere, District 12's economic activity is instrumentalized to feed the demands of the mega-urban center that is Panem. Geographically, this organization is a physical manifestation of concentrated and centralized state power spread horizontally across the landscape (cf Mann, 1984). Sociopolitically, the extension of futuristic capitalist industrial processes into Panem's rural districts allows for the concentration of people and resources in one agglomeration while dispersing the less desirable aspects of extractive economic metabolism into distant regions. The compartmentalization of extractive economic activity into discretely bound districts reflects a more crystallized version of what Brenner refers to as operationalized landscapes: zones whose "sociospatial and ecological relations are rationalized, infrastructuralized, and recurrently reorganized to support the metabolism of capitalist industrialization" (2019, p. 363). In Panem, District 12 is forcibly relegated to the task of extracting the raw materials for energy production —e.g. coal mining, a difficult, dangerous labor that results in the death of Katniss' father. Mining also wreaks havoc on the other 8,000 human residents of District 12, whom Katniss describes as being "men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces" (Collins, 2008, p. 3). Indeed, the poorest regions of Panem—and those whose Tributes are least likely to survive the Hunger Games—are deemed both "barbarians" (p. 34) and engage in labor directly involved with resource extraction.

In contrast to District 12's poverty and relationship with the earth, The Capitol is starkly artificial, technological, and affluent—far removed both cognitively and physically from the processes of ecological extraction that provide the conditions for its material comfort. Coal extracted from District 12 is transported to the Capitol, where it is transformed into energy that powers so many lights that they "twinkle like a vast field of fireflies." Conversely, "[e]lectricity in District 12 comes and goes, usually we only have it a few hours a day (2008, p. 76). Katniss' first glimpse of the technopolis illustrates the juxtaposition. She sees "glistening buildings in a rainbow of hues that tower into the air, the shiny cars that roll down the wide paved streets, the oddly dressed people with bizarre hair and painted faces who have never missed a meal. All the

colors seem artificial, the pinks too deep, the greens too bright, the yellows painful to the eyes, like the flat round disks of hard candy we can never afford to buy" (p. 56). Combined with the resources gleaned from other districts, The Capitol emerges as a mega-city that is starkly affluent in contrast to the muted colors of the Seam. The Capitol feeds on the labor and resources extracted from the outlying districts that it subordinates.

One primary mechanism of this subordination is the commodification and demarcation of nature as being for the sole benefit of the Capitol.[54] This is exemplified in the fencing off of The Meadow—a lush forest that borders Katniss' home in The Seam. The twofold effects of this are obvious. For one, the imposition of the border sever ties between the human community and the ecology that could support it—as well as, presumably, restricting the movement of non-human life within it. Coupled with the illegality of leaving one's District without governmental permission, it is clear that District 12 residents are not full citizens in the same way as residents of Panem are. Indeed, the imperialist dispossession of District 12's immediate environment, as well as the means by which to interact with it, also results in its residents becoming dependents on a brutally insufficient welfare state. Although Panem grants its citizens allotments of food and fuel, these are never enough to provide beyond basic sustenance. Accessing The Meadow is a punishable offense, but Katniss routinely slips through the fence to hunt The Meadow for food in order to supplement her family's poor diet. Aside from transgressing the border, the only other option for young people to earn additional allotments is to cast their names into the Hunger Games lottery additional times. The more impoverished one is, the more one must endanger their body to provide for their family. Not only is this a metaphorization of the actual ways that poverty renders harm onto those living with it, but it is also a fine example of the ways that imperial state power weaves its tendrils into the daily lives of those it subjugates (cf. Mann, 1984; Martinez-Alier, 2014)

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[54] Another example is that residents of District 11, the agricultural district, are not allowed to eat the food they grow. That its residents are described as being people of color, it is hard to ignore the allusion to slavery (p. Collins, 2008, p. 193). This also has frank parallels to the historic and ongoing Indigenous reservation system in the United States (cf Brousseau, 2018).

Such is one way among many that inequitable flows of resources within Panem's socioecological systems are also inscribed on bodies. When Katniss arrives in the Capitol to prepare for the Games, she sees that Tributes from other sacrifice zones are physically small like her. However, "the meat and plants from the woods combined with the exertion it took to get them have given me a healthier body than most of those I see around me" (2008, pp. 89-90). Still, her stature, strength, and skills are of both a different degree and kind than those Tributes from wealthier districts whose economies are based on the production of luxury items. So, too, are the bodies of Panem residents distinct from those in District 12. In The Capitol, "wrinkles aren't desirable… [and] a round belly isn't a sign of success" (p. 119)

Still, Katniss' history of intimate interaction with nature, itself enabled by her rural geography, is precisely what allows her to survive the Games. She is skillful at hunting and foraging, and she is able to recognize a range of medicinal plants (p. 47). Her name itself is botanical, referring to the aquatic plant whose roots can be eaten as tubers. With this ecological knowledge, cultivated out of necessity, Katniss moves through the Games' wooded arena with skill and stealth—a stark contrast to the big, "branch-breaking bodies" (p. 235) of other Tributes. Even Peeta is unable to realize the full potential of the arena's ecology. Having grown up a baker's son, he lacks knowledge to see the arena's grain field as a source of food or safety. Instead, Peeta ascribes "a sinister feeling to it… there could be anything in there" (p. 282). To put it pointedly: Katniss' rural home and material poverty granted her—forced her—to develop skills necessary to survive and thrive in the woods.

There are blatant gender dynamics to this. That Tribute pairs are consistently cis-heterosexual suggest a reproductive coupling. Katniss and Peeta recognize this and perform a stereotypical heterosexual romance, which not only fulfills the voyeuristic desires of the Hunger Games' audience, but also suggests that District 12's most accomplished young people might contribute children to a dwindling population. Katniss, in many ways, because of her youthfulness and femininity, represents sexuality and futurity (cf Driscoll & Heatwole, 2018). Positioned as such, she also is heir to a cultural legacy of Western women mobilized as symbols —protectors of nature, workers of medicinal herbs. At the same time, as a member of the rural

poor, she exhibits stereotypically masculine skills associated with hunting, meat procurement, and family protection. Thus, on one hand, Katniss can be seen, through her intimacy with nature, as a young Mother Earth figure. On the other hand, as the series goes on, her canonization as figurehead of popular rebellion could position her in a feminine symbol of collective territory, collective identity, and collective struggle.[55] These dualities comprise what Yuval-Davis calls the figure of a "border guard": a femininity that mediates between binaries. For Katniss, these are the borders between the nature of The Meadow and the metropolitan Capitol, District 12's nascent sovereignty and Panem's imperialism, feminine herbal-healers and masculine hunter-providers, and poverty and material wealth (2003, p. 313).

There are many racial critiques to be made, too. Rue, a young Tribute whom Katniss befriends during the Games, comes from a background of working orchards in District 11. Rue has dark skin and exhibits even greater abilities at moving through the arena's woods than Katniss. Still, at a crucial point in the narrative, Rue and Katniss split up to avoid detection and it is Rue—not Katniss—who is snared in a net and killed. Rue, a person of color, is sacrificed to ensure Katniss' survival (Green-Barteet & Gilbert-Hickey, 2017). The racialized dimensions to Panem's capitalist economies reproduces the racialization of capital that structures contemporary economies around the world and, particularly, in the United States (Robinson, 1983).

In the Hunger Games, urbanization processes under extractive capitalism have reached one possible maximization of their development. Space and time have been conquered insofar as communication and transportation are almost instantaneous.[56] Land and ecologies are intensively compartmentalized and operationalized. Capital accumulation and environmental dispossession stand at stark extremes. Ultimately, hierarchies of value—both economic and cultural—are topographically and horizontally arranged: the further one is from the Capitol, the less valuable they and their labor are, and the more likely they are to engage in the dangerous work of resource

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[55] Figures familiar to Euro-American cultures: Lady Liberty, Mother Russia, Mother Ireland, Delacroix's *Liberté,* Joan of Arc, etc.

[56] Katniss notes that Panem hoverships are able to "appear out of nowhere"; similarly, during the Games, Katniss receives a gift of "still warm" bread from District 11, dropped in by drone. The speed with which these transportation technologies move in order to "appear out of nowhere" and deliver still-warm bread from hundreds of miles away suggests speed verging on simultaneity

extraction. The intensification and compartmentalization of a capitalist extraction economy thus shapes the ecology and political spaces of Panem. For all this, Collins' vision is just one iteration of how urbanization processes might play out in the future. Reeves, whom I turn to next, offers a complimentary image: more topographically vertical, more chronologically distant, though no less extractive and oppressive.

"Municipal Darwinism"

Millenia from now, crawling out from the mountains of what is now called Wales, comes London. The city will cross the land bridge to the Hunting Grounds of old Europe in search of prey, and as it creeps across the continent, its Engineers hone MEDUSA: a "thunder-weapon" that helped usher the collapse of the 21st century civilization of the "Ancients". Tom, a humble Historian's Apprentice, forges an unlikely partnership with the Out-Country vagabond Hester Shaw to stop London's invasion of Shan Guo—a multicultural fortressed nation on the Indian subcontinent whose cities refuse to become mobile. As London approaches the mountains that protect the Anti-Traction League's cities, Tom realizes the imminent conflict is not just between competing technologies of urbanization, but also between radically antithetical ideologies.

Reeve's *Mortal Engines* envisions a future Earth whose landscapes have been utterly transformed by anthropogenic apocalypse. The Sixty Minutes War, a "terrible flurry of orbit-to-earth atomics and tailored-virus bombs" (Reeve, 2003, p. 6), caused the collapse of global human civilization. As the narrative explains, it "poisoned the earth and sky" (p. 173). Seas rose, droughts lingered, and earthquakes rumbled beneath scarred earth. To escape the danger, Engineers set London on top of giant tracks powered by powerful engines that allowed it to rumble away from environmental hazards. While this arrangement allowed London to survive, its newfound mobility enabled neocolonial ideologies that spread across Europe. Cities came to roam a landscape pummeled to resemble "a crumpled sheet of gray-brown paper, slashed with long, blue shapes that were the flooded track marks of countless towns" (p. 80). In this resource-depleted land, it is apparent that human communities in Europe cannot survive sedentarism for long. Even London seeks sustainable technologies, attempting even to repurpose human

excrement for food. The other option London sees—and indeed pursues—is to feed on other cities.

Municipal Darwinism, the prevailing ideology of Tractionist cities, is posited as a logical and inevitable system. Tom has learned that it "was natural that cities ate towns, just as the towns ate smaller towns, and smaller towns snapped up the miserable static settlements" (p. 10). Municipal Darwinism has overt overtones of neoliberal social darwinist theories that the narrative itself attempts to critique (Bullen & Parsons, 2007). Moreover, and as will be my focus in this section, Municipal Darwinism should also be understood as an ultimate expression of a capitalist growth economy. In *Mortal Engines,* urbanization has matured: cities no longer depend on far-flung extraction zones to provide them the materials necessary for their own processes but rather have centralized those processes within themselves—albeit without the natural ecologies to extract from. Having already consumed all available environmental resources, human societies resort to cannibalizing the physical materials that compose other society's agglomerations, sparking a city-eat-city war for a narrowing horizon of survival.

