

MAGICAL GUIDANCE: FINDING ETHICAL FUTURES IN ASIAN AMERICAN
ENVIRONMENTAL LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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by Julia Rose O'Neil Harvey

Emerging as a relatively new field in the late twentieth century, environmental criticism continues to evolve as the field expands. Second-wave ecocriticism emphasizes the consideration of environmental justice and the enduring effects of interdisciplinary topics such as the legacy of colonialism and racism on the environment, yet environmental literary criticism is slow to incorporate literature by people of color into the conversation. Similarly, while contemporary authors are consistently utilizing magical realism in literature to engage with environmental and social issues, there is a gap in environmental literary criticism related to magical realism.

My research demonstrates how Asian American authors employ various magical realist characters to serve as guides to a more ethical future by engaging with environmental criticism. In *Tropic of Orange*, Karen Tei Yamashita creates Manzanar Murakami and Arcangel function as guides to more positive results for laborers and people of color. Ruth Ozeki employs crows and the fictional character Jiko Yasutani, 104-year-old Buddhist nun, to serve as guides to more equitable outcomes in *A Tale for the Time Being*. Though the definition of an ethical future may vary between individuals, both novels suggest the interwoven topics of ethics and environmental justice as essential to advance a more favorable tomorrow. My paper examines how the topics presented through Yamashita's and Ozeki's guides are relevant in the larger interdisciplinary discussions of environmentalism and deep ecology and how their use of magical realism allows for a consideration of prospective futures that stress the equitable treatment of all beings.

VITA

Julia Harvey was born in Indianapolis, Indiana and currently resides in Pendleton, Indiana. She received her Bachelor of Science in Information Technology from Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana in May 2011. She graduated cum laude and received minors English, Art History, and Computer Art. She is a member of the Air National Guard, serving since May 2005. After completing her Master of Arts degree, she intends to pursue her PhD in English.

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Introduction

In January 2020, I began the journey that would take me through the process of writing this project, unaware of the impending significance of the first few months of 2020 on the world. By March, classes moved online as businesses and schools went virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next two years, Americans watched as the U.S. government struggled to address unemployment and the necessity for increased assistance to those affected by COVID-19. The pandemic starkly highlighted class divisions as employers expanded the definition of “essential workers” to incorporate retail and foodservice laborers and others compelled to work in unsafe conditions to continue to receive a paycheck. While many communities pulled together to provide for their unemployed neighbors, celebrate the sacrifices of medical workers, and form study groups for children learning remotely, some groups viewed the pandemic as an opportunity to foment hate for Asians and Asian Americans. Hate crimes against Asian Americans is not new and Asian American and Pacific Islander activist organizations existed decades before COVID-19—but the pandemic increased the occurrences of racist incidents as early rhetoric surrounding COVID-19 emphasized the presumed origin of the virus, subjecting Asians in general to increased scrutiny, harassment, and violence.

Violence against Asian Americans due to COVID-19 illuminated the need for additional emphasis on the more deliberate incorporation of Asian American voices in the social and environmental justice movements. Stereotyping of Asian Americans often focuses on the model minority myth and transforms the immensely diverse “group” into a faceless, middle-class Other, privileged above other communities of color as doctors, business owners, and tech workers and ignores the realities of social and environmental injustice experienced by Asian Americans today. Largely excluded from the discourse of early environmental criticism, Asian Americans

initiated their own conversations about environmental issues and environmental justice. Groups like Chicago Asian Americans for Environmental Justice (CAA EJ) have stepped forward to resolve issues like lead poisoning from gardens grown in contaminated soil and Oakland-based Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) is tackling renewable energy and affordable housing for Asian American families. Likewise, Asian American authors began incorporating implicit environmental criticism into their texts, addressing systemic injustice, racism, sexism, and the interconnectedness of all life regardless of place. In recent decades, environmental criticism broadened the field by including more postcolonial and international perspectives from authors and scholars of color. Asian Americans literature that speak to the principles of deep ecology and ethical environmentalism are entering the discourse of ecocriticism and contributing unique perspectives other than predominantly White American or European.

I undertook this project with the desire to examine contemporary Asian American novels that deliberately engage with environmental criticism. Countless canonical Asian American texts can and should be viewed through an ecocritical lens, as Begoña Simal-González does in her book *Ecocriticisms and Asian American Literature: Gold Mountains, Weedflowers, and Murky Globes*, but I wanted to focus on those authors who intentionally centered their narratives on environmental issues and proposed viable solutions. Climate issues often generate a sense of helplessness in the average citizen, much like COVID-19, and in this moment of compounding crises it is paramount that we seize opportunities to participate in the changes we can affect. Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* both place environmental issues at the center of their narratives and employ magical realism to create guides that illuminate paths toward more ethical and equitable futures for the characters and the cultures they represent as well as the reader. While their utilization of magical realism to engage with

environmental criticism is not unique to Asian American literature, their inclusion of other people of color, for example Latinx or Indigenous communities, and general positive attitude toward change stood out against increasingly negative views of ecological prospects, as found in popular dystopian climate fiction. Yamashita's and Ozeki's novels avoid pessimistic outlooks and doomsday prophesizing, instead encouraging hope and potential solutions to the climate crisis and escalating social and environmental justice issues. Ultimately, these two novels offer hopeful guidance for readers to engage with environmental issues in constructive and positive ways.

Environmental Criticism: Reviewing the Scholarship

Emerging as a relatively new field in the late twentieth century, environmental criticism continues to evolve as the field expands. According to Lawrence Buell, environmental criticism, or ecocriticism “might succinctly be defined as study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis” (*The Environmental* 430). While Rachel Carson's 1962 text *Silent Spring* shocked the world by revealing the dangers of pesticides and negligent corporate behavior and influenced a generation of environmentalism, ecocriticism did not emerge as a field within literary discourse until the establishment of academic institutions such as the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) in 1992 (Simal-González 3). ASLE's journal, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, commenced in 1993, provided a central platform for discourse in environmental criticism that fueled growth within the field. Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* and Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* were published in the mid-1990s, serving as seminal works in the field of environmental criticism.

In the 1990s, critics began to contest the terminology used in environmental discourse, including the definition of nature itself. The essence of nature continues to be debated among scholars—some subscribing to a view of nature as all life beyond humanity and others using the term to encompass all life. Recognizing changes in the field, Buell transitioned from “ecocriticism” to the use of “environmental criticism,” citing that the term “better reflects the tendency to broaden the notion of ‘environment’ to include not only the more or less unspoiled ‘nature’ and wilderness of canonical nature writing, but also urban settings and degraded nature landscapes, a shift that, as we shall see, has been matched by a slow but inexorable accompanying effort to complement the traditional local perspective with a global, transnational one” (Simal-González 4). For those participating in first-wave ecocriticism, “nature” and “environment” were distinctly separate from humans and their practice was generally considered “synchronous with the aims of earthcare” (*The Future* 21). Second-wave environmental criticism questions the separation of humans and nature, stressing the interconnectedness of humans and “nature” as humans have irreversibly altered the environment (22). Critics acknowledge the built environment and its inhabitants as a site of “nature” that cannot be ignored in favor of pristine wilderness. Second-wave environmentalism provides a space for the examination of environmental justice and power structures that plague marginalized populations.

The concept of place is often utilized in conjunction with distinctions imposed on humans and “nature” in traditional nature writing and early environmental criticism in a way that emphasizes the importance of the local and declines to engage with the realities of globalization on marginalized groups. Nixon explains that “environmental literary studies tended to give priority to the literature of place,” delving into bioregional specificity and focusing on “solitary moments of communion with nature” (236). Environmental criticism itself developed in the

United States analyzing primarily American authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir, who emphasized place as a source of identity for authors, while incorporating imperialism, majority culture, patriarchy, and spiritualism into the tone of their works (234). While finding importance and identity in place is not intrinsically problematic, this narrow focus on literature and scholarship on 19th century writers who were predominantly white often prevents the consideration of concerns beyond the local in a globalized society. Due to this limited scope, first-wave environmental criticism largely ignored concerns of environmental justice associated with colonialism and globalization. Early environmentalism shared a similar outlook that emphasized a biocentric worldview of preservation and conservation without considering the impact on all beings. Scholars and activists from other disciplines, such as postcolonial studies, show “scant interest in environmental concerns, regarding them (whether explicitly or implicitly) as at best irrelevant and elitist, at worst as sullied by ‘green imperialism’” (236). In short, the narrow focus of environmentalists and environmental criticism lead to distrust by those representing marginalized groups. Second-wave environmental criticism attempts to consider environmental issues and literature more broadly, questioning structures that reinforce hegemony and “arguing for a revised environmental ethics that includes the vexed issue of environmental justice,” while steadily incorporating the voices of authors of color (Ecocriticism 5).

Environmental criticism intersects with and generates additional theories, including anthropocentrism, deep ecology, and critical posthumanism, which in turn are found in Asian American ecocritical literature. Anthropocentrism, often an element of early American nature writing, “constructs ‘human’ as a privileged category, thereby establishing a hierarchical opposition between ‘Man,’ and ‘Nature’” (Girshin 151). Anthropocentrism removes humans

from the environment, creating a binary that is used to justify environmental destruction. The deep ecology movement seeks to destabilize anthropocentrism, undermining humans as a privileged and separate category of life in favor of a worldview that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life forms regardless of place. Deep ecology opposes the use-value paradigm, arguing that all beings have intrinsic value that is not dependent on their use to society or capitalism. The use-value paradigm is destructive and “justif[ies] the infliction of suffering or physical damage on those entities that are perceived to be resources” (152). Critical posthumanism builds on these concepts, furthering deep ecology by interrogating human interrelation with technology. Pramod K. Nayar defines posthumanism as the inseparable connection between humans and technology, while rejecting “human exceptionalism and human instrumentalism” (17). Posthumanism spans the incorporation of technology into our daily lives from the earliest tools to cell phones and satellites. Nayar summarizes the theory of critical posthumanism as humans “co-evolving, sharing ecosystems, life processes, genetic material, which animals and other life forms; and technology not as a mere prosthesis to human identity but as integral to it” (17). These theories build on each other, guiding the field of second-wave environmental criticism toward a more inclusive worldview that undermines the binaries of human versus nature and recognizes structurally inequities.

Eco-Justice, Colonialism, and Magical Realism

Michael Bennett’s 1998 *ISLE* article “Urban Nature: Teaching ‘Tinker Creek’ by the East River” exemplifies the shift from first- to second-wave environmental criticism. He argues for the reconsideration of “places we think of as natural,” encompassing “forests and deserts” as well as “skyscrapers and wastedumps” to better interrogate who is affected by negative

environmental impacts (49). Bennett recognized disparities between traditional environmental literature and the experiences of his inner-city students, touching on the environmental violence perpetrated against those deemed of lower use-value. In this way, the lasting legacies of colonialism are seen through environmental injustice in communities of color or lower socioeconomic status. Nixon argues in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* environmental advocacy focused on place-based ethics often transforms into resentment or aggression toward outsiders, as witnessed in the Sierra Club's history of anti-immigration lobbying (239). Furthermore, the local and the global are no longer separate concepts, but inexorably enmeshed by politics, pollution, ideologies, and migration. The globalization of human life continues to alter the environment and further destabilizes the glorification of place-based ethics touted by first-wave environmental criticism. Nixon states, "To observe all this is not to dismiss ethics-of-place environmentalism out of hand, but rather to render visible a particular lineage of variously misanthropic, jingoistic, xenophobic, racially blinkered, gender entitled, and amnesiac celebrations of wilderness that mark an imaginative failure while masquerading as elevated imaginings" (241-242). In short, environmentalism without the consideration of environmental justice reinforces unequal power structures and endangers the environment, suggesting the necessity for guidance toward more equitable outcomes. Similarly, environmental criticism has been slow to incorporate literature by authors of color into the field. Since the early 2000s, "the presence of ethnoracial issues in environmental criticism has become more visible, while scholars in ethnic studies have likewise started to pay more attention to environmental matters" (Ecocriticism 11). In *Beyond Walden Pond*, Robert T. Hayashi argues for the consideration of "nonwhite views of nature," specifically calling for the extension of the canon of environmental literature to deepen our understanding of the

environment (61). Journals such as *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)* are intentionally incorporating environmental criticism in conjunction with literature by people of color in the United States (11). Asian American literature specifically only recently garnered recognition in environmental criticism with the 2015 collection of articles titled *Asian American Literature and the Environment*, edited by Lorna Fitzsimmons, Youngsuk Chae, and Bella Adams, and Begoña Simal-González's 2020 book *Ecocriticism and Asian American Literature*. These texts follow the throughlines of colonialism, capitalism, labor, and depictions of the environment found in Asian American Literature, examining texts ranging from Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* to Cynthia Kadohata's *Weedflower*. These critical texts are admittedly limited in scope but provide a starting point for the consideration of Asian American literatures through an ecocritical lens.

Contemporary literature that actively engages with second-wave environmental criticism and other intertwined fields such as critical race or postcolonial studies often utilize magical realism as “a means for writers to express a non-dominant or marginal position” (Fachinger 4). Magical realism is a key element in postcolonial literature and literature that engages with the legacy of colonialism or imperialism more broadly. Homi Bhabha comments in *Nation and Narration* that magical realism is “the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world” (7). As discussed by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, European colonists permanently altered the environment of colonized nations through exploitative and extractive capitalist practices and caused “cultural derangement on a vast scale” by imposing “ontological and epistemological” notions about what it means to be human or animal on indigenous populations (11). While Yamashita and Ozeki are not traditionally considered postcolonial writers, they engage with the legacy of colonialism through magical realism which

provides the means to “defamiliarize events or objects so the reader views them in a new light,” distancing the reader from the culturally destructive ideas imposed by repressive systems and refocusing on environmental injustice and marginalized groups (Holgate 3). It can be employed to create space in the often-polarizing conversations of race, globalization, and climate change, encouraging readers to consider these issues from alternate perspectives. These texts “harbor a political potential in that they heighten the perception of usually obscured, or even indiscernible, links between phenomena of a different nature that turn out to be problematically interrelated” (Of a Magical 203). Magical realism can be used to emphasize the effects of globalization on the local or underscore the absurdity of legislation that privileges corporations at the expense of the subaltern.

However, while contemporary authors are consistently utilizing magical realism in literature to engage with environmental and social issues, there is a gap in environmental criticism related to magical realism. Rarely do critics who study magical realism endeavor to discuss the intersections between magical realism and environmental criticism and “little (if any) research has been devoted to exploring the precise interconnections between ecocritical writings and magical realist motifs” (Of a Magical 195). Likely this scarcity of scholarship between environmental literature and magical realism is related to the relatively short history of environmental criticism, particularly second-wave criticism, allowing critics like Begoña Simal-González to expand the field (Holgate 4). Simal-González acknowledges the near complete lack of scholarship pertaining to magical realist narratives in literature by people of color, identifying a growing genre of literature that requires further study and analysis (Of a Magical 195). According to Simal-González, authors of color write from the margins and often experiment with alternative narrative devices, such as magical realism, blending multiple cultural perspectives

and contradictory worldviews (Of a Magical 204). Asian American writers, such as Yamashita and Ozeki, often have “firsthand knowledge of the skewed distribution of environmental risks, as well as a heightened sense of capitalist exploitation of human beings and specific communities” and employ magical realism to “unearth the environmental unconscious” (Of a Magical 204). Yamashita and Ozeki push beyond mere engagement with environmental issues through magical realism and create texts that spark the interest of readers to affect positive change beyond literature.

Literature Guiding Literature

I selected Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* and Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being* due to their clear contributions to environmental literature, their concerns pertaining to environmental justice, and their employment of magical realism, which, as I stated above, helps us understand environmentalism by defamiliarizing the reader and allowing us to view environmental issues from different perspectives. Second-wave environmental criticism in literature remains relevant by expanding to include issues like social justice and postcolonial issues, yet not enough emphasis is placed on the incorporation of texts by individuals of color to expand the perspectives of environmental criticism. The compounding factors that impact Asian American communities are uniquely challenging and often overlooked by scholars and environmental critics. The varied intersectionality of Asian American authors allows for perspectives that integrate historical contexts such as repeated restrictions to American immigration, colonial and military occupation, Japanese incarceration during World War II, and the model minority myth into the practice of environmental criticism. These narratives explore the effects of Asian diaspora and globalization through characters whose lives often straddle the

Pacific Ocean. Many Asian American authors choose to engage with the systemic injustice faced by other marginalized groups, as Yamashita does by incorporating her experiences living in Brazil to discuss the ecological effects of capitalism on the Latinx Third World. By analyzing texts by Asian American authors that discuss environmental issues as a facet of systemic injustice, we add a depth of experience to environmental criticism that revives underrepresented histories and suggests a path to achieve more equitable outcomes.

By selecting *Tropic of Orange* and *A Tale for the Time Being*, I excluded countless other Asian American texts that would also yield valuable insights read through an ecocritical lens in favor of two texts that modeled environmentally conscious behaviors through magical guides that encourage the pursuit of more ethical futures for the subaltern. In *Tropic of Orange*, Manzanar and Arcangel serve as guides for the characters and the reader to achieve more ethical futures for the subaltern and Yamashita employs magical realism to engage with environmental issues and systemic injustice. Ozeki presents a series of magical guides in the form of crows and a 104-year-old Buddhist nun named Jiko Yasutani to lead the characters and the reader toward futures that encompass equity for all beings. Yamashita and Ozeki provide strategies for change through their guides by creating narratives that emphasize the perils of unchecked capitalism and the lasting effects of colonialism across the globe yet decline to engage in the sort of fatalist or dystopian speculative climate fiction that suggests humanity has irreparably damaged the environment. They present the unpleasant realities of so many that suffer due to racism, sexism, and environmental injustice, yet present possible paths for change. Likewise, Contemporary Asian American texts are not crafted in a vacuum—authors constantly speak to one another through their writings. Yamashita's and Ozeki's novels serve as guides for Asian American authors to interrogate environmental issues in their own works. Yamashita's 1990 novel *Through*

the Arc of the Rainforest was a marked shift in Asian American literature, starting a pointed conversation of environmental issues within the field. *My Year of Meats*, released by Ozeki in 1998 confronts the connections between patriarchal systems and the dangers of the corporate meat industry, while her 2003 novel *All Over Creation* expounds on the dangers of agrobusiness and the need for biodiversity in modern farming. Many other Asian American authors elected to continue the dialogue of second-wave environmental criticism, interrogating the connections between environmental degradation and social justice.

Yamashita's and Ozeki's influence on Asian American authors is evident in contemporary literature, guiding writers to utilize environmental issues and magical realism in their novels and poetry. Julie Otsuka's 2011 novel *The Buddha in the Attic* speaks to the Japanese immigrant laborers who struggled to build lives for themselves as farmers while facing racially motivated prejudice and violence. Otsuka employs a first-person plural narrative voice to emphasize the universal experience of immigrant workers, echoing Arcangel's Latinx followers. Jung Yun presents an enlightening tale about North Dakota's Bakken oil boom, following the unexpected streams of destruction caused by unsafe drilling practices and rampant nationalism and racism through small midwestern communities in her 2021 novel *O Beautiful*. Elinor, the novel's protagonist, uncovers the disturbing realities of ground water contamination and violence against women, paralleling Ruth's concerns in *A Tale for the Time Being* about nuclear contamination following the Fukushima disaster. Magical realism is used in many contemporary Asian American novels to approach the deep ecological dysfunction in American trade policies, infrastructure, and treatment of the subaltern. Another novel, Ling Ma's speculative *Severance* (2018), engages with the ways Western capitalism physically affects the health and safety of professional workers in the United States and laborers who manufacture goods abroad,

specifically in China. Ma's novel reflects Yamashita's concerns about the long-term effects of globalization on workers and Manzanar's musings on industrial pollution reaching Eastern shores. Meanwhile, Franny Choi's poetry collection *Soft Science* employs magical realist tropes such as cyborgs and shapeshifters to explore the queer female Asian American experience, engaging with environmental issues through critical posthumanism and cyberfeminism. Choi's collection employs many of the same principles of environmental criticism found in *A Tale for the Time Being* to describe and interpret the lives of Asian American women across the world. Through their novels, Yamashita and Ozeki serve as guides to Asian American authors, encouraging the continued interrogation of second-wave environmental criticism and the use of magical realism to advocate for a more ethical future for all beings.

Chapter 1

“Is it a Crime to be Poor?”: Subaltern Labor and Ethical Universalism

in Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*

In Chapter 1, I examine how Manzanar Murakami and Arcangel function as guides to a more ethical future for people of color and the subaltern in Karen Yamashita’s 1997 novel *Tropic of Orange*. Manzanar and Arcangel represent the struggles of their respective underrepresented groups, providing a comprehensive understanding of problematic American views of Asian and Latinx Americans while presenting possible paths to change. Yamashita employs Manzanar Murakami, a Japanese American living in Los Angeles, to reflect on the historical treatment of Asian Americans, including racially prejudiced immigration laws, Japanese internment camps during World War II, and the creation of the model minority myth. Manzanar’s experiences and associations create a character who intends to lead the residents of Los Angeles to a mindset of elevated ethics and ideal universalism, free from bigotry and oppression. Meanwhile, Arcangel, a 500-year-old performance artist, embodies Latinx communities that transcend the United States-Mexico border. Throughout the novel Arcangel traverses Mexico, amassing a following of individuals seeking futures free of exploitation and questioning the precepts of capitalism that legislation such as NAFTA allegedly intended to create balance between the United States and Mexico. Arcangel symbolizes the history of colonization across North and South America and defies the hegemonic rules associated with maps, borders, and ownership as he transports the Tropic of Cancer to Los Angeles. Together, Manzanar and Arcangel provide a path for all humanity to seek a more ethical future.

Yamashita engages with environmental criticism throughout the novel, using guides equipped with magical realism to disassociate and refocus readers on deep ecology. Arne Naess

devised the phrase “deep ecology” to separate environmentalism into two groups—the traditional form of environmentalism which supports anthropocentrism and contemporary outlooks that discard the “man-in-environment image in favor of the *relational total-field image*” (Stark 260). Deep ecology emphasises all life as intrinsically valuable, discarding the use-value paradigm that only privileges life deemed valuable through capitalism or other means of valuation. Environmentalists such as David Foreman and Robert Paehlke propose that all beings have value “for their own sake” (Girshin 161). By adopting the ethos that all life is valuable, “one is less likely to view another creature as a resource” (161). Similarly, anthropocentrism, or a human-centered point of view, has “detrimental effects upon the quality of life of humans themselves” and inhibits individuals from forming the “deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership[s] with other forms of life” (Stark 260). Deep ecology affords opportunities to observe the connectedness of all beings and the universal impacts of racial injustice, systemic violence, and environmental destruction. These concepts of environmental criticism come together in *Tropic of Orange* through Yamashita’s use of magical realism. In *Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse*, Ben Holgate explains the easy relationship between environmental criticism and magical realism in literature, stating, “a non-realistic mode like magical realism helps environmental criticism deconstruct assumed, normative conventions due to its ‘fluidity of realms’ and capacity to break down boundaries” (Holgate 4). Magical realism enables Manzanar and Arcangel to function as guides to explore environmental criticism and deep ecology.

Many multicultural contemporary American authors, specifically Latinx and Asian authors, engage with the ideas Yamashita addresses in *Tropic of Orange*, including migrant labor and the ecological effects of globalization. Yamashita’s experiences residing in Brazil provide

her with a unique perspective on the diaspora of Japanese immigrants to the Americas and the lives of Latinx peoples outside the United States. Her writing is heavily influenced by Latinx voices such as Gabriel García Márquez, basing some aspects of Arcangel on Márquez's short story "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." The old man in the story is caged and treated as a sideshow because of his magical deformity; Yamashita recreates a similar scene with Arcangel performing in a cage for a martini drinking Márquez. References to Guillermo Gómez-Peña's work as a performance artist and writer permeate the novel, influencing Arcangel's creative endeavors and his walk to Los Angeles. In *GiLArex*, a musical first performed in 1989, also sometimes titled *Godzilla Comes to Little Tokyo*, Yamashita explores environmental issues in southern California and Japanese identity and depicts the first iterations of Manzanar and Emi, later revived in *Tropic of Orange*. *GiLArex*, a revamped depiction of Godzilla as a dinosaur, erupts from the Manzanar concentration camp and "wreaks havoc all over L.A." until Manzanar conducts the monster back to the camp, destroying an aqueduct in the process and returning water to the desert (Sheffer 88). Yamashita's work is in conversation with many contemporary American authors of color approaching social and environmental issues in their works including Cherrie Moraga's 1994 play *Heroes and Saints*, which confronts the dangers and injustices migrant laborers face in the United States through magical realism, utilizing an impossibly disabled protagonist to interrogate agricultural practices and guide her community to stand against big agro-business. Though the play is a work of fiction, it responds to the United Farm Workers' grape boycott to protest the poisoning of agricultural laborers by pesticides, a sentiment echoed through Arcangel as the allegory of labor and guide to subaltern workers (Moraga 89). Yamashita's guides speak to various contemporary topics in multicultural American literature, including the enduring effects of colonialism and racism, criticism of

American capitalism, and environmental justice. She employs a magical realist style that allows the characters to transcend boundaries as they direct their communities beyond their limitations. My research will examine how Manzanar's and Arcangel's goals are situated in the larger interdisciplinary conversations of colonialism, racism, capitalism, and environmental justice and how Yamashita's literary style allows for an exploration of potential futures that broadly demand the ethical treatment of all persons, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or nationality.