London, like other Tractionist cities, physically reconfigured itself in order to maximize the efficiency of both the consumption and processing of other cities' resources. As a tractioned city, London became a towering agglomeration rising 2,000 feet above its tracks and organized into seven Tiers. The topmost Tier is devoted to the Engineers, government administrators, and St. Paul's cathedral. Cascading down, lower Tiers each harbor labor activity of descending value. The lowest Tier, "The Gut", comprises London's physical and metaphorical Marxian base. There, salvagemen and their massive machines dismantle captured cities. The conditions are oppressive. The narrative describes it as "always noisy, and it was staffed by workers from the lower tiers, who were dirty and frightening, and convicts from the Deep Gut Prisons, who were worse. The heat down there always gave [Tom] a headache, and sulfurous air made him sneeze, and the flicker of the argon globes that lit the walkways hurt his eyes" (p. 14). "The Gut", a nickname for the bottom Tier, is particularly salient within this vision of a post-ecocide social metabolism. Despite the lack of natural environments to offer resources, extraction nevertheless continues in

an entirely artificial mode. The mechanisms of the extraction are maximalist, industrialist, and

Fordist:

> Big yellow dismantling machines were crawling around it on tracks and swinging above
> it on cranes… circular saws as big as Ferris wheels bit into the deckplates, throwing up
> plumes of smoke. Mountains of brick and slate and timber and salt and coal were
> trundling off on conveyor belts toward the heart of the gut, and skips of furniture and
> provisions being wheeled clear by the salvage gangs (p. 20).

In *Mortal Engines*, the natural world may be destroyed, but industrial extraction lives on. The

environmental and social implications of this labor have resonance with these processes today.

For one, the extraction of "resources" in *Mortal Engines*—that is, smaller human agglomerations

—results in community displacement just as communities are displaced by processes of resource

extraction under global capitalism. In Reeve's novel, it's the people of Salthook; today, it is Hyde

Park, Georgia's Black community, who face adverse health outcomes due to surrounding

industrial pollution (Checker, 2005); it is also the state-sanctioned construction of oil pipelines

across Indigenous land in the Americas and beyond (Estes, 2019).

      The labor required to perform the extraction is rendered to be both hyper-masculine and

abject in its plebeianism. The salvage*men* are dangerously sexual beings, prowling The Gut like

"tomcats, their bare chests shiny with sweat" (p. 20). Their speech and mannerisms bear

hallmarks of lower-class status, but Tom is cautioned against conflating this with stupidity. "Just

because they live down in the nether boroughs and don't pronounce their Hs doesn't mean they're

fools" (ibid). In fact, the lead Historian notes that salvagemen are able to recognize technological

artifacts—often weapons—that even the most experienced Historians would miss. Thus, the

exploitation of undervalued, dangerous, and provincial labor is precisely that which allows

London's ruling, technophilic class to continue their exploitation of the cities they encounter.

      If the undesirable manual labor of extractive processes occurs in the lowest Tier of

London, then the highest value labor is that which is at the city's summit. The abstract intellectual

work of city officials and Engineers, being highest in the city, recalls a similar topography of

labor/value that prevailed in European Renaissance utopias (Kumar, 1991). The manifestation of

hierarchy suggests not only that intellectual labor might facilitate transcendence from the material-embodied limitations of human dependence on the earth, but also that this labor should be both categorically distinct and socially segregated from that labor which actually interacts with the earth. London thus spatializes a stridently modernist Western teleology that ascribes to a "productivist faith in the logic of economic expansion and technocratic organisation to guarantee human well-being" (Garforth, 2005, p. 404). Engineers, as social designers, are the harbingers of futurity and, presumably, salvation.

In this regard, Tractionism is a technophilic ideology. In order to sustain it, however, London requires more and more powerful weapons in order to subdue and consume other cities. The city's tyrannical mayor, Magnus Crome,[57] rejoices when MEDUSA has been successfully reverse-engineered, knowing that every city in the world is now available for London's consumption. When Crome is confronted about the unsustainability of his vision, he remains adamant that technological advances will ensure London's perpetual growth, Crome explains that once all terrestrial resources are exhausted, Engineers will devise a way to extract the heat of the Earth's core, and then "devour" the planets of the Solar System before moving into the galaxy. "A million years from now," Crome exclaims, "our city will still be traveling, no longer hunting towns to eat, but whole new worlds!" (Reeve, 2003, p. 274).

As a whole, the novel suggests that the real fault is not so much mobility or urbanization as it is the capitalist growth imperative. Even the Anti-Traction League notes that Traction Cities were once necessary when climate disaster was threatening metropolitan centers around the world. But now, Municipal Darwinism pushes cities to "just keep rolling around and eating each other 'cos people are too stupid to stop them" (p. 42). The Anti-Traction League offers an alternative to London's destructive growth imperative. Shan Guo, the League's leading nation, has become a haven for humans from around the world who refused to participate in Municipal Darwinism. While the narrative does not offer descriptions of the static cities further into the subcontinent, it does describe villages in the difficult-to-traverse foothills of the Himalayas that

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[57] In his excitement to breach Batmunkh Gompa, Crome pushes London faster than it has ever gone. The speed, industry, and destructive potential of the city, combined with its mayor's namesake (C[h]rome), is reminiscent of the Italian Futurist movement of the 1920's—a proto-fascist aesthetic and politic.

protect them. Flying above the foothills, Tom sees pine and rhododendron for the first time, and farms, as well as roads that emanate from a mountain village "like the spokes of a wheel" (p. 209). The simile is prescient: Tom struggles to see beyond the mobility imperative that has dominated his entire life. When he arrives in the Anti-Traction fortress city Batmunkh Gompa, Tom sees that much of the agglomeration is built physically into the mountains—a stark difference from London's desire to be emancipated from the land.

As the novel progresses, Tom becomes increasingly uncomfortable with his internalized bias toward Municipal Darwinism and Tractionism. Even at Batmunkh Gompa, which he finds objectively beautiful for its diversity and egalitarianism, he remembers that static settlements are supposed to be universally "dingy, squalid, backward places" (p. 212). The dichotomy between Traction/Anti-Traction manifests here and elsewhere as a debate on the definitions of civilization and barbarism. During a strategy meeting about the defense of Batmunkh Gompa, Tom recoils at the suggestion that London is barbarian. "It's you who are the barbarians!" he exclaims to the League, "Why shouldn't London eat Batmunkh Gompa if it needs to? If you don't like the idea, you should have put your cities on wheels long ago like civilized people!" (p. 216). The connotations are clear: in Tom's mind, assimilation to industrial-extractive urbanization is what makes one civilized. To be in place, to be content with living equanimously with the ecologies on which one finds themselves, cannot exist within this system. The plot hinges on Tom coming into critical consciousness in his experience of alternative modes of urbanization and interactions with the environment.

The growth-oriented urbanization processes in *Mortal Engines* demand that cities serve as socially stratified technologies of colonial violence and resource extraction—insofar as other cities themselves are transformed into resources. Living on the land is, for those who ascribe to Municipal Darwinism, a "horrifying" thought (p. 23). Combined with the patriarchal desires of the powerful men who control London, the novel serves as a reminder that "male conceptions of freedom and happiness depend on an ongoing process of emancipation form nature, both human embodiment and the natural environment" (Bradford, 2008, p. 87). However, like Bradford goes

on to claim, the novel also suggests that "future human well-being will need to reweave the culture/nature duality by incorporating embodiment and nonhuman nature" (ibid).

For all its technological striving, tractioned London falls to its own imperative. MEDUSA implodes in the novel's climactic finale, destroying the entire agglomeration. Gone, too, are the sustainability initiatives the city devised in order to survive between feedings: the conversion of its green spaces into gardens and farms, the exact portioning out of nutrition relative to an individual's caloric requirements, the recycling of human waste. In this, the novel is ultimately wary of technology's potential to support continued growth. This ambivalence is summed up well in a Historian's rebuke of the MEDUSA project: "That's what comes of the Engineers' obsession with old-tech!... and what did the Ancients ever achieve with their devices, anyway? They just made a horrible mess of their world and then blew themselves up!" (p. 203). Technology does not inevitably result in sustainability.

The physical agglomeration—the physical city—is one thing; the processes by which it supports itself is another. Urbanization, as I have written, did not begin with capitalism, but capitalism has transformed it, as well as fixated in our cultural imagination the necessity and naturalness of growth and extraction as prerequisites to urbanization. In the final section, I consider how *Mortal Engines* and *The Hunger Games* succeed at imagining rural resistance to extractivist and imperial systems while also failing to usher in alternative modes of urbanization.

Imagining Activism

The Hunger Games and *Mortal Engines* are, in some ways, inverse visions of the same dystopian, ecocidal, extractivist ideology that is threatening the survival of our planet in the Anthropocene. For one, each novel's focalizing character experiences different geographical and ideological trajectories. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is forced from her rural home to compete for the viewing pleasure of an affluent capitol city that administers her home District. Her resistance to oppression from urban elites is only reinforced. In *Mortal Engines*, Tom is forced from his mega-urban London home to live on the land. In doing so, he learns the value of alternative social agglomerations. The gendered dynamics of these journeys are also distinct.

Katniss must balance a performance of femininity that serves both the Capitol's expectations of a subservient, flirty girlhood with District 12's need for a survivalist heroine to symbolize their resistance. Tom, on the other hand, comes to recognize the dangers in idolizing hyper-masculinity and replaces his patriarchal male hero figures with women. Again, despite ultimately sharing a mission to resist oppressive forces of urbanization, either character must find their own path for doing so within their respective world systems.

Here, too, are important distinctions between Collins and Reeve's visions. Their respective fictional worlds offer complimentary images of how contemporary urbanization processes under capitalism will unfold. In *The Hunger Games*, The Capitol tightly administers and compartmentalizes processes of ecological extraction within outlying Districts. Urbanization is facilitated through a horizontal extension of urban-state power—specifically, the extractive elements that support Panem's social metabolism. Brenner calls these processes, which occur in today's real global economy, an "explosion of sociospatial relations across vast territories and ecologies that are likewise being perpetually enclosed, operationalized, industrialized, and creatively destroyed in support of capital's voracious, profit-driven metabolism" (2019, p. 14). *Mortal Engines* offers the opposite movement: implosion, the concentration of the self-same metabolic processes into a single urban agglomeration. The result is a verticalization of both economic processes and the social value of the labor required to perform them. These divergent responses to ecological disaster are also distinct in the availability of ecological resources. There is, apparently, still coal left to mine in The Seam; there is nothing to be gleaned from the barren lands of The Hunting Grounds. In *Mortal Engines*, urbanization has reached its ultimate expression under extractivist ideologies; in *The Hunger Games*, it is well on its way to doing so.

For these differences, the two narratives share several elements in common that shed light on what, ideologically, is assumed stable enough to survive beyond catastrophe. Race is not one of them, as it is longer a primary organizing category in either society. Instead, geography and vocation serve as the principle marker of caste. Other elements of contemporary society do carry through, though. Both London and Panem are societies of spectacle (Debord, 1970). They relish in consuming depictions of violence, be it the combat between adolescent tributes in the arena or

the cannibalization of smaller, more vulnerable cities on the Hunting Grounds. Both societies also inherit extant discourses that contrast civilization and barbarism: those that live in the city, the *polis*, are civilized; those that do not are wild, uncouth, barbarous.