Manzanar Murakami: A Guide to Elevated Ethics and Ideal Universalism

Manzanar is a Japanese American man who casts off the stress and trauma of skilled labor and intentionally experiences homelessness on the streets of Los Angeles to engage in the creative pursuit of transforming the noise and movement of the interstate into "a great society, an entire civilization of sound" (Yamashita 33). Conducting traffic, symbolically and progressively literally, is how Manzanar serves as a guide toward a more ethical future for Los Angelenos and readers. He perceives his labors as a symphony of which he is both composer and conductor, compelling the commuters of Los Angeles to seek more universally beneficial outcomes by recognizing systems of oppression that damage the greater ecology. Manzanar is a guide both individual and universal—through his personal experiences and his magical realist perspective he influences Angelenos and readers. As a character, Yamashita employs Manzanar to introduce commentary about identity, place, systemic racism, skilled and creative labor, and social justice as an individual practice. Manzanar's magical labors as a conductor guide the reader and the city to engage with deep ecology and environmental justice concerns through his ideal universalism, focusing on the interconnectedness of life along the Pacific Rim, special segregation, and inequities created by urban infrastructure.

Yamashita employs naming as a cue to historical events, compelling the reader to examine how names and language serve as markers of individual identity, hybridity, cultural fluidity, and place. Gabriel comments that Manzanar crafted his name from the internment camp where he was allegedly born, “Manzanar Concentration Camp in Owen Valley” (95). By changing his name, he removes his individuality, directing anyone who inquires about him to confront the historical realities of the American treatment of Japanese immigrants. In John Blair Gamber’s book *Positive Pollutions and Cultural Toxins: Waste and Contamination in Contemporary U.S. Ethnic Literatures*, he analyzes the importance of Manzanar’s name to understanding his identity. As a person experiencing homelessness, Manzanar “reflects the loss of home suffered by interned Japanese Americans,” though his name provides additional cultural references for the reader to unravel (Gamber 123). Gamber states:

It is difficult to ascertain the truth of Manzanar’s naming... Nonetheless, his name speaks to a critical element about him. He is born of the cultural toxins of forced relocation, internment, and dispossession, in a site of prior relocations and dispossession (of indigenous people by Mexican and later U.S. settler colonists, of Mexican Californios by Anglo squatters, of family farmers by superwealthy urbanites, and of Japanese Americans by a xenophobic and racist federal government). Manzanar’s name speaks to a liquidity of identity that belies the administrative containment ideology that led to its generation. (123-124)

In *GiLArex*, Manzanar returns to his site of incarceration to put to rest the monster created in part by the cultural losses caused by Japanese internment (Sheffer 87). Manzanar’s identity is irrevocably linked to the violence against Japanese Americans and serves as a touchstone for readers, but his identity remains fluid as he transitions from prisoner, to student, to doctor, to

homeless conductor. Yamashita represents other Asian characters as equally culturally fluid, particularly Bobby Ngu, who falsely creates his name to invoke the Vietnamese boat people, disguising his Chinese heritage (15). Bobby's identity is altered by his lexical disguise and is further complicated by his fluency in Spanish, allowing him to capably participate in the multicultural environment of Southern California. Both Manzanar and Bobby's names represent a loss of place, each expelled "from home due to U.S. military and economic forces," underscoring the mechanisms that forced them to adopt fluid identities to survive (Gamber 124). Through his name, Manzanar refuses to permit Los Angelenos to forget the treatment of Japanese Americans during his lifetime and leads the reader to create a more constructive future through memory.

Manzanar's decision to abandon his family and his profession as a surgeon to live as a creative experiencing homelessness serves to question the model minority myth and systemic racism to exemplify a difficult yet rewarding path for Asian Americans that overcomes the expectations of white Americans. After Manzanar's break from his family, the Japanese American community of Los Angeles continues to ensure he is clothed and fed while apologizing "profusely for this blight on their image as the Model Minority" (Yamashita 34). After WWII and various changes to immigration laws, Asian immigrants and Asian Americans were touted to achieve "higher standards of academic and employment" status than other racial groups, attempting to disguise racial inequality in the United States with additional prejudice (Hsu 21). Manzanar's life spans the history of white Americans believing "ethnic Asians [...] as essentially foreign, inassimilable, and therefore probably threats to national security" to Asian Americans being glorified as superior to other minority groups (Hsu 5). His identity shifted from prisoner to renowned surgeon to someone intentionally experiencing homelessness from the

1940s to the 1990s, an irreconcilable path influenced by race-based discrimination. Despite his complicated relationship with the Japanese Americans as a community, Manzanar represents the shifting and fluid identities of Asian Americans and functions as a guide to the reader to question the problematic treatment of Asian immigrants by American citizens and the federal government.

While Yamashita examines the realities and inequities of labor among the working class through Arcangel's struggles, she utilizes Manzanar to explore professional labor, interrogating the trauma and stress associated with participating in a profit driven enterprise like the American healthcare system. Manzanar was a skilled surgeon before he walked away from his life and declined to continue to labor in corporate medicine and capitalism at large, establishing a path for him to work outside the system to provide guidance toward a more favorable path. Manzanar participated in America's system of higher education, overcoming racism and prejudice that imprisoned him as a child, providing him access to gainful employment within a for-profit medical system that favors those of higher socioeconomic status while leaving more vulnerable populations without sufficient healthcare options. The commodification of healthcare in America damages the greater ecology by devaluing the poor and marketing the labor of healthcare workers as a product, rather than a public service. Though Yamashita never clearly articulates why he walked away from his family and career, Manzanar expresses anxiety about the physical reality of humans independent of machines, implying an inability to reconcile his experiences as a medical practitioner. When faced with humans outside their vehicles, Manzanar recognizes the relative defenselessness of the human form with "surprise and disgust" and recalled "intimately the geography of the human body" and "cutting through soft tissue," suggesting his surgical career traumatized him (Yamashita 177). His labor-induced distress caused him to reject his professional career and filial commitments and seek a life of artistic expression:

“His work had entailed careful incisions through layers of living tissue, excising tumors, inserting implants, facilitating transplants. At what point the baton replaced the knife, he could no longer remember. Perhaps the skill had never left his fingers, but the will had. He could as easily have translated his talents to that of a sculptor in clay, wood, or even marble—any sort of inanimate substance, but strangely, it was the abstraction of music that engulfed his being” (51).

Music transformed his life and provided him with a new form of service outside the bounds of skilled professional labor. Manzanar’s trauma forced him to separate himself from the people he dedicated his life to serving and directed him to his new form of service in the abstract. Regardless of his trauma, he is determined to track and influence the movements and lives of the humans in Los Angeles through art, leading them toward a more equitable tomorrow free of suffering for skilled professional laborers.

Manzanar becomes a personal, if somewhat unenthusiastic, guide to Gabriel in *The Tropic of Orange*, revealing how Manzanar can function beyond his role as conductor to guide individuals toward more constructive outcomes as Gabriel transitions from unbiased reporter to investigative journalist and change agent in Latin America. Manzanar’s reluctance to communicate directly with Gabriel leads Buzzworm to stand in as the interviewer for Gabriel’s meeting, injecting his own agenda (Yamashita 95). Buzzworm intends to leverage Gabriel’s position of power to discuss social issues and encourage the development of programs to support the subaltern residents of LA, and while Gabriel does not disagree with Buzzworm’s motives for this story he believes that Manzanar has more to offer than simply representing the homeless population of LA. Gabriel is preoccupied with the feeling that “there was something I had to learn from this man, something I needed him to impart to me, not as the subject of an interview

or an investigation, but something he could teach me, as if he were some sort of conducting shaman, as if he held a great secret, as if he knew *the way*” (96). Gabriel’s observations and desire to seek Manzanar’s guidance foreshadow the events on the freeway and help to refocus Gabriel on altering the lives of those affected by systemic violence and disenfranchisement. By observing Manzanar’s efforts to improve the lives of Angelenos, Gabriel pursues opportunities to assist Subcomandante Marcos in his fight to protect Chiapas villages and disrupt international organ smuggling by creating online news forums to spread information. Gabriel’s humanitarian efforts aim to positively affect the environment and draw attention to the problematic application of use-value against communities and individuals of the Third World. Manzanar’s example as an agent of positive change influences Gabriel to seek opportunities utilize his talents as an investigator and writer to create more equitable and constructive futures for the subaltern and positively impact the greater ecology.

Manzanar believes in a secular, ideal universalism that encompasses all human life indiscriminately and pursues this ethic to influence Los Angelenos to constantly strive for more beneficial futures en masse. Sue-Im Lee explains that Manzanar’s intention as a conductor is to “pronounce the absolute interconnectedness of humans” (Lee 513). Universalism, especially in a political setting, leverages the status quo and the ideal to determine a baseline that can encompass all individuals. As a political instrument, universalism smooths over differences, erasing identities and unequal power dynamics in the name of order. Political universalism fosters binaries, creating an environment for continued exploitation of marginalized groups. Lee explains that “the history of universalism is a history of a tool of oppression—the discursive and material coerciveness of a few who presume to speak for all” (Lee 504). However, Manzanar envisions a world striving to realize a more dynamic universalism, “as an antifoundational,

nonnormative force of political necessity, the ideal and the impossible dimension are crucial—universalism as an ideal that cannot be achieved and as a perennial ingredient in all human struggles for hegemony” (Lee 513). Ideal universalism is ultimately impossible and Manzanar’s endeavor to instill an ethic of equity and cooperation between all humans requires constant effort. Manzanar conducts to guide all populations of Los Angeles toward a more ethical future while understanding that the pursuit, not the result, is imperative.

Yamashita further hones Manzanar’s ideal universalism through environmental critique, engaging with the interconnectedness of East and West and ultimately leading the interstate dwellers to realize his ambition of a more ethical future. As Manzanar remembers his life prior to his calling to conduct traffic, he is overcome with a vision of the Pacific Ocean (Yamashita 146). He envisions the Pacific “brimming over long coastal shores from one hemisphere to the other” (146). He recalls the names of places he has never visited and “looked out on this strange end and beginning: the very last point West, and after that it was all East” (146). Manzanar connects the manmade and naturally occurring, declining to separate the two into distinct categories, emphasizing the principles of deep ecology present in his concept of universalism. While other characters in the novel clearly engage with environmental degradation and the long-term effects of globalization, Manzanar focuses on the ways that humans are an integral part of the greater ecology while avoiding overt criticism. During his reverie about the Pacific, Manzanar notes the existence of “garbage jettisoned back prohibiting further progress,” recognizing the pollution created by Western capitalism that is carried out on Eastern shores (146). Environmental injustice in Asian countries continues to directly affect those of lower socioeconomic status, though Yamashita takes this opportunity to identify the consequences through the greater worldwide ecology. The crescendo of Manzanar’s great effort to conduct the inhabitants of the

interstate toward a more ethical future occurs as his estranged granddaughter Emi dies at the hands of the police, forcing Manzanar to drop his arms and observe the ocean beyond the rim. He witnesses “waves of natural and human garbage thrown back again and again,” again drawing attention to the waste created by capitalist globalization as it turns up on the coastline of California (219). His mention of “human garbage” conjures additional meanings, correlating globalization and the subaltern who are treated as garbage due to use-valuation present in Western capitalism (219). Though Manzanar ceases to conduct the symphony of Los Angeles, the grassroots conductors take up his lead and the baton to end the violence on the interstate, realizing a future where human life is not discarded like refuse.

Yamashita counters the traditional binaries of environmental criticism through Manzanar’s engagement with magical realism, allowing him to literally control freeway traffic, achieve a near omniscient view of the city, and positively alter the lives of the underprivileged. Magical realism is an effective method for exploring environmental criticism in fiction as it “presents the magical or the unreal in an ordinary, everyday manner, such that the real and the unreal are juxtaposed,” allowing readers to become defamiliarized with the objects or events and “view them in a new light” (Holgate 3). Through magical realism, the binaries of human versus nature and non-human or nature versus culture are challenged and ultimately revealed to be social constructs. In “Of a Magical Nature: The Environmental Unconscious” Begoña Simal argues, “environmentality is also ‘encoded’ in magical realism through both literal and metaphorical renditions of the frictions between the capitalist notion of progress and the survival of the earth as we know it” (Simal 194). In this way, Yamashita utilizes deep ecology to undermine capitalism through Manzanar’s fantastical oversight of Los Angeles. When Manzanar ceased to perform his roles as a father and surgeon, he “followed an ancient tortoise out into a

deep place in his brain,” allowing him to function as a character that transcends the constraints of the realities of human capabilities and consciousness (Yamashita 218). Manzanar’s unique perspective permits him to recognize Los Angeles as a complete ecology, acknowledging the inextricable connection between the man-made and the naturally occurring. He is prone to classifying vehicles and other man-made constructs as blurred with the humans that occupy them, identifying a car as “a thing with intelligence. He envisioned the person within as the pulpy brain of each vehicle,” a defenseless human body within each protective vehicle shell (177). Large vehicles are described as autonomous and animate, suggesting agency in “great land-roving semis” which “lay immobile” and “formidable red fire trucks, poising themselves defensively around the victims,” underscoring the ways man-made objects affect the greater ecology in unintentional ways (104). Manzanar’s magical perception becomes a way of observing reality beyond the constraints of human understanding of deep ecology. He observes a blending of the borders between naturally occurring and man-made objects, allowing the reader to achieve a new perspective on routine interactions such as between a vehicle and a person and reflect on the impact of man-made objects on the living.

Likewise, naturally occurring land features in *Tropic of Orange* are forever altered by man-made infrastructure, creating a new, complex global ecology that Manzanar can interpret and influence as he leads the residents toward more constructive outcomes. Manzanar is unencumbered by personal affairs, allowing him to examine the urban ecology of Los Angeles through his seemingly omniscient perspective powered by magical realism:

For Manzanar they began within the very geology of the land, the artesian rivers running beneath the surface, connected and divergent, shifting and swelling. There was the complex and normal silent web of faults—cracking like mud flats baking under a desert

sun, like the crevices in aging hands and faces. Yet, below the surface, there was the manmade grid of civil utilities... On the surface, the complexity of layers should drown an ordinary person, but ordinary persons never bother to notice, never bother to notice the prehistoric grid of plant and fauna and human behavior, nor the historic grid of land usage and property, the great overlays of transport—sidewalks, bicycle paths, roads, freeways, systems of transit both ground and air, a thousand natural and manmade divisions, variations both dynamic and stagnant, patterns and connection by every conceivable definition from the distribution of wealth to race, from patterns of climate to the curious blueprint of the skies (52).

The ecology is indelibly transformed by man-made infrastructure, altering the movements, habits, and health of the human and non-human. In large urban spaces such as Los Angeles, infrastructure creates physical boundaries to perpetuate social boundaries, such as socioeconomic status. Buzzworm does not own a vehicle and spends most of his time in Los Angeles on foot, creating a routine perspective that is defined by his ability to move within the space (i.e., his neighborhood and adjacent neighborhoods). Buzzworm's entrenched perception shifts when he is given a ride on the interstate, realizing that the interstate functions as a bridge that avoids his urban spaces and allowed drivers to "skip out over his house, his streets, his part of time. You never had to see it ever. Only thing you could see that anybody might take notice of were the palm trees" (31). Interstates forcibly edit the perception of motorists, not only removing undesirable neighborhoods from their view but also their consciousness. Spaces below the interstate melt away into urban sprawl and divide humanity by class. The residents of such urban landscapes often suffer from educational and infrastructure inequities due to a decreased tax base, they have diminished access to healthful food, such as fresh produce, and are more likely to

be exposed to various forms of pollution, such as air and noise. Manzanar's ruminations about inequity serve to guide the reader to a better understanding of influences on the greater ecology and to encourage the pursuit of more equitable futures for the subaltern.

Manzanar's unique perspective of Los Angeles and his status as a person of color experiencing homelessness interrogates the segregation inherent in the design of the city and how systemic spatial segregation transforms the ecology of a given area. As a component of ecology, the wellbeing of humans must be considered when applying environmental criticism. Physical urban segregation functions to guarantee communities of color remain segregated by perpetuating a system that restricts their access to power. Nationally "about one-third of African Americans live under conditions of 'hypersegregation'-conditions of extreme spatial isolation that make it very unlikely that they would have encounters with whites in the course of everyday life... The material construction of the ghetto shapes political possibility in a very direct way, for this residential isolation has precluded the emergence of cross-racial political coalitions" (Bickford 360). Often these neighborhoods are in physically undesirable areas, adjacent to industry or impacted by other sources of pollution and may be more exposed to the aftermath of natural disasters, such as flooding. Racially and socioeconomically mixed communities could potentially wield greater political power, preventing inequities experienced currently in segregated communities. In their book *Uneven Urbanscape: Spatial Structures and Ethnoracial Inequality*, Paul Ong and Silvia Gonzalez explain that the freeway system of Los Angeles itself "has had a profound impact on communities of color" as Los Angeles is designed to favor individuals with a personal vehicle and "remains car-dependent despite a substantial increase in its rail system" (Ong 109). Far fewer people of color own vehicles in Los Angeles than whites, forcing them to rely on outdated and insufficient mass transit, such as bus or rail, and restricting

their access to higher-paying employment. Vehicle ownership in densely populated urban areas is less likely for those of a lower socioeconomic status due to the cost of payments and repairs. Additionally, higher insurance rates often plague those who reside in less desirable neighborhoods due to segregation (113). While the construction of infrastructure such as interstates in segregated neighborhoods devalues communities, Manzanar's perspective allows the reader an opportunity for deeper analysis of the structures that allow the continued segregation and exploitation of urban communities to seek more equitable outcomes for those affected by such practices.

Constraints to educational opportunities are another consequence of spatial segregation exposed by Manzanar's understanding of Los Angeles, providing additional opportunities for readers to recognize systemic injustice and seek positive change to the greater ecology. Urban educational systems are place-based, relying on the local tax base to fund schools and placing children of color at a disadvantage. Manzanar's status as a highly educated surgeon suggests he was privileged enough to access better than average education, yet his magical near-omniscient perspective allows him to recognize educational inequities on those of lesser means and communities of color. During Manzanar's first chapter, he reflects on the ways that education utilizes the interstate, noting the absence of school buses, teacher vehicles, and minivans typical of the middle class as summer break alleviates traffic congestion (Yamashita 33). Students from more affluent areas can attend schools outside their local area, such as charter or private schools, that place the burden of transportation on individual families, represented by the "mothers and their early-morning Chrysler and Previa vanpools" traversing the freeways of Los Angeles (33). Ong and Gonzalez explain, "within the educational sphere [of Los Angeles], the urban spatial structure defines how resources are allocated among neighborhoods, the way negative and

positive externalities are concentrated by locations, and the level of accessibility to educational enriching opportunities scattered throughout the region” (148). Interstates facilitate the education of individuals who have access to reliable transportation, relegating those of lower socioeconomic status to local schools. American elementary schools are “anchored to the immediate neighborhood,” creating educational segregation that “not only isolates students of color, but also confines them to the disadvantages of the immediate environment” (146). The lack of accessible public transportation within Los Angeles further restricts the educational mobility of students. Ultimately, children of color are the victims of a system that perpetuates “separate and unfair structures that contribute to an intergenerational reproduction of ethnoracial stratification” (Ong 146). Spatial segregation of urban spaces perpetuates continued stress on communities due to a lack of sufficient access to education, damaging the greater ecology by the continued exploitation of the subaltern. Manzanar’s observations guide the reader to examine transportation infrastructure and place-based education, uncovering another layer of systemic injustice imposed against communities of color and seek possible avenues for change.

Conducting traffic, figuratively and gradually literally, is the way that Manzanar intends to act as a guide toward a more ethical future. He, both as composer and conductor, directs the drivers of Los Angeles to acknowledge systems of oppression that harm the greater ecology and pursue more universally favorable outcomes. Throughout the novel Yamashita employs mounting magical realism as his performance becomes increasingly impactful to the inhabitants of Los Angeles, generating auditory hallucinations in individuals and several massive accidents. His actions create a temporary utopia of overlooked and oppressed Los Angeles residents, growing vegetables, providing sanitation, and producing television shows that humanize the usually subaltern residents. The infrastructure that once functioned as a barrier between

socioeconomic groups and concealed the subaltern from public view became a stage, lifting the interstate's residents into the national consciousness. By the end of the novel, Arcangel's followers mingle with Manzanar's, creating countless "grassroots conductors" (218) and a melody that everyone could sing "the words in their own language" (222). Manzanar retires from his role as conductor and guide having led his followers to a mindset that could create a more ethical future, demonstrated by the orchestrated explosion of airbags across the city (218). The airbag deployment effectively ends the violence against the unarmed residents of the freeway, creating the opportunity for people of all walks of life to reconcile their trauma together.

Arcangel: "Conquistador of the North" and the Allegory of Labor

Arcangel embodies Latinx communities across North and South America, regardless of borders. Arcangel represents those effected by European colonization of the Americas and confronts the hegemony of maps, borders, and ownership as he conveys the Tropic of Cancer toward southern California. His path crosses Mexico, accumulating a congregation of subaltern individuals pursuing outcomes free of exploitation. As the "Conquistador of the North," Arcangel's crusade of laborers seeks the establishment of a "New World Border" and the conversion of capitalism and unequal power structures to systems that prioritize the needs of the workers and the greater ecology (170). Yamashita continues to employ the principles of contemporary environmental criticism, including deep ecology and the use-value paradigm, through Arcangel's quest to improve outcomes for subaltern laborers. While they travel north, Arcangel presses his followers to question the principles of First World capitalism, including trade agreements like NAFTA and other legislation that claims equality between the United States and Mexico while simultaneously creating structural inequity and endangering the lives of

workers through violence, pollution, and insufficient access to healthful foods. Mirroring Manzanar's secular universalism, Arcangel advances a universal ethic that prioritizes the equity and inclusion of workers. Additionally, he becomes an allegory of labor, critiquing the subjugation of unskilled and creative labor by American capitalism. Ultimately, Arcangel leads his followers beyond the limitations established by colonizing governments and American capitalism and presents them the opportunity to construct more equitable futures for themselves in the North of his dreams.

Yamashita prefaces *The Tropic of Orange* with an epigraph from "Freefalling Toward a Borderless Future" by Guillermo Gomez-Peña: "standing on the map of my political desires/ I toast to a borderless future" (2). Peña envisions a future where all parts of the Americas are acknowledged as one, incorporated entity; a future where one unified body is formed from "Alaskan hair" to "Antarctic feet" that defies predetermined political borders (2). Yamashita recognizes that the invented borders drawn between the First and the Third World sustain hegemony and imagines a world where borders become permeable. In a 2005 interview with Jean Vengua Gier and Carla Alicia Tejeda, Yamashita explains that "Arcangel is a literary interpretation of Peña," incorporating Peña's politically charged poetry and garish performance art (Gier). Yamashita continues, "Arcangel's performance is grotesque, freakish, yet Christ-like, accounting for 500 years of history in the Americas... He takes the poetry, and also the political conscience and history across the border" (Gier). To achieve Peña's borderless future Arcangel displaces the Tropic of Cancer, guiding his fellow subaltern Latinx laborers to disrupt the power structures between the Third and First World. Though the Tropic of Cancer is a celestial phenomenon, Arcangel considers it a manmade border with ancient Western connotations. In a dream, Arcangel observes the Tropic of Cancer, "a border made plain by the sun itself, a border

one can easily recognize” (64). The orange on Gabriel’s property that is entangled with the Tropic of Cancer is the vehicle for Arcangel’s rejection of the hegemonic rules associated with maps and borders. He slowly migrates the Tropic of Cancer to Los Angeles, shortening the distance between the two points, and creating a path for Third World laborers to safely traverse the boundaries of the First World. By displacing the Tropic of Cancer, Arcangel disrupts the status quo and begins to guide his followers to achieve more ethical futures beyond the confines of imaginary borders.

The improbable out-of-season orange growing on Gabriel’s property defies borders and serves as an example of colonization in agriculture that alters ecosystems and the lives of indigenous peoples. Arcangel observes an orange “rolling away to a space between ownership and the highway,” highlighting the futility of owned property (64). The mobility of the orange undermines structures of property and indigeneity as it rolls beyond the bounds of Gabriel’s land. The history of oranges in the Americas is one of colonization beginning with Columbus and orange trees being transported to California in the 1800s (Gamber 140). The navel variety was then grafted from Brazilian trees onto existing root systems in California (140). Gabriel transplanted the navel orange tree that bore the enchanted fruit from Riverside, California, romanticizing his attempt to repatriate the navel orange, undeterred by the hybridity of the tree (Yamashita 13). The orange, along with the Tropic of Cancer, is transported to the market by the woman with the cart of cactus leaves. The unnamed market vendor is afforded the power to alter the structure of observed reality by carrying the orange, beginning the refutation of maps and borders by the subaltern. Upon meeting Arcangel, she declares the orange worthless as it “is not imported,” applying the relationship between perceived value and national origin associated with humans throughout the novel to goods. Regardless, Arcangel recognizes the intrinsic value of the

orange as the physical embodiment of the Tropic of Cancer and adds it to his collection of possessions contained in his suitcase (67). The orange tangled with the Tropic of Cancer is a product of multiple importations and migrations as humans transplanted orange trees across the Americas, establishing hybrids that flourished in the various climates and soils where they were planted, suggesting a path for Latinx immigrants to seek more favorable prospects for themselves regardless of borders.