Urbanization processes observable in contemporary extractivist capitalism also carry through into these future visions. In both novels, society is arranged topographically into obvious hierarchies. Whether vertical or horizontal, the further distant one is from the intellectual and abstract work of the bureaucratic government, the more dangerous and less valued one's labor— and the closer to the earth. The salvagemen work on London's lowest platform, suspended just a few dozen feet above the ground. Residents of District 12 work in coal mines: literally inside the earth. Yet for as dirty, dangerous, and devalued as these labors are, they are the fulcrum on which their respective societies pivot. The people of The Gut and The Seam possess the skills required to make Panem and London function as working societies dependent on material resource extraction. Their skills are also that which enable effective resistance to these same oppressive and extractive regimes. Katniss and Hester both possess survival skills learned in response to government austerity, and both become leaders of ecologically-entwined factions that actively resist the imperialist state operating from a distant urban center. In both novels, those who resist are provincial, far-flung, rural. While their resistance isn't firstly to the environmental destruction, the implied end of their struggle involves a sustainable system of environmental interaction.

And what of those who labor in the zones of extraction? What if they simply refused to work? Of course, the totalitarian regimes described both by Collins and Reeves would likely respond with force—not so different from the cases of Welsh and Scottish miners strikes (McCabe & Wallington, 1988) and the ongoing farmer strikes in India (Ganguly, 2020). The danger of these resistance movements, in literature and in reality, is both in their ability to grind urban processes to a halt and in their provincialized otherness. There is a radical potential in visions of future agglomerations, even if this potential is only partially realized.

Speculative fiction asks its readers to consider alternative modes for being in relationship with other humans and with the non-human world. Even dystopian fiction, which presents a non-ideal image of a world to come, insists that young readers imagine its opposite: that is, utopia. In

contrast to the depicted stratified inequities of totalitarian systems they read about, readers are invited to imagine more empathetic, kind, and inclusive relationships. This invitation can be implied in the narration, or the characters themselves can model this explicitly. Even Tom, who brought all his biases to Batmunkh Gompa, cannot help but to wonder:

> Didn't the people of the Shield-Wall long for movement and a change of scene? How did they dream, without the grumbling vibrations of a city's engines to rock them to sleep? Did they love this place? And suddenly he felt terribly sad that the whole bustling, colorful, ancient city might soon be rubble under London's tracks (Reeve, 2003, p. 219).

In addition to imagining—or inviting imagination about—ontologies different than our own, these narratives also speculate about how humanity will react to the global climate emergency. Heise and Christensen (2017) argue that we cannot anticipate what this reaction will be, but these novels suggest that the reaction will be to adhere to the extractivist status quo. But while the systems do not change, their protagonists offer hope in the form of a rural adolescent agitator. Through the actions of these young activists, transformation is, at least, a possibility.

In the world we currently inhabit, radical transformation must occur if life on Earth is to survive. We need radically different "dreams, imaginaries, and experiments that are articulated and make the impossible seem possible" (Bradley & Hedrén, 2014, p. 2). Dreaming and articulating these sustainable visions goes hand in hand with seeing beyond capitalism into radically different systems of human social agglomeration and ecological interaction. In this, these novels fall short, but they are not the only ones that do. As a cultural field, literature for young people tends to insist that young people think critically about the future they want themselves to live in while simultaneously reproducing ideologies of capitalism (Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2017; Mickenberg & Nel, 2008). The paradoxical push and pull of conservative centripetal and radical centrifugal forces in young peoples' literature is not limited to that literature. Even more broadly, these forces comprise a larger complex that Giroux calls the "disimagination machine," a "set of cultural apparatuses extending from schools and mainstream media to the new sites of screen culture, and a public pedagogy that functions primarily to undermine the ability of individuals to think critically, imagine the unimaginable, and engage in

thoughtful and critical dialogue: put simply, to become critically informed citizens of the world (2014, p. 186).

Ecologically sustainable societies will require spatial reorganization as well as a reimagination of urbanization processes. Doing so without also persistently attending to the underlying structures of power, ecological interaction, and human relationships will prove inadequate. As Lefebvre wrote, ecological sustainable urbanization "can only lead toward the end (goal and conclusion) by means of the activity of the base: spatial (territorial) self-management, direct democracy and democratic control, affirmation of the differences produced in and through that struggle" (1978/2003, p. 100). The issue is not whether rural or urban is the future. Rather, it is how we might reimagine the global socioeconomic systems from which they emerge.

Dystopia and utopia can provide, in their distinctive yet entwined imaginative methods, opportunities to catalyze action for changing systems. Levitas (2013) calls this utopia as method —the interrogation of imagined future political, economic or social alternatives beyond capitalism. As a mode of critique, utopia also generates knowledge that is in fact a repressed already existing, evaluative form of knowledge about possible futures. These futures do not need to be actually possible, Levitas argues, but they merely "need to be believed so as to mobilize people to political action" (Levitas, 2010, p. 221). Depictions of characters engaging in action for change only cement this impetus, and depictions of local activism can and do make a difference to readers: "small-scale community narratives demonstrate this more materially, as they can both raise consciousness and offer avenues for practical action available to children as well as adults" (Bradford, 2008, p. 96). Oziewicz concurs:

> When characters resist oppressive aspects of their societies, challenge and transform them, they envision a more just social order and a better ground for the flourishing of human life. This is rarely explicit, but whenever this happens, readers are asked to take a stand. They are shown why certain choices matter, and how values have consequences (2015, p. 13).

In the following chapter, I follow these claims and examine depictions of rural youth engaging in acts of ecological awareness and resistance, as well as the ways they position both those youth and ecologies within the broader systems described in this chapter: capitalism, industrial-

extraction, neoliberalism, globalization, and urbanization. In short, I argue that depictions of young people—and young rural people living and learning in rural places, in particular—prove instructive in imagining ways that we, adults, might learn to resist ecocide in more inclusive, effective, and necessary ways.

Chapter V: Emergent Action

I have argued that the Anthropocene might be described as an epoch of distance. This distance has two poles: one points toward nostalgic pastorals, the other toward future utopias. This distance, as well as the cognitive and geographical distances detailed in Chapter Two, are based on the multifaceted distance between individuals and the ecologies that sustain them. In this chapter, I want to consider how this distance might begin to be collapsed and how doing so can transform the Anthropocene from an epoch of distance to an epoch of action in the West. In particular, I will explore the ways in which young people across the globe are developing ways of collaborating with one another and their non-human environments to demand a sustainable future. In this, the Anthropocene might also be characterized as a learning situation. Seeing it in this regard calls for an analysis of how people—individuals and communities—are *learning* to see the processes that enable ecocide, articulate the dispositions necessary to change these processes, and collaborate on the most effective means of action.

Young people are already collaborating to enact change. The youth-led 2019 Global Climate Strike turned out millions who marched, demonstrated, and took direct action against ecocidal policies (Sengupta, 2019). Indigenous youth continue to be on the literal front lines of resistance to petrocapitalist expansion (Elbein, 2017). Literature intended for these young people, particularly when set in rural areas, also offers depictions in which youth are shown learning about and acting upon local environmental destruction. I find it vitally important that these depictions, as with ongoing youth movements in reality, occur largely outside educational institutions and outside hierarchical adult-youth relationships. And yet, I believe that seeing these depictions of youth collaboration as depictions of pedagogy helps both to valorize young people's work and to inspire adult educators interested in taking up the cause of environmental justice. In this regard, Freire's conceptualization of dialogue is a beautiful tool for considering how young people learn to enact sustainable, biocentric relationships in the Anthropocene.

My argument in this chapter leans on my observation that global attention to critical pedagogy and youth climate activism has focused largely on how these are enacted in urban sites.

Youth resistance at Standing Rock notwithstanding, youth demonstrations in Berlin, Stockholm, and New York City have become focal points of media attention. So, too, has scholarship on Freire's critical pedagogy. While the pedagogy had its origin in rural Brazilian communities, its scholarship has become nearly synonymous with urban education (McLaren & Giroux, 1990). Still, my aim in this chapter is not to simply flip the focus from urban to rural sites. Rather, I hope that by focusing on depictions of rural youth engaging in dialogical praxis we may arrive at a more inclusive understanding of critical pedagogy: one that offers a framework for recognizing how urbanization processes under extractive capitalism causes uneven harm to all those who live under it. I hope to show that attention to processes and relationships—rather than specific sites and entities—allows for youth to engage more robustly in action for change.

In previous chapters I discussed how petrocapitalist urbanization creates distance, and in this distance emerge possibilities for ignorance, nostalgia, utopia. In this chapter, I look at how rural youth collaborate with other youth to replace this dominant structure of feeling with an emergent one more conducive to sustainability, collaboration, and action. The five novels I discuss offer models for how a specifically rural context shapes youth beliefs and action on the environment. Freire's five requirements of dialogue—love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thought—are cornerstones of the analysis, though not prescriptively so. Rather, his notion of dialogue is taken as a general and malleable framework that lends itself to enriching understanding of the ways that young people learn about and take action on the environment. Ultimately, I hope to show that immersion in rural sites of extraction—in dialogue with rural communities both human and non-human—is essential to cultivating critical consciousness and desire for action.

On Dialogue

The influence of Freire's pedagogy on education globally cannot be understated. His magnum opus, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) has become the theoretical touchstone of critical pedagogy worldwide, giving educators a common language from which to conceptualize the purpose and nature of education as conducive to freedom rather than assimilation. Literacy,

too, underwent a transformation. No longer was reading merely the lexical decoding of words and phrases foreign to a learner's lived experience; instead, *critical* literacy insisted on recognizing the ways that social systems shape language after their own image to imbue them with power. Reading is not just about identifying the meaning of the word, but identifying the meaning of the world, in Freire's now famous formulation (p. 87). In this radical reconceptualization, Freire insisted that individuals working together might come to a collective recognition of their own power to transform an unjust and unequal world. This is the heart of Freire's pedagogy: to expose systems of dehumanization and replace them with ones that enable individuals to "overcome alienation" (p. 44) from their own subjectivities, from one another, and from the ecologies that support them. Such pedagogy is an attempt to become more fully human.

Freire argued that traditional models of education structured on a hierarchical teacher-student relationship could never be truly transformative. In what he called a "banking" model of education, teachers are imagined to be experts who deposit knowledge into the minds of receptive, passive students. This type of education is no more than a direct transmission of information. Freire believed a pedagogy was needed that would allow students to understand and enact their own power to create knowledge and act upon it. For Freire, this pedagogy was the dialogue.