The colonization metaphor of the orange continues throughout the novel as a shipment of oranges from Brazil are found to contain highly concentrated levels of cocaine, emphasizing the rhetoric of fear American media outlets utilize to other Latinx communities (120). As Buzzworm listens to the radio news updates every twenty-two minutes, the language used to describe the oranges emphasizes their toxicity as a direct result of their foreignness. Initially, the media reports the incident as a “*spiked orange alert*,” (119) suggesting “an intentional act by someone, but the event itself is merely an alert,” something to be considered as a standalone crime, invoking caution, not panic (Gamber 142). During subsequent radio news reports, the language shifts toward xenophobia and fear, labeling the incident as an “*illegal orange scare*,” (120) then an “*illegal alien orange scare*”, and finally “*death oranges*” (121). Gamber comments, “Each of these terms, of course, alludes to immigration,” inciting panic and resentment that reflects the alarm generally associated with the federal government’s rhetoric toward immigrants, specifically those from Latin America (142). Oranges become a symbol of foreignness, serving as a proxy for immigrants from Mexico and South America, allowing Americans to exert their anger and fears on the inanimate oranges. The oranges come to represent the subaltern, often exploited as migrant farm labor, manipulated by drug cartels, and condemned by the American

government; the subaltern that Arcangel intends to lead to a more equitable futures by disregarding borders that perpetuate hegemony.

By intertwining oranges and the drug trade, Yamashita provides Arcangel the opportunity to lead laborers trapped within the employment of cartels to a more ethical future while allowing the reader to consider the ways the American government unfairly targets those of lower socioeconomic status rather than the powerful who fuel demand. The oranges are used as a vessel to smuggle cocaine to the United States to satisfy the demands of American consumers for illegal drugs, pointing to the violent and exploitative nature of the drug industry in Latin America that Arcangel and Rodriguez posit is chiefly driven by the demand in the United States. The American “War on Drugs” destabilized governments across Latin America and the implementation of NAFTA all but destroyed Mexican agriculture, exposing workers across the region to poverty. While many fled Latin America and immigrated to the United States, others faced exploitation by drug cartels to provide for their families. Rodriguez’s son was the victim of violence for his involvement in the drug trade while attempting to improve the lives of his family through a product that continues to find its way across the border to the United States despite the American government’s constant attempts to thwart drug trafficking by cartels (Yamashita 127). Rodriguez’s son asserted that drugs “have come to kill our poverty and marry our politics. It’s a very powerful marriage. Join the honeymoon while it lasts” (126). Arcangel recollects his experience burying the bodies of six hundred anonymous victims of a drug war over the “innocent indigenous [coca] plant” (126). Rodriguez comments that all the drug traffic “goes north to the gringos. If they want it so much, why don’t they plant it in their own backyards? Make it in their own factories?” (126). Drug production and trafficking involve the exploitation and endangerment of countless individuals at every level of the process, from the farm laborers

growing the marijuana and coca plants, to the individuals coerced to transport drugs across the border, to the dealers distributing products in the United States. The drug trade is driven by American demand, yet the American government wages covert wars against the cartels on foreign soil and American laws overwhelmingly criminalize the dealers, smugglers, and users who are people of color or lower socioeconomic status. Yamashita's use of oranges as the vessel of drug trade encourages readers to interrogate how American legislation and law enforcement unfairly target the subaltern associated with the drug trade and affords Arcangel the opportunity to spread his universalist ethic by leading individuals caught in the employ of the cartels toward more constructive outcomes.

Arcangel develops a universalist ethic that runs parallel to Manzanar's ideal universalism, focusing on correcting the balance of power between the First and Third World as he heads "north, of course" searching for "his manifest destiny" of pursuing an ethical universalism and encouraging his followers to do the same (114). His ethical universalism is rooted in the principles of deep ecology, exhibiting social injustice as damaging to the greater ecology. Arcangel serves as an allegory of labor and seeks to claim the rights and privileges of the First World for the Third World, destroying the colonial structures of racism that view Third World workers as expendable and infinitely exploitable. This "model of universalism" Arcangel desires to achieve acknowledges the contradiction of universalism "as the site of an impossible/necessary dialectic... which reject[s] the unidirectional, imperialist deployments of universalism without rejecting the concept itself" (Lee 505). Sue-Im Lee argues that "The globalist 'we,' indeed, is a central protagonist in the First World's discourses of politics, commerce, and culture, crucial to its narrative of 'progress' and 'development'" (502). Yamashita engages with the idea of the global village, another form of universalism that is

unidirectional, driven by the imperialist “few who presume to speak for all” through Arcangel and his group of Latinx followers (503). The crowd that quickly develops around Arcangel as he begins in earnest to reach the United States manifests as an anonymous group of Latinx workers, finding their voice as a chorus of “we,” comprised of the imagined community of the “overworked global village” (507). Together the crowd labors to surge the bus across “the New World Border [which] waited for him with the anticipation of five centuries” imagining himself to be the great “Conquistador of the North,” claiming the rights enjoyed by the First World for the Third (170).

The universalism proposed by Arcangel, depicted by the seemingly anonymous workers traveling with him across the United States border, is a method of guiding his followers in the novel and the reader to pursue more constructive tomorrows. The homogeneity of the group emphasizes the subaltern and impoverished nature of all Third World laborers, regardless of profession, and their desire to enter the United States to improve their lives. He leads “hundreds of thousands of the unemployed” across the border, all entering the United States “with nothing in their hands” (171). As Arcangel leads the laborers toward Los Angeles, the antagonistic American crowds accuse the immigrants of being “illegal,” prompting Arcangel to ask, “Is it a crime to be poor? Can it be illegal to be a human being?” (181). In response, the laborers chanted, “Is it a crime to be poor? Is it a crime to be poor?” (181). This question introduces the idea of intrinsic value into Arcangel’s universalism, rejecting the insistence by the First World that the lives of Third World immigrants be judged based on their use-value. The use-value paradigm is a concept raised within the deep ecology movement of environmental criticism. David Foreman explains the use-value paradigm “states simply and essentially that all living creatures and communities possess intrinsic value, inherent worth. Natural things live for their

own sake, which is another way of saying they have value” (Girshin 152). Placing value exclusively on the usefulness of a being is problematic as it justifies the inhumane treatment of those who are viewed as resources rather than individuals that have value regardless of utility. Thomas Girshin explains that one of the primary arguments in favor of the use-value paradigm is “the idea that all entities are valuable in and of themselves is that nothing exists in isolation,” suggesting that the unequal treatment of an individual or group harms all living beings (152). The use-value paradigm is essential to Arcangel’s attempt to lead Latinx laborers to a more ethical future, as it disregards the perceived differences between the First and Third Worlds and demands equity for the subaltern. The use-value paradigm submits that the exploitation of Latinx labor by the First World is not a unidirectional act of injustice but damages the First World as well. Arcangel’s vision of universalism seeks to achieve the rights and privileges of the First World for Latinx workers, allowing both groups to benefit from the equitable exchange he proposes while improving the greater ecology.

By leading the migration of workers to the United States to create improved prospects for themselves, Arcangel serves as an allegory of labor, critiquing the oppression of workers by American capitalism. Yamashita constructs the 500-year-old man who journeys from Tierra del Fuego across the many geological and archeological wonders of South and Central America and who claims to have witnessed countless historic events to embody the spirit of Latinx laborers through a single character whose existence is a work of magical realism. Lee explains that Arcangel is “allegorical of labor’s movement from the south to the north, from the Third World to the First World, the shift literally destabilizes the topography of the land” (504). The movement of the Tropic of Orange creates a fantastical shift of South to North that blends both spaces, destabilizing the power of the First World by disregarding their illusory boundaries. He

performs isolated acts of physical labor throughout the novel: clearing the street of the truck carrying oranges, assisting Rodrigues to construct a brick wall on Gabriel's property on the Tropic of Cancer, hauling the bus carrying Sol and the orange, and finally combatting SUPERNAFTA. These seemingly mundane tasks become increasingly consequential to the futures of the migrants as he guides them single-handedly across the border into Los Angeles and attempts to defeat the capitalist structures that maintain their oppression.

Arcangel's representation of labor is not restricted to physical labor, but ventures into the creative, suggesting the potential for Third World creative labor to gain the level of respect as a profession enjoyed by creatives in the First World. Like Manzanar, Arcangel personifies creative labor through his performance art and poetry. Arcangel continuously embodies a character of his own design: "He was actor and prankster, mimic and comic, freak, a one-man circus act. He did it all himself—the animals, the scenery, the contraptions, the music, the sound effects, all the characters, the narration, advertising, and tickets" (Yamashita 43). He combines a variety of languages and dialects, both Western and Indigenous, generating "great confusion discernible to all and to none at all" (43). Yamashita's novel acknowledges the disparity between physical (or so-called "unskilled") labor, creative labor, and professional labor in the United States: "across the border, they had a name for such multiple types: they would call him a performance artist. This designation would entitle him to local, state, federal, and private funding" (43). Through a capitalist lens, creative labor is often considered less valuable than professional labor unless it elevates the artist to the level of the elite. As a creative in the Third World Arcangel does not have access to monetize his art on that scale, forcing him to survive on the charity of his audiences and the occasional job as a day laborer. Likewise, creative skill alone is not recognized as a desirable factor in immigration to the United States unless it is accompanied by notoriety

and access to capital; only affluent or famous creatives can hope to immigrate to the United States for their talents. Arcangel's status as a creative in the Third World further interrogates how hegemonic power structures diminish labor that does not focus on utility and incorporates creatives into his vision for a more prosperous future.

Through Arcangel's pilgrimage across Mexico, Yamashita provides ample opportunities for the reader to examine the undesirable effects of NAFTA on the greater ecology, including Mexican workers. Arcangel's wrestling persona, El Gran Mojado, intends to battle SUPERNAFTA, a "wrestling giant" of legend, allegedly dressed in titanium, self-replicating, and at least twice the size of El Gran Mojado, though no one has seen him personally to validate these fantastic claims (Yamashita 114-115). SUPERNAFTA is touted to be a future champion based strictly on rhetoric, parodying the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a deal that principally benefitted American companies and further threatened the Mexican poor. In her book *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies, and the Destruction of Mexico*, Alyshia Gálvez's explains that over two decades after the implementation of NAFTA, the "educational level, income, and labor force participation" of Mexicans rose and the country established itself as a world leader in automotive and aviation manufacturing, though these statistics gloss over the impact of the trade agreement on individuals (9). NAFTA radically changed the labor force in Mexico as inexpensive American corn flooded the market and paved way for large-scale agrobusiness, shifting from small-scale agricultural labor to manufacturing or migrant labor. As Arcangel travels north, he dines at the Cantina de Miseria y Hambre and encounters a young man who recalls his childhood in San Cristobal de las Casas where his family "worked an ejido there for three generations" (Yamashita 113). Ejido plots were an attempt by the Mexican government to "mitigate inequalities in resources" by providing communal agricultural land owned by the

federal government, like commons land in Europe (Perramond 356). This program was established in 1917 and ended in 1992, “as Mexico sought to integrate aspects of governance in line with their NAFTA partners... opening up the land markets it held captive” (359). Ejido land use today remains less dramatically influenced by the market-led agrarian reforms than many (likely including Yamashita) anticipated but does not provide the same level of benefit to individuals and families nationwide. The young man in the cantina no longer works his family’s assigned ejido land because the program was dissolved, presumably forcing him to find employment in the restaurant industry. NAFTA further shifted labor from subsistence agriculture, forcing workers to seek employment in other industries and sustenance from American corporations. Arcangel’s encounter with the cantina employee introduces the NAFTA-induced labor changes for workers residing in Mexico and underscores the need for Arcangel’s guidance toward a more equitable path for Mexican laborers.