As both a motif and method in Freirean pedagogy, the dialogue is grounded in a belief that knowledge is produced relationally. Theoretically, dialogism posits that relationships must strive toward egalitarianism: both in the teacher-student relationship and in the oppressor-oppressed relationship. In working toward humanization, the goal is not to replace the powerful (teachers, the oppressors) with those who are not (students, the oppressed). This would only invert the existing hierarchy, flipping roles of oppressor and oppressed. Practically, dialogism insists that critical thinking cannot occur either through rote memorization or in isolation from others. "The teacher," Freire writes, "cannot think for her students… authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (1970, p. 77). In this way, effect dialogic is also "biophilic"—it is alive, active, dynamic, and seeking proliferation and change (ibid). It resembles a healthy ecology, and thus

insists on the importance of interconnections to the production of knowledge. Humans being together, embodied, in place, enable conversations that directly impact the lives of those participating in the dialogue. These local dialogues are themselves part of a broader system—that is, human's ongoing attempt to make humanization both "an ontological possibility and historical reality" (p. 43). Through this process, the objective of education is less about transforming individuals and more about transforming the systems that violently impose upon and constrain their lives.

My interest in this chapter, however, is not to analyze Freire's methods but rather Freire's prerequisites for dialogic education. These prerequisites are, by and large, not specific skills. Instead, they are dispositions, or ways of relating to individuals and communities: love, humility, faith, hope, and a willingness to think critically. Without these, Freire argues, education for freedom cannot happen. I address each of these dispositions in more depth in the sections that follow—hoping to show that these dispositions help to illuminate young people's environmental activism as the rich and necessary arena of education that we, adults, might learn from. However, I first want to reckon with attempts to apply Freire to environmental education. These attempts and their critics will provide context to my own articulation of dialogue as a generative framework for conceptualizing grassroots, rural youth activism.

Despite Freire writing little about the environment, there is a robust body of scholarship that seeks to apply his critical pedagogy to environmental and place-based education. Called ecopedagogy, this form of critical pedagogy-as-applied-to-the-environment is a broad term for socially-aware education for sustainability. Ecopedagogy has found champions in many place-based and environmental educators. For one, ecopedagogy has made both fields more flexible and effective, namely in that it provided a critical disruption of the long-held assumption of "a linear relationship between environmental knowledge and environmental action" (Schild, 2016, p. 34). By insisting that an individual's environmental relationships are imbued with other sociocultural systems, ecopedagogy is predicated on ongoing critical dialogue that attends, at the same time, to the particular ecological, social, and political contexts of a specific local community (Norat, Herrería, & Rodríguex 2016). Given that ecological destruction is global, however, scholars argue

that ecopedagogy must also seek to cultivate a global perspective. Fassbinder (2020) agrees, citing Freire's staunch belief that humans are uniquely capable of transforming nature because they grant it significance beyond themselves (cf. Freire, 1970, p. 97). For these scholars, ecopedagogy, even one "not predicated on a prior conveyance of biocentrism" is capable of generating critical thought, "an openness to praxis and to utopian dreaming" (Fassbinder, 2020, p. 20).

For as noble as ecopedagogy's aims are, they are not without critique. Bowers and Apffel-Marglin (2005) provide one of the most strident criticism of ecopedagogy and its Freirean foundation. They argue that Freire was "unable to think in ways not dependent on the same assumptions that underlie the Western approach to economic development" (p. xii), and so, in their perspective, ecopedagogy built on Freirean foundations falls short of its potential. Freire's anthropocentrism, belief in linear progressive social change, elevation of reason and rationality as the supreme source of knowledge, focus on individual actors over communities, and assumption that these tenants are universally applicable for all human communities are all elements that Bowers and Apffel-Marglin see as problematic. Nor are they alone in this criticism. Souza, Wals, and Jacobi (2019), for example, suggest that Freire's pedagogy ought to be reshaped into more biocentric and territorially attuned than Freire himself granted it. Tuck, McKenzie, and McCoy (2014) concur. They insist that if ecopedagogy is to truly be as transformative as Freire desired for critical pedagogy to be, it must dislocate settler futurities as its "central referent" (p. 8) and replace them with "unsettled imaginary" (p. 17). This process would include disrupting settler epistemologies, such as the Western Marxism in which Freire was schooled, which tend toward universalizalism and essentialism. Seawright (2014) says as much in arguing that ecopedagogy must question "the complex epistemic relationship between modes of domination, conceptions of the natural world, and the politics of self" (p 556). In doing so, these critics insist, and as Jewell Parker Rhodes writes in *Bayou Magic*, ecopedagogues might come to recognize that there are "all kinds of knowing, all different ways to know" (2015, p. 24).

The need for diverse modes of thinking about and engaging the environment are crucial to my analysis of *Bayou Magic* and the four other novels in the sections that follow. Critiques of

the Freirean framework also help me resist reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as gospel. By taking *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as one of many possible means of conceptualizing learning about and action for the environment, I hope to help realize the potential of Freire's theory to be more inclusive without being universal. For, as Schild reminds us, "as these global problems are highly complex, interrelated, and interdependent, they demand novel approaches in understanding, managing, and conceiving humans' relationship to the natural world" (2016, p. 19). In this spirit, it is necessary to spell out five key distinctions between Freire's theory and the ecopedagogy framework I bring to this chapter.

For one, I take pedagogy to be something people *do* rather than something an educator *facilitates*. Pedagogy is a process of mediation, an interaction between a subject—an individual or a group—and the world that affects change. Pedagogy does not emit from any particular person or group; it is constantly enacted by anyone who is engaged in mediational processes with others. Of course, certain groups—educators, in particular—may actively reflect on pedagogy more diligently than others, but this does not mean that others are not pedagogues in their own right. Granted, such a broad understanding of pedagogy may cause some theoretical hiccups, but I insist that extending a definition of pedagogy allows for a richer understanding of how young people learn to engage in action for change on their own terms.

The second key distinction rests between Freire's focus on adults involved in dialogue and my own interest in the ways that young people dialogue. In fact, I believe that Freire's universal subject is an adult subject. Despite his nod to the "youth movement" in the first footnote of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, his numerous examples are drawn from experiences with adults—individuals who inevitably have distinct cognitive and social needs from young people. Youth possess fewer legal rights and opportunities for political expression than adults; when youth attempt to change the world through their activism, adults often reject their authority to do so (Feldman, 2020). Adult resistance to acknowledging youth intellectual, social, and political capacity can be seen as kin to Romantic conceptions of childhood as *tabula rasa*—the exact conception that Freire decries as a banking model. In this patronizing view, because young people are believed to lack the "wisdom" that presumably only comes through the experience of formal

education, they must wait to be old enough to accrue the authority needed to participate in adult society. Schools, of course, are influential gatekeepers of this subjectivity, in that they formally certify young people as proper authorities on the knowledge needed to participate in adult society. In industrial and post-industrial nation-states around the world, this "proper" subjectivity revolves around an allegiance to the nation *and* to young peoples' roles as consumers and eventually producers in capitalist economies. These two tenets—allegiance to nation-state and to economy— are also those that hamstring an individual's ability to be a global, ecologically-minded citizen—a role that is increasingly necessary to fulfill.

The second tension relevant to my analysis is that between centralized and decentralized education. Freire's conception of dialogic education, as outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was organized around local culture circles that would be composed of members of the community specific to that locale. Ironically, however, when the Brazilian government recognized the potential of Freire's model, officials sought to incorporate it as the national standard for adult literacy education. As with other national education systems, the conflict between state and community values has proved to be a dangerous fault line in dialogic education. The ideals and standards articulated at a national level can become rigid and unresponsive to the lived conditions of particular communities. And any learning that happens outside of formal schooling and its standards often fails to be recognized as learning—indeed, this learning can even appear subversive to formal schooling itself. This tension will not go away. It is no wonder, then, that the Youth Climate Strikers chose school walkouts as a collective action. In protesting the ecocidal global systems ruining their futures, young people also protested the educational institutions that prevent them from engaging directly in the struggle to transform those same systems.

From this point, the distinction between planned and what might be called *unplanned* learning follows naturally. The difference between the planned and unplanned learning, in my mind, is in how the learner comes into the learning situation—that is, how they realize the intervention of novel experiences into what is already known and how that novelty component provides the impetus for learning and change. For Freire, the intervention comes from the critical pedagogue. They, i.e. the teacher trained in facilitating dialogue, comes to the learning situation

with an itinerary: educators should first immerse themselves in the community with which they will work, then they should contact community leaders to begin gathering groups of learners, then identify generative themes, etc. While this planned protocol has benefits for the students , I want to posit that unplanned learning—that is, learning that comes from response to unforeseen, and uncontrolled situations—requires the same dialogic processes and is no less valid. When taken as such, learning becomes something that occurs in any response to any novel situation. This broader understanding of learning is especially vital in the Anthropocene, a sociohistorical moment without a clear agenda or solutions—a state of sticky enmeshment, to use Morton's terms, in which we all, collectively, find ourselves (Morton, 2013).

Despite Freire's description of his theory as anthropological rather than anthropocentric (1970, p. 43), critics have charged his pedagogy with precisely that—a commanding focus on humanity's epistemological, ontological, and axiological primacy in the biosphere (cf. Bowers & Apffel-Marglin, 2005; Arrows et al., 2020). Indeed, Freire's theories—intentionally or not—have a universalizing tendency that ignores and erases non-Western epistemologies. Biocentrism is one such erasure, as are systems that privilege the sensory over the esoteric, communal over individual, and cyclical conceptions of time over linear ones. Just as importantly, in Freire's Western paradigm, the rational, individual *adult* is championed as the paramount thinker. In contrast, ways of knowing associated with children—spontaneous, playful, curious, animistic, justice-oriented, and action-oriented—are considered naive. And yet, as the following analyses will show, these traits not only lend themselves well to fulfilling Freire's requirements for dialogic education. They are, in fact, necessary to rectifying local environmental destruction.

Part of the solution will require overcoming dehumanization that occurs under petrocapitalism, which disconnects individuals and communities from the ecological processes that we depend on and, indeed, come from. Transcending these divisions will prove to be the task of the young rural characters that enliven the novels I consider in this chapter. Confronting these same divisions will also prove to be the task of adults and young people alike in the Anthropocene. Ultimately, the kind of humanization Freire meant—expanded to an effort of mending our relationship with the biosphere—will require bringing young people into the

dialogue: recognizing their innate capacities to understand ecological injustice and engage in praxis to act toward justice.

The following sections are organized around Freire's five requirements for dialogue: love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking. In each section, I offer a reading of a particular novel that represents rural youth learning to recognize and agitate against environmental destruction. Although the settings of each novel are unique, in each case young people's environmental learning is predicated on an intervention coming through personal experience with ecological systems that are, in turn, grounded in an immersion in rural settings. When considered together, these novels suggest that witnessing and being in sites of environmental extraction, in dialogue with one another, produces powerful conditions for action.

Love and *Marvin Gardens*

Obe has a keen yet unique sense of what it means to be a Devlin boy. Born on land that was once his family's farm, Obe cannot feel the same way about it as his mother or her parents. Housing developments have destroyed much of the non-human environment, stymying his relationship with the place. Obe spends his mornings and evenings cleaning pollution from the creek that bears his family's name. Meanwhile, his father laughs at Obe's so-called feminine environmentalist sensibilities, believing that Obe shouldn't waste his energy cleaning up after others. However, one day, Obe meets Marvin Gardens—a mysterious, pig-like animal that eats trash and lives undetected near Devlin Creek. When Obe learns that the boys who live in the new houses are attempting to capture and kill the creature, Obe is forced to ask for help—adult help. That trust pays off. With his teacher, Ms. G, committed to Obe and his mission, he is able to protect Marvin and the land that no longer belongs to him and his family but which Obe nonetheless feels responsible to maintain.

Obe's relationship with Marvin and the land that Marvin embodies is grounded on love— one of the constituent elements of Freire's dialogue. This love is not a fleeting sense of likeability, masochism, or even a "pretext for manipulation" (1970, p. 90). It is a deep and sustained commitment to proliferate the freedom and lives of other beings, even those beyond our

immediate civic responsibilities. As Freire wrote, "dialogue cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people… love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (p. 89). Obe lives this loving commitment to others and as such he is able to dialogue with Marvin on several registers: dialogue in the sense of actual conversation and in the more relational, positional sense of mutual investment.

Obe's love for Marvin is fueled by his ability to see the interconnections between himself, Obe, and his environment. One aspect of this recognition is in the way the ecosystem of Devlin land is connected with ecosystems beyond it. Obe thinks to himself about how the ocean starts "here, at Devlin Creek" (p. 11) and how "all trash is [Devlin] trash" (p. 31). He does not winnow his perspective to only immediate geography, but rather acknowledges the ways that his actions taken on Devlin land impact the communities and ecologies connected to it. In addition, Obe's understanding of his family's history with that land allows him to feel personally connected to the environment. He knows that his great, great-grandfather endured racism and addiction, and he also knows that the ensuing trauma left his family financially bankrupt. Defending Marvin allows Obe to feel "what [his family] must have felt like to own 175 acres of land. Pride" (p. 217). Importantly, these two understandings—connectivity and legacy—are made apparent exactly when Obe immerses himself in nature. In one moment, Obe sits on the bank of Devlin Creek and wonders "what it must have been like to be my great grandfather. Maybe he sat on this very spot once. Maybe my grandmother did. Maybe my mother. Maybe five hundred years ago a Lenape kid sat here and watched the sun rise" (p. 125). The fact that Obe has these thoughts sitting on the creek bank is crucial factor in the development of his love.

Obe's deep commitments to Marvin might be defined more specifically as an example of a *partnership ethic* (Merchant, 2016) between human and non-human nature, which acknowledges mutual commitments and interdependencies across multiple scales. The partnership ethic calls on humans to "understand nature as a complex system that includes humanity within it allows for the possibility that both the earth as we know it" (Merchant, 2016, p. 135; cf Gough & Whitehouse, 2018). It is thus offered as a feminist, biophilic response to the neoliberal, masculine ethics that prioritizes the individual human as the focus of ethic thought—

that which Obe's father espouses. Obe's father implores his son not to feel sentimental about the destruction development brings, but rather to "solve the problem." Obe responds, succinctly, "There is no solution to this problem" (p. 45)—or, rather, there is no single solution but to develop his love for Marvin. In addition, the novel recognizes that ideologies of whiteness work to sever an individual's relationship with the natural world and the histories of specific locales. In this, white supremacy, "through capitalistic structuring of society and the economization of everything, works to alienate people from a healthy relationship with the natural world and local places" (Seawright, 2014, p. 571). Again, Obe's father symbolizes this severance, in his insistence on individualism over communitarianism— "I didn't personally ruin the planet!" he roars (p. 32). Thus, white settler supremacy is articulated as a system of oppression that, often working as hypermasculinity, abrogates responsibility for environmental destruction and limits others from feeling love for the non-human world. It is also a system that alienates those who love differently in the world. While Obe's love allows him to dialogue with the non-human world, he nonetheless often feels ostracized from his human community. "I was a loner," he admits, suggesting that the loneliness is caused in part by the rules and expectations that don't allow him to "be able to do what felt right" (p. 227). The novel is careful to highlight several of the mechanisms that disconnect Obe's sense of righteousness from his ability to act on it—that is, his love for Marvin from his ability to express it.

Obe resists systems of oppression out of love for Marvin, but as consequence these systems also cause him to distrust adults to be capable of sharing his biophilia. In fact, the novel's climax hinges on whether or not Obe will be able trust adults to love Marvin as he does. Obe knows he cannot tell his parents, as they forbade him from going out as punishment for not finishing his math homework. He cannot tell his friend Tommy, as Tommy befriends the ecocidal group of boys from the housing development. Obe even worries about telling his science teacher, Ms. G—what if she is forced to report it to authorities whose institutional obligations and greed will lead them to render Marvin as a specimen for study, rather than a loving friend? Ultimately, Obe realizes he has to risk telling someone and chooses Ms. G. What follows is an anxious few days, but Ms. G pulls through. She contacts state officials to certify Marvin as a member of a

newly discovered species, and together they commit to protecting both Obe's non-human friend and the ecosystem that supports him. In this development, *Me and Marvin Gardens* offers young people a model for how love for others, both human and non-human, can provide opportunities for environmental action. The novel is also instructive about how dialogue is predicated on an ability to recognize the affordances and limitations of one's own positionality. Obe lacks the political power to openly advocate for Marvin. Ms. G, for all her good intentions, does not know the actual, material environment of Devlin Creek well enough to find Marvin on her own. Because these two characters recognize their own needs and limitations, they realize the importance of learning from one other and from others. This humility is vital to the dialogical relationship they develop. To explore this dynamic in more depth, I turn to Amy Allgeyer's *Dig Too Deep*.

Humility and *Dig Too Deep*

For Liberty Briscoe, a soon-to-be high school senior accustomed to the vibrant political and cultural scene of Washington, D.C., the promise of living with Granny for her senior year in Ebbottsville, Kentucky feels like an exile. But with her mother on trial for an act of environmental activism gone wrong, Lib has little choice but to reconnect with her Appalachian roots. Like Obe, Lib's sees her commitment to the land as her inheritance. "I'm not one of those people who wax all poetic about nature, but I like the way this place makes me feel," she thinks. "Like my bones are made of the same rocky stuff" (Allgeyer, 2016, p. 6). This commitment, as well as love for an increasingly ill Granny, makes Lib wonder if the processes of mountaintop removal (MTR) so celebrated in the community for its purported economic value might in fact be poisoning the place she comes to call home. Lib certainly seems more than capable of resisting MTR: her quality D.C. education has given her a wealth of knowledge about ecological processes, and her mother is a living role model of an effective environmental activist. Nonetheless, Liv's assumptions about the ignorance of rural communities hamstring her attempts to enter into dialogue with her newfound peers. Her activism is impeded until Liv recognizes the

need for humility and is able to work in solidarity with those suffering from environmental pollution caused by the mining corporation's destructive practices.

Like love, humility is a vital component of dialogic relationships. For Freire, humans inevitably possess incomplete knowledge about the world and only when different individuals are able to share what they know through mutual exchange can knowledge be proliferated. In order for this to occur, however, individuals must first recognize that their understanding of the world is neither more complete nor more valued than that of others. In fact, Freire questions whether dialogue can even be possible "if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?" (p. 90). For those whose vocation is the production knowledge—teachers, academics, students—the task is not to instruct. Rather, it is to recognize that others, too, know things. It is this process of humility that allows Lib to recognize that she needs others' help in bringing down the mine.

Two important aspects of Allgeyer's *Dig Too Deep* shape the way humility is enacted. One is the working class rural setting. When Lib first arrives in Ebbottsville, she carries assumptions about poverty and rurality that limit her ability to see the value of local knowledge. Coming from an academically rigorous high school in Washington D.C., Lib believes that at Plurd County High she'll "be lucky to have a math class that doesn't involve flash cards" (p. 2). She adopts a posture of expertise and seeks to prescribe correct behavior and thinking for those around her. The community is well aware, however, that these prescriptions are biased and oppressive. "You don't understand anything about this town," one of Lib's peers argues. "You come waltzin' in here, trying to save us like we're a third-world country" (p. 64). While this wariness of outsider "expertise" might be seen as a lack of humility on the community's part, I am instead reminded of Freire's insight that marginalized communities tend to be more critical of the imposition of knowledge systems than those who benefit from those systems (cf. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, introduction). In fact, Ebbottsvilleans are well aware of the power dynamics wrought by class difference. Lib is consistently marked as an affluent outsider because she talks "real proper" (p. 12). When Lib's working-poor friend Dobber conducts an independent investigation that finds evidence that the coal mine fabricated reports that masked its

environmental impacts, Lib is taken aback. "What?" Dobber asks. "You thought I was an ignorant redneck just 'cause I don't speak Shakespeare-like English?" (p. 144).

Whereas Lib is able to humble herself in order to dialogue with others, adults are more resistant to it. When Lib goes to the Kentucky EPA with evidence of mining company malfeasance, the adult officials dismiss her claims out of hand. Later, when company employees murder Granny's dog, the local police dismiss Lib's accusations. These instances of adult conceit are certainly keeping with the ways that youth—and youth climate activists, in particular—are "often criticised for being deficient in their knowledge on—and hence their ability to engage with —the broader political system" (Feldman, 2020, p. 4). However, the novel provides a crucial intervention into this marginalization. *Dig Too Deep* suggests that young people, because they are more keenly aware of their social position, are better capable than adults of identifying those with the knowledge and skills that they themselves lack. For instance, after Lib comes to terms with her own intellectual limitations, she sees the potential for allyship with Ashleigh—the company president's niece. Using Ashleigh's relationship as an in, the pair set up an interview with the company president under the pretense of a school assignment. During the interview, with the help of Dobber's evidence, Lib records the president admitting to fabricating reports. Once the recording is sent to Lib's connections in the D.C. media, Ebbottsville's youth have powerful leverage that forces the company to stop its destructing practices.

Refusal to recognize others' knowledge has a parallel in the anti-science attitude taken by several characters. For one, Lib's love interest, Cole, actively rejects scientific evidence of the ecological impacts of mountaintop removal. "Studies my ass," he laughs. "That's nothing but a pack of lies" (p. 75). The novel makes clear that Cole's denialism is a function of both his class status—he and his father work for the mine and live in a middle class neighborhood—and his political allegiance. "Facts and figures from your liberal website? No one wants to hear that shit," he says (p. 128). Although Cole eventually comes to side with Lib, his strong position is a powerful reminder of the ways that one's ability to see the value—the truth—of evidence of ecocide is mitigated by class, position, and place (Hamilton et al., 2014).

Still, *Dig Too Deep* makes a point to show how distinct sets of knowledge and experiences are both shaped by positionality and necessary for dialogue. With love for Ebbottsville, generated through her familial connection to that place and her physical immersion in it, Lib comes to see the importance of humility in developing dialogical relationships that lead to environmental action. Importantly, humility must necessarily be complimented by faith that, once a person comes to see the value in others' knowledge, that that trust will be reciprocated. To explore this aspect of dialogue, I turn to Jewell Parker Rhodes' *Bayou Magic.*

Faith and *Bayou Magic*

Now that Maddy Levalier is nine years old, it's her turn to spend the summer with Grandmère in Bayou Bon Temps. Sure, Grandmère has an outhouse and no telephone; Sure, Grandmère grows and harvests her own food and is believed to be witchy. But Maddy's wariness about Grandmère and the "foreign" bayou ebb when she befriends Bear, a local boy whose father works on the oil rig that stands ominously on the horizon. The summer passes quickly, and Maddy comes into deep relationships with Bon Temps' human and nonhuman communities. When an accident on the oil rig causes a spill that threatens all life on the bayou, Maddy is forced —for the first time—to mobilize her relationships and skills in order to protect the community and ecology she loves. She's successful, and the novel concludes with the oil spill drifting away from her Grandmère's home but only because others were willing to entrust Maddy with the responsibility of doing so.