Arcangel’s mission to overthrow the lingering effects of colonialism on Latinx laborers extends to American imperialism and NAFTA, as the legislation negatively impacts the health of Mexicans by irreversibly shifting their diets by restricting methods of food production. Until recently, milpa-based cuisine was practiced widely across Mexico and varying regionally in ingredients and techniques (Gálvez 2). A milpa-based diet is characterized by corn and fresh vegetables, often grown, processed, and consumed locally (2). As a result of NAFTA, traditional Mexican food systems have largely been replaced with “hyperpalatable, ultraprocessed foods... that are engineered to activate cravings and override cues of satiety” (12). After NAFTA’s passage, Mexican obesity and diabetes rose to historic levels as individuals began to rely on foodstuffs imported from the United States, reaching almost 16 percent of the population by 2017 (9). Gálvez argues that NAFTA paved the way for American companies to flood Mexican

markets with foods that lead to the development of chronic diseases and should be considered “a kind of structural violence—a result of policy decisions and priorities” (6). Disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes affect individuals of varying socioeconomic levels differently and chronic diseases should be considered through a similar lens. Arcangel recognizes the shift in diet for Mexicans as all customers at The Cantina of Misery & Hunger dine on “hamburgers, Fritos, catsup” and American beers while he alone eats the more traditional nopales (Yamashita 114). Gálvez pointedly states, “the methodical, aggressive, and intentional reorienting of Mexico’s economy away from small-scale agriculture and toward foreign direct investment and global trade as had worrisome consequences: the sickening of the population and the neutralization of demands they can make—on their political leaders and the economy” (7). NAFTA’s influences on the health and welfare of Mexicans negatively impacts the greater ecology, further preventing the subaltern from shifting the balance of power in their favor. As Arcangel compels his followers to Los Angeles, he empowers them to break free of constraints placed on them by imperialism and NAFTA and achieve more equitable outcomes through his universalist ideal.

Yamashita introduces the fashionable rise of ethnic cuisine in *Tropic of Orange* by juxtaposing Arcangel’s and Emi’s experiences with food in their respective countries to explore the First World appropriation of culture as a site of violence that harms the greater ecology. While healthful food became economically impossible for laborers to grow locally or purchase worldwide and milpa-based cuisine became less common in the daily diets of Mexicans, the First World adopted traditional foods of the Third World, treating culture as a “high-value, high-status commodity to be ‘elevated’ and reinterpreted by global elite chefs” (4). Emi, Gabriel’s long-time girlfriend and Manzanar’s estranged granddaughter, is suspicious of the concept of

multiculturalism, drawing attention to the hypocritical white patrons of the sushi restaurant where she and Gabriel are dining. After Emi's outburst to Gabriel about cultural diversity, a patronizing middle-aged white woman seated next to Emi at the bar exclaims, "can't you calm down?" (111). The woman claims to "adore different cultures" and has traveled all over the world but does not understand the inappropriateness of using Asian eating utensils as hairpins (111). This woman represents Western appropriation in the name of multicultural appreciation. Arcangel experiences the shift in Mexican cuisine after NAFTA in the Cantina de Miseria y Hambre. Much to Arcangel's disgust, when he enters the cantina, they are only serving "hamburgers, Fritos, catsup" and American beer (113). As a favor, the chef agrees to cook the nopales Arcangel brought from the market, representing the traditional foods displaced in the average Mexican diet by NAFTA. Arcangel witnesses the casting off of nutrition-less American food onto Mexicans who cannot afford to seek other options, while Emi experiences the careless appropriation of culture by white Americans. Arcangel's journey uncovers many detrimental consequences of NAFTA on the Mexican people, underscoring the necessity for El Gran Mojado to lead his followers to Los Angeles to battle SUPERNAFTA and establish beneficial futures for themselves.

Arcangel leverages his talents as a performance artist and his mythical status as the allegory of labor to create the wrestler persona El Gran Mojado to act as "the champion of the Mexican/Third World labor against the US/First World industry," leading his followers to create more favorable outcomes for themselves by casting off the constraints American capitalism and legislation places on the Third World (Lee 511). While Yamashita employs magical realism to depict Arcangel's extreme age and previous physical acts of strength, El Gran Mojado's battle with SUPERNAFTA mimics the drama and excitement of Hollywood. SUPERNAFTA begins

his performance with a capitalist soliloquy, proclaiming NAFTA's benefits to the crowd. He argues that NAFTA represents progress and Arcangel "doesn't want progress. He doesn't care about the future of all your wonderful kids. He thinks you ought to run across the border and pick grapes" (Yamashita 220). Arcangel contends with SUPERNAFTA's claims by detailing his view of the conflict between the First World and the Third World, debating

*The myth of the first world is that
development is wealth and technology progress.*

It is all rubbish.

*It means that you are no longer human beings
but only labor.*

*It means that the land you live on is not earth
but only property.*

*It means that what you produce with your hands
is not yours to eat or wear or shelter you
if you cannot buy it. (222)*

El Gran Mojado carries out a battle against the representation of the First World and NAFTA that the subaltern Third World cannot truly perform. The mutual destruction between the two contenders signifies the futility of the First and Third Worlds competing against each other; even if the subaltern laborers affected by legislation like NAFTA can defend themselves, the battle would still prove pointless. However, Arcangel's attempt to vanquish SUPERNAFTA is crucial to his followers as it suggests a path to a more equitable tomorrow based on cooperation between the First and Third Worlds that benefits both groups and the greater ecology without exploiting the subaltern.

Conclusion: Walking the Path of Ethical Universalism

In a world increasingly flooded with negative predictions about climate change and environmental degradation, Yamashita employs guides to empower readers to positively affect change where possible. As Yamashita's guides in *Tropic of Orange* direct the characters within the novel to pursue more beneficial outcomes that positively affect the greater ecology, the reader becomes the crucial beneficiary of Manzanar's and Arcangel's direction as they reflect on the perspectives shared by the guides. Yamashita's novel speaks to themes widely addressed in contemporary multicultural American literature through the lens of environmental criticism, including the persistent consequences of settler colonialism, racism, and criticism of American imperialism and capitalism. Her use of magical realism through Manzanar's conducting and Arcangel's transportation of the orange permits the guides to transcend the boundaries and limitations imposed on their respective communities as they guide them toward more ethical futures and challenge the reader to reevaluate their position within systems that perpetuate exploitation of the subaltern. Both guides propose a universalist ethic that stresses the interconnectedness and intrinsic value of all human life and the importance of relentlessly pursuing a universalist ideal that can never be fully attained. Manzanar proposes an ideal universalism that is intentionally unattainable, yet readers are encouraged to adopt an ethic of constant striving toward equity and cooperation between all beings. As the allegory of labor, Arcangel's ethical universalism intends to lift subaltern workers to the level of privilege enjoyed by the First World and compels readers to embrace this ethic. *Tropic of Orange* itself is a magical guide for the reader to follow as they strive to improve the greater ecology through the ethical and equitable treatment of people of color and the subaltern.

Chapter 2

“Not-one, Not-two. Not Same. Not Different.”: Buddhist Philosophy and Rejection of an Anthropocentric Ecology in Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*

In *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen Zenji writes, “For the time being, standing on the tallest mountain top/ For the time being, moving on the deepest ocean floor... For the time being, any Dick or Jane/ For the time being, the entire earth and the boundless sky” (Ozeki 1). No beings are prioritized above any others in Dōgen Zenji’s verses, and he evokes connection between all beings, regardless of place, time, or form. Ruth Ozeki translates these words from the original Japanese and places them on the first page of *A Tale for the Time Being*, introducing readers to her novel through Dōgen Zenji’s thirteenth century Buddhist philosophy. While Dōgen Zenji could not have predicted the climate crises we experience today, his text provides guidance for contemporary readers on rejecting binaries and respecting all life that if followed would alter our approach to environmental issues. These verses inform Ozeki’s environmental ethic and serve as a touchstone for readers to reflect on throughout the novel.

In this chapter, I discuss how Ruth Ozeki employs crows and the fictional character Jiko Yasutani, 104-year-old Buddhist nun, to serve as guides to a more ethical future in her third novel, *A Tale for the Time Being*. Though the definition of an ethical future may vary between individuals, Ozeki’s novel suggests the interwoven topics of ethics and environmental justice as essential to advance a more favorable tomorrow. Ethical futures can be more broadly defined as outcomes that are beneficial to the greater ecology or more constructive results for an individual. Ethical futures in the context of this argument imply the incorporation of honest and equitable prospects for the implied recipient, whether that be an individual character, the reader, or all present and future beings on this planet, without causing detriment to others. In most cases, the

futures Ozeki creates are individual, reflecting the Buddhist intent to save all beings, though when applied broadly and ecologically, the consequences transcend the individual. To direct the novel's characters toward more equitable and constructive outcomes, Ozeki presents a series of guides that surpass the boundaries of time and language to ensure their charges are set on the proper path. In this chapter, I argue that Ozeki uses environmental criticism, magical realism, and critical posthumanist theory to create guides for the characters and reader to follow toward a more ethical future for themselves and all beings. Crows appear repeatedly throughout Ozeki's novel as characters from oral traditions or novels, as physical beings, and within dreams. T'Ets, or Grandmother Crow deriving from the prehistoric creation stories of the Sliammon peoples, sets a precedent for crows as guides and Miyazawa Kenji's 20th century Crow Captain character influences Haruki #1 to behave ethically despite his circumstances, and the Jungle Crow guides Ruth to assisting Nao and Haruki #2 in creating more beneficial outcomes for themselves and others. Similarly, Jiko Yasutani, a 104-year-old Buddhist nun and Nao's great grandmother, functions as the embodiment of many of the Buddhist principles addressed by the novel. Jiko specifically guides Nao through her challenging teenage trials, instilling in Nao a broader understanding of the greater ecology and a universalist ideal that encompasses all beings, while providing an opportunity for the reader to create their own more constructive tomorrow based on these sentiments. (Note: To avoid confusion, in this article I will refer to the author as "Ozeki" and the character in *A Tale for the Time Being* as "Ruth.")

According to Ben Holgate, "magical realism and environmental literature share a transgressive nature that dismantles binaries, such as human and non-human, and animate and inanimate" (3). Ozeki deploys the tools of magical realism to outline the posthuman and environmental questions presented by the text, creating a path for a more ethical future beyond

the novel's fictional characters. Ozeki's guides speak to several contemporary topics in multicultural American literature—particularly that which engages with ecocritical themes, including posthumanism and deep ecology. Ozeki further incorporates quantum theory into the novel's magical realism to allow Ruth to interact with Nao, Jiko, and Haruki #2 in real time. My research examines how the topics presented through Ozeki's guides are relevant in the larger interdisciplinary discussions of environmentalism and critical posthumanism and how Ozeki's use of magical realism allows for a consideration of prospective futures that stress the equitable treatment of all beings. By incorporating the various crow guides presented in the text, Ozeki nods to the use-value paradigm central to contemporary environmental criticism that aims to unravel anthropocentrism. She explores the concepts central to deep ecology and critical posthumanism through the teachings of Indigenous creation stories and the consequences of settler colonialism. Magical guides, such as the Jungle Crow and dream sequence Jiko, allow Ozeki to further dismantle the binaries of anthropocentrism and apply those concepts to the lives of the characters. Jiko's guidance largely engages with similar concepts of environmental criticism as she influences Nao and the reader to resist the pull of a binary mindset that endangers the greater ecology by employing mindfulness and gratitude. Furthermore, she models resistance to binaries through her feminist principles and engages with principles of critical posthumanism and cyberfeminism that permeate the novel through Nao's experiences. Broadly, the crow figures and Jiko challenge the central characters and the reader to reevaluate their interactions with the greater ecology and steer them toward paths that will lead to constructive and equitable futures.

Corvid Conductors: Indigeneity, Ecological Destruction, and Magical Crossings

Crows serve as unconventional guides throughout the novel, taking the shape in Indigenous creation stories, a Japanese novel, and the migrant Jungle Crow that appears on Cortez Island. Crows lead the characters and the reader toward more beneficial outcomes without the advantage of directly communicating with the individuals they influence. Often considered a nuisance or a bad omen, Ozeki explores the mischievous, intelligent, and creative aspects of corvids, allowing their lore and physical presence to guide the characters toward their intended path. The Jungle Crow mystically directs Ruth through the dream sequences toward Jiko, Haruki, and Nao, but also assists with the practical matter of locating Pesto. The interactions between Ruth and the Jungle Crow present an opportunity to reevaluate the binaries of human versus animal through the lens of magical realism, where the crow guide occupies a position of power and wisdom beyond the grasp of the human characters. In Ozeki's latest novel, *The Book of Form and Emptiness*, she again utilizes crows as guides and protectors to the Oh family. The Ohs feed the crows and in return they leave gifts and use their bodies to protect Kenji and Annabelle from the elements when each of them is rendered unconscious on the property. By bestowing the responsibility of guide on an animal, Ozeki succinctly builds the foundation for a discussion of topics central to environmental criticism, such as anthropocentrism and the use-value paradigm.