There are important similarities between Rhodes' *Bayou Magic* and the two novels discussed previously in this chapter. Like Obe and Lib, Maddy feels at home in her Grandmère's rural place even though her relationship with it is new. She is able to "read the bayou like Pa reads his newspaper" (p. 27). And like Lib eventually learns, Maddy understands that are "all kinds of knowing, all different ways to know" (p. 24). However, Maddy's inheritance is distinct from Lib's in that Maddy's relationship is predicated not just on a commitment to the bayou but also in that Maddy has inherited a magic capacity to commune with it. Specifically, Maddy is able to communicate with Mami Wata—the mermaid spirit who accompanied Maddy's ancestors

through the harrows of slavery and who continues to protect the bayou on which their descendants live. These magical relationships are not only a departure from the more mimetic nature of *Dig Too Deep* and *Me and Marvin Gardens*. They are also received much more willingly and immediately by those who do not experience it firsthand. In this, *Bayou Magic* celebrates radical trust in those whose ways of knowing and being the world are inaccessible to others. In fact, this trust—along with other elements of the dialogue—is exactly what enables Maddy to protect the bayou.

Freire describes trust—faith in others—as an *a priori* requirement for dialogue. Faith encourages individuals to "believe in others even before [they] meet them face to face" (Freire, 1970, pp. 90-91). This faith allows individuals to recognize the importance, value, and contributions of others for their own work. As such, Freire sees faith as a natural and necessary extension of humility. Without faith in others, individuals may work for others without believing in their capabilities. The consequence, Freire cautions, is that individuals—particularly those in powerful positions—may come to "talk about the people but do not trust them" (p. 60). Trust must occur unconditionally, even without direct, empirical evidence to support that trust.

The knowledge to which Maddy is uniquely privy is non-empirical. She alone can see and interact with Mami Wata who teaches Maddy the vibrancy of bayou (p. 144-7). Maddy's abilities also grant her premonitions about the oil spill soon to come (p. 155). Maddy's ability to know and commune with nature beyond the empirical allows her to supplement the school-based knowledge she had acquired in New Orleans. Part of this is, of course, her magical ability. But it is also partly due to her immersion in a rural environment. Grandmère, for example, can feel changes in the weather. When Maddy asks how she is able to tell, Grandmère explains that "Bayou folks know the old ways. City folks forget" (p. 115). But despite her status as a relative newcomer to the place, Maddy finds that Bear and other humans of Bon Temps nonetheless trust her knowledge. When Maddy first catches a glimpse of Mami Wata, who appears to her as a mermaid, she is worried about Bear's reaction. "I don't know everything," he says seriously. "Show me" (p. 59). Later in the novel, Maddy has a premonition that the spill has occurred and wakes Bear to pilot an airboat out into the Gulf. Bear doesn't hesitate, but rather "jumps up, slips

his feet into shoes. 'Let's go,' he says" (p. 201). These insights allow Maddy to understand the bayou in ways that are inaccessible even to the human residents who have spent their entire lives there.

Despite her youth, Maddy is also trusted by adults who listen to Maddy and accept her knowledge as something needed to deepen their relationships with the ecology that sustains them. In contrast to Obe's father and the Kentucky EPA, Grandmère's trust is a constant and powerful presence throughout Maddy's summer. The elder Levalier lacks the magic to interact with Mami Wata directly, but she asks Maddy to liaison: "ask her, ask her, Maddy, if she knows me." When Mami Wata says yes, Grandmère "weeps happy tears" (p. 149). Grandmère and the other adults never regard Maddy's knowledge as naive; rather, they trust in her capacity to teach them. Even beyond trusting Maddy to *know* things, adults also trust her to *act* upon that knowledge. When Maddy senses that Bear is being abused by his father, she is determined to stop it; as she approaches Bear's home, she notices that "none of the grown-ups stop me" (p. 159) In fact, the adults of Bon Temps, knowing that Maddy is the best hope for placating Bear's father's rage, encourage her to intervene. Their trust is affirmed when Bear's father repents and begins a journey to absolve himself of the trauma he had caused. As such, Bon Temps adults enact Freire's radical trust not just among one another, but across generational divides.

When the oil spill occurs, Maddy calls on Mami Wata and other ancestral water spirits to save Bayou Bon Temps. She realizes that doing so was her destiny, and as she dialogues with water spirits she embraces this fate. Crucially, Maddy recognizes this fate only when it becomes obvious that any human response to the oil spill will inevitably be inadequate. The Bon Temps community does all they can to save the wildlife suffering from the spill and despite their efforts many creatures die (p. 218). In their labor against the odds, I see not vanity but the enactment of hope—a fourth element of Freire's dialogue that becomes obvious in a close reading of a fourth novel, *Same Sun Here*.

Hope and *Same Sun Here*

The epistolary structure of *Same Sun Here* (House & Vaswani, 2011) renders it distinct from the previous novels analyzed in this chapter in that it offers two separate young voices in correspondence with one another. Despite this difference, this novel shares the other novels' commitment to recognizing the capacity of young people to dialogue across differences in order to understand and enact positive change. The two focal characters of *Same Sun Here* exemplify this. Meena has lived in New York City for just a few years, having been the last of her immediate family to leave India after a national dam project displaced her family from their ancestral village. She's come to see the skyscrapers like the mountains of her home, a fact that resonates with her pen pal, River, named after the Cumberland that flows near his Appalachian community. Through a year-long letter exchange, the two become close friends and kindred youth activists. They become all the closer when a rockslide, the result of mountain top removal, destroys River's school and injures his best friend. In the activism that ensues, River learns both from Meena and his Kentucky elders the necessity of responding to seemingly unchangeable circumstances with persistence and solidarity.

I want to consider hope in a particular light: that which corresponds to action even in the face of a reality that appears to be unchanging. When humans encounter injustice and recognize that it stems from massively complex and powerful systems, Freire argues the response—if it is to be dialogical—cannot be one of pessimism and despair. These latter lead to inaction. Hope, he writes, "does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting" (Freire, 1970, p. 92). Instead, humans must constantly work toward proliferating humanization, and they must do so together. This definition makes hope not only an essential disposition for the Anthropocene, but also for the dialogical relationship between Meena and River. In particular, three facets of hope are especially important: a belief that change is possible, a readiness to act on that belief, and the desire to share hope with others.

Meena and River espouse beliefs that ecocidal policies and practices can be transformed on local levels. Part of their respective beliefs comes from each having stories of change readily

available and personally meaningful to them. For instance, Meena tells River about the Chipko movement—a women-led movement in rural India to stop deforestation. Because one of the Chipko leaders was a close friend to Meena's grandmother, this allowed the story of the movement's success to become family lore. River, for his part, learns from his Mamaw what protesting ecocide might entail. "If something legal is unjust," Mamaw explains, "sometimes people have to do something illegal to get attention. It's called civil disobedience" (House & Vaswani, 2011, p. 109). Both youths share these examples with one another through their letter exchange, reinforcing the belief that change can happen—and has happened—in a variety of means and settings.

Meena and River not only believe that change can occur, but they come to believe that *their* actions can *directly* make a difference. One of the most pivotal moments of the novel comes when River attends an anti-mountain top removal march in Lexington. At first, he's awed at the sight of the crowd. "I had never seen so many people in one place in all my life," he writes to Meena (p. 234). The march fills him with pride, but when the governor comes out to address the crowd, River is disheartened to hear only platitudes and indecision. Just as the governor turns back toward the capitol building, River steps forward. He thrusts a bottle of polluted river water toward the governor and invites him to drink it. Journalists snap photos, but the governor politely declines, retreating back into his offices. The scene, however, makes national headlines. River is selected to represent Kentucky in a delegation at the United Nations. Even River's father, who had previously championed MTR, recants in the aftermath. River's actions also have ripple effects beyond Appalachia in that they also bring hope to Meena. In the novel's final letter, she discloses that her family has been forced out of their apartment. She details the harrowing days in which her family scrambled to find living arrangements, detailing the stress and anxiety that it caused. But for all the uncertainty and upheaval, Meena nonetheless ends the novel on a hopeful note. Knowing that River will soon be in New York, she writes that, "Everything is going to be OK. It is, it is" (p. 297).

Same Sun Here suggests that young people's hope for change facilitates their dialogical relationship with one another, allowing for the mutual exchange of knowledge and support. It also

suggests that this hope—and the action that stems from it—can occur across different identities, experiences, and geographies. Meena details her experiences with racism and xenophobia, but nonetheless supports River's activism by sharing examples of successful actions for change she and others have taken. River details his concern about environmental destruction and injustice, but nonetheless supports Meena's activism by sharing stories from his family and community. It is crucially important that both characters not only share these stories—encouraging hope and action for change—but also that each also understands the systems that contribute to the others' suffering. Meena knows about the ways capitalism exploits the environment and human labor, both from her experience and from teachers who have helped her learn to analyze these systems. River knows how white supremacy is an ideological structure, thanks to his study of Black activists and his Mamaw's teachings. In their respective ways, both protagonists are able to analyze the other's situation and offer hope that their actions will be meaningful in improving their lives. This capacity to think systemically, and to recognize and critique the power structures than imbue those systems, is the final requirement to Freire's dialogue. In the following analysis of *Forest World*, young people are seen as having just as much capacity to see and think critically about environmental destruction as the adults with whom they collaborate.

Critical Thought and *Forest World*

Luza isn't happy that her privileged brother, Edver, is traveling all the way from Miami to visit her and father's rural Cuban home. Edver isn't happy either. He'd rather be gaming with his friends from the comfort of the A/C than schlepping around the hills and forests outside Havana. Still, it's the first time either have met the other, and soon they'll reconcile their antipathy for one another—as well as the parents they haven't met. Gradually, Edver is inspired by his eco-warrior father. Luza is awed that her mother is a globe-trotting cryptozoologist. When the siblings learn that their mother's boyfriend is actually a con artist hoping to profit from poaching the rare creatures that live in their forest—a "Human Vacuum Cleaner"—they put their heads to stop the impending exploitation of the ecology that has sustained their family for generations.

Forest World enacts each of the four requisite elements of dialogue already discussed. Edver and Luza come to love one another and recognize their commitment to both their family and their forest, which Edver describes as his "inheritance" (p. 69)—a theme common in the four novels discussed in this chapter. Both he and Luza teach the other: for Luza, it is Edver teaching her the research potential of the internet; for Edver, it is Luza teaching him how to become comfortable in nature. Despite their initial wariness, both come to trust each other. Both have role models important to this process—their parents—that affirm the possibility that a life spent in communion with nature can and does allow an individual the knowledge needed to defend it. *Forest World* takes care to highlight what the other novels include but may not emphasize to the same extent: that these dispositions are necessary for action, but they are incomplete without the capability and willingness to think critically about the situation that needs to be transformed.

The critical thinking required to analyze the systems of power one hopes to change is the cornerstone of Freire's dialogue. To hold knowledge and information is one thing, but Freire deems it much more important to use that knowledge to understand how it fits within larger social systems that are constantly developing. Critical thinking, Freire writes, "perceives reality as a process, as transformation… [it] does not separate itself from action" (p. 92). This, of course, lends itself well to understanding ecosystems. The biosphere is a complex, interdependent, and multivalent system that is far greater than the sum of its parts. Critical thinking is also vital in understanding the mechanisms of oppression that prevent individuals from becoming more fully human. Although Freire suggested a particular protocol for leading individuals into critical consciousness, I want to consider how young people take this task upon themselves organically— that is, how they learn to recognize the totality of their situation, as well as engage in the praxis needed to act in informed ways upon that recognition.

By the end of the novel, Edver and Luza have a keen understanding both of the socioeconomic factors that have pushed "the human vacuum cleaner" to poach animals and the ecological stakes of that poaching. "That's all it takes to wipe out a species," Edver reflects. "Just a few ordinary people making a string/ of greedy/ decisions" (p. 121). But their respective journeys toward this more complete understanding requires them to teach one another. Edver,

because he has lived a cosmopolitan life with his mother, is able to explain to Luza the extent of the lucrative global trade in rare animals. Luza, because she has spent her life immersed in nature, is able to show Edver the ways these rare animals live as part of vast ecosystems. By that time, both siblings have a keen sense of the ways that global climate change is wreaking havoc on Cuban life. "Rivers of clouds/ above rivers of water/ have suddenly dried up,/ leaving tropical parts/ of the world/ uncertain" (p. 12).

These two young people, committed to working together to protect the life of their forest, engage in continual praxis. For instance, after they've decided that they must take action, Luza reflects on the value of involving adults. "[Adults] might be able/ to catch [the poacher]," she thinks. "But will they ever trust us again?" (p. 152). Luza brings her questions to Edver, who describes the ensuing conversation: "...we keep debating possibilities/ until we're so exhausted that she falls asleep" (p. 158). The novel makes it clear that the two are diligent in their reflection not just to ensure that their plan will be effective, but also that it aligns with their values. "I wish we could splash truth / all over our lives… facing a dilemma every bit / as challenging as negotiations / between enemy nations" (p. 160).

In their successful action to stop the poacher, Luza and Edver cooperate to protect a local ecosystem. But I argue that their work to protect their forest can and should be seen as synecdoche for environmental action writ-large. Just as the siblings used the intellectual, moral, and cultural resources at their disposal, so too might their work be extrapolated to represent the ways that youth engage in action for change in diverse locales across the globe. Luza and Edver's story is indicative of the youth climate movement writ large, including the challenges it faces from the way adult world operates. As such, when Edver admits that "I wish I couldn't read./ It would be heaven to remain unaware/ of this catastrophe I created" (p. 142), the question blooms into a more general problem of how individuals ought to respond to knowledge about climate catastrophe in general. This question—what to do—is among the most pressing and most nebulous questions of the Anthropocene. And yet, as *Forest World* suggests, young people engaged in dialogical relationships are ready and willing to provide immediate responses.

An Epoch and Generation of Action

This chapter has outlined how five novels for young people represent youth engaging in Freirean dialogue. Although each novel was largely assessed independent of the others, they should be considered a quintet that collectively depicts love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thought. There is a thematic cohesion as well. Across these novels, young rural characters struggle to prevent petrocapitalist expansion and environmental destruction. These youth are, by and large, successful at doing so on local levels. Because of these commonalities, it is tempting to read any of these novels as a blueprint for action. That said, doing so would actually limit the insights readers young and old can glean from them. Instead, I suggest it is more productive to consider these novels—as individual narratives and as a sequence—as models of the dialogic processes needed to recognize and act against environmental destruction. Together, these novels offer a meditation on what it means for youth to "act local, think global." Or, as Freire wrote in a footnote to the very first sentence of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "The current movements of rebellion, *especially those of youth*, while they necessarily *reflect the peculiarities of their respective setting*, manifest in their essence this preoccupation with people as beings in the world and with the world—preoccupation with *what* and *how* they are 'being'" (Freire, 1970, p. 43; emphases mine). For the young characters described in this chapter, the preoccupation with the *what* and *how* of their being includes not only an attempt to transcend distances from others and themselves, but also steps taken to forge new, sustainable, and egalitarian relationships with the natural world.

The characters in these novels love their rural places. Even if they consider themselves outsiders,[58] familial and communal commitments grounded in these places provide a foundation for their biophilia. They see nature as their "inheritance," and they are committed to protecting it. While this commitment often stems from histories of land ownership, inheritance might also be

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[58] While I use "outsider" uncritically for brevity's sake, I heed Naples' argument that the insider/outsider binary is false, as status always fluxes in response to "shifts in constructions of "community" that accompanied ongoing social, demographic, and political changes" (1996, p. 83). The young characters described in this chapter provide ample evidence of the ways that rural wariness of outsiders can be mitigated by having family ties to that place.

considered more broadly: as their generation's inheritance of political responsibility. In this regard, young characters put the needs of the world ahead of their own. They each check their own hubris in order to learn from others with more specific knowledge. They trust in one another —both that others know and that they are capable of action that will, in turn, transform the local ecocidal situation. Because of these relationships, and because these young characters are themselves interested in the interconnected systems that unite them with their ecologies, they think critically about how their actions—or lack thereof—will impact the environment.

One of the most significant insights these novels provide concerns the benefits of being physically present in sites of environmental extraction. Particularly for characters who each had little direct contact with the rural settings prior to the events of their novels such as Lib, Maddy, and Edver, immersion in place is vital to understanding the dangers of ecocide. In fact, the local environmental destruction in each novel is ended precisely *because* these characters arrive at the site of ecocide, gradually recognize with horror the scale of the destruction, and use their newfound knowledge of local ecosystems to advocate for environmental justice. Their initial assumptions about rural people being backwards, witchy, or stupid are soon replaced by an awareness that these rural knowledge systems are unreplaceable assets in their activism. No longer are rural communities and extractive processes abstractions, but rather they become actual, physical, "unjustly dealt with persons" and literalized violence (Freire, 1970, p. 50). These novels seem to suggest that recognizing the actuality of environmental destruction—of seeing and living it firsthand—is a powerful precursor for action.

These novels are also profoundly about solidarity. Characters from outside those rural communities recognize the horrors of these practices and reciprocate by providing emotional support, connections to powerful governmental agencies, and advice about organizing. Rural characters provide on-the-ground insights into the historical developments of ecocidal practices and offer narrative evidence of the destruction. From the perspective of rural characters, the knowledge and skills that outsiders bring to their situation also proves invaluable. In fact, the solution to each local environmental problem requires dialogue across urban and rural geographies. Obe, who grew up rural, requires the assistance and insights provided by his new

neighbor, Anne, who had had access to myriad educational resources in her former home of Portland, Oregon. Maddy, who learns so much from Grandmère about non-empirical ways of knowing nature, is able to supplement her immersive learning with information she learned in school. When Maddy first sets out to explore the bayou, she thinks back to how Miss Avril taught her that bayous are "slow moving streams… [and] part of our disappearing wetlands" (Rhodes, 2015, p. 47). The constant conversation between school-based learning and on-the-ground, experiential learning is thus imagined to correspond with urban and rural learning. While I am wary of seeing this as a binary, I find it important to recognize these novels' insistence that dialogue must occur between individuals from disparate geographies.

Dialogue also occurs, even if sporadically, between young people and adults. Influential family elders and teachers provide young people the trusted mentorship and information they need to fill the gaps in their own knowledge. These relationships are egalitarian. River notes that Mamaw "has always treated me like I'm grown" (2011, p. 57). When Obe tells Ms. G about Marvin for the first time, she engages him as the expert that he is. "I understand," Ms. G says. "I had no idea" (King, 2014, p. 198). The inverse is also true. Young people see adults as potential models for environmental action—Mamaw, Lib's mother, and Edver and Luza's parents. The majority of these adults are *not* teachers—or, if they are, they do not necessarily relate to the protagonists in a traditional teacher-student relationship. This is in keeping with Arnold, Cohen, and Warner's (2009) argument that youth environmental activists are motivated either by influential experiences—in nature, outside the classroom—or by influential people—again, beyond the teacher-student relationship. These novels suggest that young rural characters become activists and advocates using the material and intellectual and emotional resources at hand. They do not need adult coordination or supervision. In fact, top-down control relationships with adults are often impediments to youth action.

These novels present dialogical relationships between adults and young people to be, by and large, much more fraught than those between young people. When Obe attempts to involve his father in a discussion about climate change, his father denies climate change out of hand. Bear's father, who grew up in Bon Temps, downplays the risks of deep water drilling in favor of

allegiance to the oil company that employs him. As I showed in Chapter Three, this highly-masculine denial of ecocide has its roots in a nostalgia for a pristine past that obscures one's ability from seeing present destruction. In lieu of adult involvement, young people take it upon themselves to learn, organize, and act. While they may use relevant knowledge gleaned from school—and, particularly, from individual critically-engaged teachers—school is more often than not depicted as a hindrance to action. So, too, are adults seen more as a liability than as an available resource. These novels thus insist that young people are able to—and indeed *do*—learn and enact processes of change on their own terms.

This is a provocative suggestion about how young people might experience climate change differently than adults. In these novels, adults are more prone to what Freire calls the fear of freedom—the embrace of the status quo, even if it oppresses those who embrace it. In contrast, "freedom rejects prescription and replaces it with autonomy and responsibility" (Freire, 1970, p. 47). Young people in these novels understand the weight of their task. They understand that adults who deny culpability merely "wish to avoid the discomfort of conflict or who are unwilling to assume responsibility for future populations" (Shume, 2015, p. 22). By showing how the young protagonists embrace responsibility for the biosphere, these novels describe youths as activists-in-the-making (Fassbinder, 2020). Even if their elders' nostalgia and utopian dreams imbue their relationships with their elders, young people are not frozen by these desires, these distances. Instead, young people act, and their actions are rooted in a sense of present injustice and an urgent need to rectify the ecological damage of the world in which they find themselves. Although young people are indeed activists in the making, they are not so by choice. Thrust into a situation they did not create, young people know they have little choice but to accept responsibility to correct it. "My entire life is a rush of duties," Edver states (Engle, 2017, p. 127). Obe sees environmental protections as his "job" (King, 2014, p. 2). Maddy realizes "there's all kinds of history inside me," and that saving Bayou Bon Temps is her fate (Rhodes, 2015, p. 131). A biocentric responsibility is at the heart of these novels, and young rural characters are those who make it beat.