Ozeki employs the crow character trope to establish a precedent and ultimately guide the characters of *A Tale for the Time Being* toward more ethical futures, beginning with the appearance of crows and ravens in Indigenous stories. Upon sighting the Jungle Crow, the First Nations character Muriel recalls the Sliammon traditional narrative of T'Ets, or Grandmother Crow. According to Sliammon folk traditions, T'Ets is "one of the magical ancestors who can shape-shift and take animal or human form," often presenting as a crow (96). When T'Ets's

granddaughter became pregnant, she was banished from the community, but T'Ets placed a hot coal in a shell to guide her granddaughter, saving her life (96). T'Ets refused to abandon her granddaughter, who finally gave birth to the Sliammon people, vindicating T'Ets merciful act. Muriel's story demonstrates the use of animals as guides in traditional stories and suggests to Ruth the possibility of seeking guidance from the mysterious, displaced Jungle Crow inhabiting Ruth and Oliver's property. It also presents an opportunity for the reader to consider the ecological damage created by colonization, including the destruction of Indigenous traditions and food sources, pollution, and the introduction of invasive species to recognize the role of the individual within those systems and seek more principled options.

Contemporary environmental criticism concepts such as deep ecology echo the messages of Indigenous stories—like Sliammon tale—which emphasize a near-posthuman morality that rejects anthropocentrism and does not privilege humans above other beings, underlining the interconnectedness of lifeforms through shapeshifting magical ancestors. Arne Naess coined the phrase “deep ecology” to separate environmentalism from that which reinforces anthropocentrism and perspectives that reject the “man-in-environment image in favor of the *relational total-field image*”; instead, deep ecology encourages viewing all life as intrinsically valuable regardless of use-value (Stark 260). Jerry Stark explains that anthropocentrism has “detrimental effects upon the quality of life of humans themselves,” preventing humans from attaining the “deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership[s] with other forms of life” (260). Deep ecology provides an opportunity to examine the interdependencies of all lifeforms and the global effects of racial injustice, systemic violence, and environmental destruction. Critical posthumanism furthers the elements of deep ecology to incorporate human interaction with technology. It is defined as the indivisible relationship between humans and

technology, while denying “human exceptionalism and human instrumentalism” (Nayar 17). Nayar outlines the theory of critical posthumanism as humans “co-evolving, sharing ecosystems, life processes, genetic material, which animals and other life forms; and technology not as a mere prosthesis to human identity but as integral to it” (17). Deep ecology and critical posthumanism are integral to interpreting the environmental criticism embedded within Ozeki’s novel, as they allow the reader to interrogate the greater impacts of systemic oppression and environmental devastation.

Muriel’s telling the story of T’Ets presents opportunities for Ruth and the reader to interrogate the legacy of settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples and the ecological ramifications of physical and cultural violence on disadvantaged groups. The colonization of North America by Europeans destroyed Indigenous groups through mass slaughter, disease, forced relocation, famine, and the intentional annihilation of Indigenous culture. In her article “Writing the Canadian Pacific Northwest Ecocritically: The Dynamics of Local and Global in Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*” Petra Fachinger states, “The novel de-romanticizes and decolonizes Indigenous reality by portraying the novel’s sole Indigenous character, Muriel, as a down-to-earth retired anthropologist who repeatedly reminds the other characters that they live on unceded Coast Salish territory” (Fachinger 2). Ruth reflects on the official and unofficial names of that unceded territory, Cortes Island and “Island of the Dead,” and the enduring effects of colonization suggested by both. While Ozeki never explicitly identifies Ruth and Oliver’s home as Cortes Island, she strongly suggests it by stating it was “named for a famous Spanish conquistador, who overthrew the Aztec empire” (141). Likewise, the name Island of the Dead potentially derives from “the smallpox epidemic of 1862 that killed off most of the indigenous Coast Salish population,” underscoring the complicated and calamitous relationship between the

settler colonial Canadian government and First Nations peoples (142). Historically, the Canadian government has participated in the genocide of First Nations peoples through physical violence, removal from ancestral lands, and the suppression of traditional practices and culture. By destroying much of the population and stripping the remaining Indigenous people of their ancestral knowledge, the colonizers have radically and irreversibly altered the ecology of British Columbia. T'Es and the Jungle Crow serve as guides for Ruth and the reader to reflect on the history and legacy of settler colonialism in the Americas and worldwide as the novel discusses the transnational nature of our contemporary greater ecology.

The discussion of the Indigenous peoples of Canada provides Ozeki a framework to briefly review the legacy of colonialism in Japan, address the complicated relationship between Japanese immigrants and the Canadian government, and suggest the global nature of these seemingly local occurrences. Fachinger succinctly explains, “Ozeki’s novel questions the isolation of local political and ecological phenomena by connecting the colonization of British Columbia with that of the Miyagi prefecture” (2). Ozeki does not dwell on the history of the imperialism in Japan, but mentions Miyagi prefecture as “one of the last pieces of tribal land to be taken from the indigenous Emishi, descendants of the Jōmon people, who had lived there from prehistoric times until they were defeated by the Japanese Imperial Army in the eighth century” (141). Across the ocean in the twentieth century, Japanese immigrants living in British Columbia were subject to incarceration by the Canadian government after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor during World War II, stripping them of their land, possessions, and livelihoods, echoing the relocation of First Nations peoples. Residents of Cortes Island were incarcerated and forced to sell their homestead, which the locals continue to call it “Jap Ranch” (32). After learning of the nickname, Ruth insists on using it regardless of Oliver’s objections. Ruth believes

“as a person of Japanese ancestry, she said, she had the right, and it was important not to let New Age correctness erase the history of the island” (32). She views the land as stolen from the incarcerated Japanese immigrants, though the land was stolen from the Coastal Salish before the Japanese ever arrived in Canada. The historically-compounded ecological damage experienced by the forcibly removed Indigenous peoples and Japanese Americans becomes part of the fabric of the lives lived on the island. The complicated histories of the Japanese island and Cortez Island overlap figuratively in circumstance and literally as individuals migrate and seemingly separate bioregions coalesce. Muriel’s retelling of T’Ets’s tale guides Ruth and the reader to reflect on the colonization that destroyed T’Ets descendants’ civilization and the global ecological ramifications of exploiting the disadvantaged.

Ecological destruction resulting from colonization extends beyond the devastation of humans, disrupting ecosystems and traditional food sources, often in the name of profit. Ancient trees once sheltered Cortez Island, the waters flush with salmon, native oysters, and clams. Off the coast, whales traversed the waters of the island, prompting Europeans to christen the village Whaletown. In Ruth’s time, the island is vastly altered, the once plentiful salmon runs overfished to ecological devastation. Ruth laments, “oyster farming was the closest thing they had to an industry, now that the salmon run was depleted and the big trees had been cut” (Ozeki 187). Similarly, on nearby Vancouver Island, acts by colonizers such as coal mining and the overfishing of salmon, forever altered the ecology. Akira, the owner of the Campbell River sushi restaurant Arigato, “brought his family to coastal B.C. for the world-class salmon fishing, before the runs went dry” (233). With no salmon to fish, his family intended to repatriate to their home province of Fukushima prefecture, though their plans were thwarted by the tsunami and subsequent meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant (233). Due to European settlers’

opportunistic destruction to the ecosystem of Cortes Island, contemporary residents intentionally guard their local food sources against outsiders. Ruth muses on the natural secrets kept by the island residents to safeguard their environment, noting “secret clam gardens and oyster beds, secret pine mushroom and chanterelle patches, secret underwater rocks where sea urchins grew” (186). The residents have also set a limit to individuals’ daily harvest of clams and oysters to encourage the replenishment of shellfish without destroying the population. These measures to protect the current ecology present an opportunity for readers to reflect on the damage caused by colonization and the conservation of natural resources.

Much like the overfished salmon runs, whaling by European settlers decimated the whale population near Cortes Island. Indigenous groups of the Pacific Northwest practiced whaling to some extent; ethnographers began to collect oral histories of Indigenous groups in the 1930’s though by then “whale stocks had been seriously depleted [and] disease and warfare had drastically reduced Aboriginal populations” limiting the information obtained (Monks 191). The specifics of how Indigenous populations of the Pacific Northwest hunted whales pre-contact have essentially been lost and whale products discovered at ancient sites create questions for archeologists (188). Prior to the discovery of fossil fuels, whale blubber was the primary source of oil for much of the world (Ozeki 57). Ruth recounts the story of Scotsman James Dawson who, with business partner Abel Douglass, began the wholesale destruction of the whale population with the assistance of a new weapon called a bomb lance (57). By 1870, Dawson and Douglass sold more than 20,000 gallons of whale oil to the United States and “the last whales in the area either had been slaughtered or had fled,” forcing them to abandon the island (57). Ruth hypothesizes that the whales communicated the dangers of the waters surrounding the island, “chirping and cooing to each other in their beautiful subaquatic voices [to] *Stay away!*,” thereby

discouraging habitation by future whales (58). However, the intricacies of ecological dependences play a role in the disappearance of whales from Cortes Island as well. According to a 2014 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) report generated after 10 years of research conducted by NOAA and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), orcas subsist primarily on Pacific salmon throughout the spring, summer, and fall months (8). Pollution, contaminates, vessels, and noise are also noted as major threats to the repopulation of whales in the Pacific Northwest (9-10). Ultimately, the disappearance of whales from Whaletown is a result of compounding disregard for multiple ecosystem dependencies in favor of monetary gain. By implementing unsustainable capitalist-driven harvesting practices, European settlers and their descendants overtaxed the salmon and whale populations beyond repair without intervention of the United States and Canada governments. Ozeki's recitation of the history of Whaletown encourages the reader to examine the long-term ecological damage generated by colonization and consider their place within the systems that continue to disregard the greater ecology.

Ozeki skillfully interweaves the science of oceanic patterns into the fabric of Ruth's present, outlining the movement of waste across the world, as ecological destruction is not limited to the effects of capitalist actors in the distant past; damage continues today through the movement of waste via oceans. Early in the novel, Oliver provides Ruth and the reader a lesson about gyres, or ocean currents, and how debris is carried across the ocean by gyres (Ozeki 13). Ozeki bases the premise of the novel on the movement of currents and the objects they carry—in this case, a freezer bag containing Nao's lunchbox. Muriel, an anthropologist who studied middens, treasures many of the objects that wash up on Cortes Island, including First Nations objects and a collection of antique Japanese fishing floats (33). Ruth describes the floats as "the size of large beach balls, murky globes blown from thick tinted glass. They were beautiful, like

escaped worlds” (33). Ruth seems to refrain from judgement about the arrival of the Japanese fishing floats on her home shore, appreciating their beauty and durability rather than condemning them as litter. Ruth and Muriel recognize the interconnectedness of cultures despite distances and treasure the accidentally cast-off items. For Ruth and Muriel, trash is not intrinsically bad or undesirable, but can serve as a window into the lives of others across space and time, as the journal connects Ruth to Nao.

Ozeki’s discussion of waste shifts when considering the types of waste that are driven by consumerism and capitalism and the long-term effects these items have on the environment. Through Manzanar, Yamashita provided commentary on the pollution of the Eastern Third World by the Western First World in *Tropic of Orange*, but in *A Tale for the Time Being* the reader witnesses how developed nations, regardless of place, endanger the world at large indiscriminately. Ozeki’s interrogation of “transpacific literary, political, and ecological relations [in] *A Tale for the Time Being* presents ecological issues as having transnational relevance... remind[ing] us, social and environmental injustice is hardly ever contained within national borders” (Fachinger 1). Ozeki resists the urge to blame the average consumer for the waste they create, instead focusing on the global and insidiously industrial nature of plastic pollution. Oliver explains to Ruth how plastic trash is pushed by ocean gyres into large, floating masses of pollution, including two in the Pacific Ocean known as the Great Eastern and Great Western Garbage Patches (36). These garbage patches are a direct result of an increasingly global culture of plastic. Manufacturers create plastic products or sell products in plastic containers without regard to how they will be disposed or if they can be recycled. Many plastic items, whether responsibly dropped off at a local recycling center or hastily thrown out a car window, end up sloshing around in the ocean, “ground into particles for the fish and zooplankton to eat,”

contaminating ecosystems worldwide (36). Similarly, energy companies disregard ecological dangers in favor of profit. During the Fukushima reactor meltdown crisis, Tepco flooded the reactor with water, creating “500 tons of highly radioactive water each day” that was then pumped into containment pits which leaked into the Pacific Ocean, contaminating fish and seaweed (196). Tepco and the Japanese government denied the danger the leak posed to humans and “didn’t estimate the consequences to the fish” (197). After the arrival of the freezer bag and other contemporary Japanese items on Cortes Island, the residents began to consider the potential for radiation contamination to their food sources if in fact the drift arrived in British Columbia sooner than expected. Ozeki largely dispels this idea through Oliver and Muriel, but it underscores the interconnectedness of ecosystems regardless of distance. Through the discussion of the Pacific garbage patches and the secondary effects of nuclear contamination, Ozeki challenges the reader to contemplate the ways their participation in a waste generating society impacts the greater ecology beyond their front door and modify their choices to generate lasting change.