Freire wrote that those most capable of seeing and enacting change are those who are also pressured into "believ[ing] themselves too stupid, incapable, small" to do so (1970, p. 63). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire recalls an interview with a rural worker who asked, "What can I do? I am only a peasant" (p. 61). This has a parallel in the young person's question, "What can I do? I am only a child." At the risk of responding to this question with another. I wonder: who better to understand the stakes of the Anthropocene than those who will inherit it? Who better to understand the dangers of extraction capitalism than those living within sites of extraction? Thankfully, these novels take rural youth seriously. The narratives described in this chapter do not doubt youth knowledge; they do not see it as "stupid" or jejune (Heldke, 2006). Nor do these novels question the promise of this knowledge to inform actions against ecological destruction. Acting through the generative relationships forged through dialogue, rural youth reject the distances of the Anthropocene, the ecocide of extractive capitalism, and adultist bias against them and their capacity to transform the world. Together, these novels introduce what might be— should be—considered a new, emergent structure of feeling in the Anthropocene among an ascendant generation worthy of its responsibility: action.

Conclusion

Distance structures the collective feeling of our era. In this dissertation, I have attempted to identify a few ways young people's literature expresses this distance. As a social system and cultural fixation, urbanization has sunk its teeth in the nooks and crannies of our lives —even in the most unlikely of places. Barnyard friends boardbooks, for instance, purport to realistically depict happy farm animals, though this depiction is in fact a fanciful idealization. The American pastoral ideology couples itself onto myriad other ideologies and narratives, suggesting that rural places and people are protected in a nostalgic glow that outshines the realities of the ecocidal present. Even visions of the future, for all their nascent radical potential, often fail to conceive of a world not dominated by extractive urbanization. Even still, for all this, there may yet be a new sentiment emerging not predicated on distance, but on youth immersion in and attention to rural places as sites worthy of their labor. Further analyses might begin to look for this sentiment in other areas, as well for moments when seemingly "progressive" and "modern" ideas inadvertently impede the very sustainable movements they seek to inspire. This contradiction might be made more apparent and avoided with the collapsing of distance—if not physically geographical, then perhaps in the empathetic distances we imagine between ourselves and those who live far away.

In retrospect, the points I have explored in this dissertation are embarrassingly straightforward. They can be stated briefly: 1) the Anthropocene's dominant social systems have a geographic valence, 2) urbanization hinders engagement with rural ecological realities, 3) critical analysis of representations of rurality can illuminate this hinderance, and 4) the awareness that comes from analysis may be conducive to collaborations across geographies. To put it again, differently, even more simply: I have been asking why, for all we know about the dangers of our moment, has change—*actual* change in thought, feeling, and action—been so slow to come? My position is that affluent, Western complacency is partially geographical. Our attentions play out territorially, a result of myriad social and cultural forces that seek to keep our bodies and minds contained to our immediate, often urban locales. Broadening these attentions will require a great,

concerted effort. It will also need to be done concurrently with an diligent overhaul of our assumptions about the future and young people's role in shaping it.

There is one other hindrance to this effort, and despite its obvious impacts I have so far refrained from addressing it: the popular image of rural people as inevitably and innately conservative. The countless maps produced during the 2016 and 2020 elections make this apparent. 58% of rural votes cast *were* for Trump—a slight uptick from those that voted for Romney in 2012. The atrocities of the Trump administration did not slow this support much, either. Between 2016 and 2020, Trump lost support in only one third of all rural counties; in the other two-thirds, his support either plateaued or grew (Kannick, & Scott, 2020). Commentaries abound reinforce these statistics. One of the first reports to come after the 2016 election set the tone when it concluded that ,"Trump's victory would likely not have been possible without the influence of rural areas" (Shearer, n.p). In the years since, there has been so much ink spent and so many pixels populated by those on the left trying to understand rural voters. Why indeed would rural voters vote for politicians and policies so blatantly against their own interests?

I continue to be confused and frustrated by this. Leading up to and throughout this project, my friends on the left would ask me to explain what's *wrong* with rural people. When I hear this, I want to scream: both because my chagrin leads me to want to ask the same thing, and because I am dismayed at the essentialism in the question. Rural people—living, complex, diverse, human beings—are dynamic. They are an incredibly diverse bloc—exponentially more so when rurality is considered globally—in such a way that cursory political reporting cannot capture (Jones, 2019). For these reasons, coupled with the metrocentrism described in this dissertation, *rural* is now shorthand for conservative, yokel, Trumpist, redneck. I am acutely aware of the ideological marshaling that happens when "rural" makes an appearance in any conversation, but I am learning to see these moments less as barriers and more as opportunities to engage with these assumptions and the politics that are their object. Whatever is imagined as rural political expression must be seen as only one potential iteration of much broader systems.

Rural political life is rife with contradictions. The recent legislative history of my home state is testament to this. In 2009, Iowa became the third state in the nation to legalize

same-sex marriage (Davey, 2009). Now, just over a decade later, the state legislature has introduced a bathroom bill that would limit transgender people from using the school restrooms that match their gender identity (Gruber-Miller, 2021). In 2004, Iowa released its state quarter depicting a school house and the phrase "foundation in education." Two decades later, the same state is seeking to legislate—pummel—its public education system into the ground (Nietzel, 2021). For the past thirty years, the largest Iowa farms have not been penalized for the pollution they cause, but rather receive heightened legal protections against environmental lawsuits (Hines, 2018). These trends are worrying and dangerous, but to see them as innately rural is wrong. There is something else underlying this—another structure, another ideology—that is not limited to rural communities. I follow the lead of Fraser and Nelson (2019), who write that "rather than defining rurality merely as something at odds with the diversifying, dynamic liberalism of big cities," the task is instead to "emphasize the real conditions under which rural America has been systematically marginalized, exploited, and *distanced* from national centers of economic and social power, both historically and, with intensifying severity, in recent years" (2019, p. 20, emphasis mine).

This project has not been to "figure out" rural people. It has been to identify the systems that produce rural ecological realities, their cultural representations, and popular impressions of them. I maintain that urban and progressive anger toward rural people, particularly during the Trump years, is misaligned. The culprit is not a geography, but rather an extractive, exploitative, alienating socioeconomic system—one that has become so entrenched into our consciousness that it is difficult to see beyond, let alone see at all.

What to do? I hear many of my fellow Millennials argue that progress will come with the ebbing of the older, presumably more conservative, generation. This, too, is essentialist. It denies individuals' abilities to learn, change, and grow. But then again, there is some truth in it— particular generations *are* shaped by their collective experiences, which are in turn based in social and cultural structures. The result is generational experience that is intangible, deeply felt, internally diverse, hard to define, and distinct from those that follow. Part of this structure is passed down culturally, including through young people's literature. But as society changes,

young people come into different social structures, encounter different cultural products, and experience different prevailing sentiments in their formative years than their forebears did. This distinction gives each new generation a unique set of experiences apart from the generation that preceded it—and an opportunity for a new structure of feeling. Williams referred to this generational transition as the moving "escalator" of history (1973, p. 9). Each step— each generation—moves further and further from a role on the "ground floor" of the present, and each of these movements expresses its values through diverse modes and forms: a speech, a note in a journal, an essay, a novel, a picturebook, a snapchat. And yet these steps are not so radically different as to be part of entirely separate systems. Each generation is a part of the same global society facing, albeit unequally, climate catastrophe.

I noted in Chapter Five that young people are more aware, organized, and activated by this emergency than previous generations. This is testament to the groundwork laid by previous generations: the scholars, teachers, and community leaders who raised the alarm when few others of their generation could or would. So, too, will future generations experience the climate crisis differently than young people today. We might see these distinctions not as barriers but as opportunities for cultivating intergenerational solidarity. Articulating intersections across generations can contribute to both to an awareness that generations are not discrete and the "the importance of intergenerational bonds for the sustainability and welfare of contemporary societies" (Deszcz-Tryhubczak & Jaques, 2021, p. xxi)—a sustainability and welfare that "may occur only as a result of a systematic cross-age effort" (p. xi).

Here, young people's literature can play a central role in reflecting and asserting a structure of feeling for young people whose collective, generational experience is defined by far greater awareness of the systemic and structural perils of the Anthropocene than their predecessors. Again, young people's literature is only *one* cultural form that can provide this influence. Social media, streaming television and film, and user-generated content are all avenues for the rapid transmission of ideas and actions. Already young people are proving to be far more adept at communicating about the need for action than their elders (Feldman, 2020)—a hopeful sign of an activist structure of feeling now emergent.

Adults can—must—help by shifting the ways we ourselves think and talk about the global climate crisis. This includes, as I have argued, interrogating the values and assumptions we carry about rurality and its relationship with extractive capitalism, urbanization, and sustainability. What values of ours are worth sharing? What values of ours hinder action? The answers to these questions provide a framework for a sustainable future with young people in mind. These answers are of utmost importance. As Walter Dean Myers wrote:

> Somewhere between childhood and adulthood we teach a great many children to think like adults. We're even able to convince them that their children should not be trusted. As writers we face no more formidable task than to bring children and adults together. We need to see the world clearly and to explain it clearly to children so that they, in turn, can explain it back to us without our adult compromises, and without our adult excuses. To do less is to abandon our talents, perhaps even our universe (1986, p. 21).

I am reminded here, so close to the end of this dissertation, of my conversations with L and H. At one point, we found ourselves speculating on ways to change the systems that are exploiting our community. "Well," H said, matter-of-factly, "you can't change just one thing." Indeed. Change must be an everything change. We also cannot make this change when we are ourselves isolated. Change must be both and everything and *everybody* change. Making these connections, establishing these collaborations, seeking these solidarities, across and between differences will be the task of our time. The barriers to doing so, as this dissertation explains, are great. But then again this is where stories—the right stories at the right time in the right place—can bridge the gap. As Williams wrote in the conclusion of *The Country and the City*:

> When we become uncertain in a world of apparent strangers… we can retreat, for security, into a deep subjectivity, or we can look around us for social pictures, social signs, social messages, to which, characteristically, we try to relate as individuals but so as to discover, in some form, community (1973, p. 295).

When I started this project in the summer of 2020, I had very different dreams for it. I envisioned having conversations with members of my community about what it meant for them to be rural. Perhaps, I though, I would use young people's literature as a departure point. But life intervened: revolution, pandemic, insurrection. I went to Iowa to be in place, for a time, and when I returned to St. Paul my notes were as scattered as my directions. When I sat to think about what

it was that most moved me about my months back home, the first memories that came to mind were the hog confinements: rows and rows, the smell of manure and dust. Back home, my lungs burned from the air, and I woke frequently to the sound of semis hauling their morning load. I knew I needed to get smarter about these conditions and the reasons why they have come about. Soon I found myself reading critical urban theory, critical geography, and Marxist ecology—naming urbanization under capitalism and the havoc it wreaks on rural communities. But how to convey the complexities of the problem back home and its connections to global systems while maintaining the sense that these realities are in fact *lived*? I came to see I also needed to get smarter about the stories—those told or not told about the slow destruction celebrated as progress. I did not come into this project as an expert, and I do not pretend to be one now at the end of it. But to ask what it is I really need to learn, and to have the opportunity to explore that need, is an precious gift. Though perhaps this gift is also itself a necessity: the room to question, imagine, dream in the Anthropocene: prerequisites for leaving it behind.

There are stories we grow up with that are common to our generation, our time, our place. Other stories are unique to us alone. Then still there are stories that we can only anticipate: those of a new generation, a new time, if still the same place. Our earth. Let us hope these new stories reflect and inspire a community that is less and less one of distance and more and more one of action, camaraderie, inclusion, and—yes—hope.

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