Western settler colonialism and imperialism creates irreversible ecological damage through the inadvertent and intentional introduction of non-native or invasive species, much to the frustration of contemporary environmentalists, though the introduction of non-native species to an ecosystem does not necessarily warrant panic and immediate remedial action. The appearance of the Jungle Crow, a species of crow native to Japan, on Ruth and Oliver’s property is a mystery and possibly a coincidence. Oliver speculates, “The only thing I can think of is that it rode over on the flotsam. That it’s part of the drift... Anything’s possible. People made it here in hollowed-out logs. Why not crows?” (Ozeki 55). Many of the fictional residents of Cortes Island are environmentally conscious and vigilant against the establishment of additional non-

native and invasive species to their home. Callie, a marine biologist Ruth enlists to identify the barnacles attached to Nao's freezer bag, comments that the "local nativists already have their knickers in a twist" after sighting the Jungle Crow on the island (120). Callie advises that the island is currently home to several invasive species, including black slugs, Scotch broom, and Himalayan blackberries and the introduction of another species of crow is concerning (120). However, Ozeki repeatedly undermines the environmentalist kneejerk reaction to the introduction of non-native species by presenting examples of organisms that solve or mitigate an ecological deficiency created by colonialism. Humans created environmental damage, but we have the power to alter the outcomes of that damage by thoughtfully introducing non-native species or species previously native to the area. Additionally, as Fachinger aptly states, "The text's focus on the importance of species in defining place emphasizes the interconnectedness between the local and the global" (Fachinger 3). While environmentalists obsess about the importance of keeping ecosystems pure and free of outside influences, Ozeki proposes a more inclusive and wholistic approach to ecological change that acknowledges and leverages the connection between geographically separated locations and their lifeforms.

Ozeki discusses the Pacific or Miyagi oyster (*Crassostrea gigas*) as an example of the targeted implementation of a foreign organism used to solve a manmade ecological problem to highlight the ways ecosystems can be restored when the concept of environmental purity does not constrain progress. In the novel, Oliver explains, "The Pacific oyster isn't native... They were introduced in 1912 or '13... but didn't really acclimate until the thirties. But once they did, they took over. Crowded out the smaller native species" (Ozeki 187). However, Oliver's explanation is somewhat misleading. Along the Pacific Coast of Canada, oyster farming of the native oyster species became popular in the 1880s (Lavoie 2). By the 1930s, the native oyster

populations declined due to “overexploitation and deleterious environmental factors” (2). To replenish the oyster populations to avoid the deterioration of industry and traditional food sources, the Pacific oyster was introduced to the Canadian Pacific Coast in 1912-13. This process was repeated along the coasts of the United States and Mexico after the Pacific oyster proved to gradually adapt to variations in environmental conditions. Had the Pacific oyster not been introduced and painstakingly cultivated in British Columbia, it is unlikely that oysters of any variety would exist on the Canadian Pacific Coast today. By including the history of the native and Pacific oysters on Cortes Island, Ozeki introduces the difficulties of classifying species as non-native and indiscriminately preventing their addition into new bioregions in the face of environmental damage caused by humans and naturally shifting ecological change. Ozeki complicates the concept of nativity, suggesting the introduction of a species, or more abstractly, an idea, can benefit the existing structures, as Ruth and Nao ultimately alter the other’s life through their reciprocal interventions.

Like the oyster farmers, Ozeki introduces Oliver’s attempts to combat the detrimental effects of humans on the environment through his art installations and complicates native-ness temporally. When Ruth met him, Oliver was already an accomplished environmental artist, creating “botanical interventions into urban landscapes” (Ozeki 56). He created an urban forest in Vancouver titled “Means of Production” that provided materials for local artists and artisans such as wood, willow, and fiber (296). While living on Cortes Island he began a rural project he calls the NeoEocene:

Anticipating the effects of global warming on the native trees, he was working to create a climate-change forest on a hundred acres of clear-cut, owned by a botanist friend. He planted groves of ancient natives—metasequoia, giant sequoia, coast redwoods, *Juglans*,

Ulmus, and ginkgo—species that had been indigenous to the area during the Eocene Thermal Maximum, some 55 million years ago (60).

This project encounters an obstacle when the covenant holder on the property identifies the trees Oliver is planting as non-native to the area. As the environment changes, trees native to British Columbia during the Anthropocene will likely struggle to adapt to increased temperatures and shifting weather patterns; trees provide shade, moisture management, and air filtration and a decrease in their already greatly diminished population due to logging will further exacerbate the effects of climate change. Oliver argues that “given the rapid onset of climate change, we need to radically redefine the term *native* and expand it to include formerly, and even prehistorically, native species” (120). Throughout the novel, Oliver defends his choice to include trees that will thrive on Cortes Island as the climate shifts, as the selected trees will provide an ecological advantage to the region. In frustration, Oliver explains to Ruth, “I’ve got a whole flat of baby ginkgos, ready to be planted, but the covenant holder won’t let me. They’re saying the ginkgos are potentially invasive... It’s insane. That tree is a living fossil. It survived major extinction events over hundreds of millions of years” (312). The Jungle Crow, the Pacific oysters, and Oliver’s climate change forest all serve to complicate our traditional scientific notions of native purity and interrogate how contemporary scientists and environmentally conscious individuals can creatively thwart some aspects of ecological destruction through the introduction of entirely non-native or prehistorically native species to a bioregion. Ozeki challenges readers to reevaluate their closely held environmentalist beliefs and consider possibilities beyond convention that may combat changes to the environment and seek outcomes driven by the conscientious application of practical innovations.

The Jungle Crow appears to Ruth several times in her mysterious and vivid dreams, leading her to help Nao, Haruki #2, and the reader to create more beneficial outcomes for themselves. Ozeki's implementation of magical realism entwined with quantum physics alters the time and space of two worlds, allowing for an exchange of information and meaning. Ben Holgate states, "A key characteristic of magical realist fiction is to disrupt perceived ideas about time and space. This is one of the core reasons why the narrative mode is so useful in colluding with environmental literature to depict the long duration of environmental degradation caused by industrialisation" (Holgate 7). Nao introduces the idea of magic and the complexities of time in the opening pages of her journal, exclaiming, "But if you do decide to read on, then guess what? You're my kind of time being and together we'll make magic!" (3). Those opening pages also contain her desire to "drop out of time... Exit my existence" by committing suicide, a fate she expects her father to also achieve in the immediate future (6). After Ruth explains her various dream experiences to Muriel, Muriel theorizes that the Jungle Crow of Ruth's dream came from Nao's world to enable Ruth to divert the course of Nao's future toward more favorable prospects (376). Muriel hypothesizes, "her story was about to end one way, and you intervened, which set up the conditions for a different outcome" (376). Oliver concurs with the supposition that the Jungle Crow led Ruth back in time, averting Haruki #2's suicide and allowing Nao to discover the truth about her great-uncle and her father. By learning the truth of her family history and the deeply moral behavior of both Harukis, Nao can envision more constructive prospects for her future.

Ruth exerts the power given her by the Jungle Crow to guide Nao and the reader to discover, retell, and remember stories that lead to equitable results. Memory is used various ways throughout the novel, not least of which to emphasize Ruth's fears of developing Alzheimer's

like her mother. Ozeki plays with the concept of memory through magical realism, allowing Ruth to discover and remember stories she could not have accessed normally. As an avid and impulsive researcher, Ruth desires to uncover the stories of Jiko and Nao beyond the extent of the journal, searching the internet for traces of their fates. While reading about the tsunami, she discovers the existence of ancient stone markers warning residents not to build their homes below the indicated location and a quote from the mayor of a Japanese town, commenting that the stones are “the voices of our ancestors... They were speaking to us across time, but we didn’t listen” (114). Ruth muses, “Does the half-life of information correlate with the decay of our attention? Is the Internet a kind of temporal gyre, sucking up stories, like geodrift, into its orbit? What is its gyre memory? How do we measure the half-life of its drift?” (114). In this way memories and stories are shifting, yet permanent; they may be forgotten or trapped in the amber of cyberspace to be unearthed decades later. Ruth empowers them both to create their own realities by remembering and exploring Nao’s stories, regardless of the pain or shame associated with Nao’s memories. Leah Milne relates Ruth’s exercise in remembrance to that of Sethe’s in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, emphasizing the importance of remembering despite discomfort

Much like the drift floating in oceanic gyres, memories become agents, objects willfully persisting against the human tendency to disremember even the most shameful public and personal histories. *Beloved*’s polysemic closing refrain, “It was not a story to pass on,” exposes the difficulty in facing events such as slavery or Haruki #1’s perils during World War II. We cannot disremember, or pass on, these stories but must instead share them and pass them on. While Ruth never learns the exact circumstances under which the lunchbox and its contents appear on her shore, she nonetheless recognizes their storytelling powers,

teaching her about herself and helping her overcome the physical and metaphysical isolation of her remote island to share responsibility for the fate of another (Milne 135). By remembering and recounting stories, Ruth, Nao, and the reader all participate in a system of preserving the past to guide the future. Ruth refuses to forget about the injustice against Japanese Canadians and Americans during World War II and that act of memory and reframing of history creates her reality. Muriel remembers and shares Indigenous creation stories, altering Ruth's and Oliver's perceptions about the appearance of the Jungle Crow, therefore shaping their reality. The act of recounting stories and the remembrance of history alters the fabric of Ruth's and Nao's present and future, allowing both characters to create more equitable outcomes for themselves and those they influence with their stories.

Ruth serves as the reader of Nao's journal, but we, the audience, serve as Ruth's reader. Nao views herself as creating her imagined reader, her "one special person," insisting that she is "reaching forward through time to touch" her reader who then reaches back to touch her (Ozeki 26). In this way, Ozeki creates the possibility for a reader to influence a text as the text influences the reader. When Ruth "finally decides she can no longer be a passive reader" of Nao's journal, she actively follows her Jungle Crow guide and intervenes to save Haruki #2 and Nao from suicide and direct them toward a different path (Milne 134). The decisions Haruki #2 and Nao make after their last encounter with Ruth then shape Ruth's reality and future. Kit Dobson observes that Ruth's actions in Nao's reality influence events enough to generate some resolution in her present, "but not so much resolution that the future too is not opened up as a space for further ethical acts. Everything is never quite solved, but events are set sufficiently to right so that Ruth will be able to go forward, and so too might Nao and her father" (Dobson 132). The magical nature of the novel allows the reader to reflect on the interconnectedness of texts

and their readers. In this way, “every writer of every text becomes implicated in that text, and every reader and witness shares responsibility for the tale that follows” (Milne 133). If the reader rejects the role of a passive reader and engages with the novel, they can create more equitable outcomes beyond literature. The ethical paths Ozeki presents for readers to follow are myriad, from engaging with difficult stories to seeking environmental justice for the subaltern.

Haruki #2 is empowered by Ruth’s crossings to create more constructive prospects for himself, Nao, and perspective clients by engaging with critical posthumanist discourse and challenging the permanence of stories on the internet. The Jungle Crow leads Ruth back in time, she approaches Haruki #2 in the park, compelling him to reconsider his intention to commit suicide and intercept Nao on her way to Jiko’s temple. As Haruki #2’s suicide is averted, he is directed on a path that allows him to assist Nao and countless others by inventing the cyber-spider, Mu-Mu the Obliterator. Haruki #2 explains in a letter to a former colleague that he developed Mu-Mu to sanitize search engine databases and remove “all instances of my daughter’s name and personal information, as well as all the pictures and nasty videos...” allowing her to live her life without the reminders and shame associated with her time as the victim of bullying (Ozeki 382). The Q-Mu version of Mu-Mu is itself a work of magical realist quantum physics, shifting between worlds to remove undesirable information from the greater Internet that extends across realities. Mu-Mu allows the reader to interrogate how the internet has become a part of our greater ecology, directly affecting how humans interact, attain information, and ultimately function within society. Search engines and social media algorithms dictate the content we experience, influencing how we determine what is important and relevant to our lives, in effect merging our consciousness with technology. Ozeki’s discourse of critical posthumanism and the internet allows Haruki #2 to beneficially alter his and Nao’s prospects and

the encourage reader to consider how to create a more ethical future that embraces all beings, regardless of medium.

Jiko Yasutani: Buddhist Guide to the “Not-Two Nature of Existence”

As a Buddhist nun, Jiko Yasutani vows to become a bosatsu, a Buddhist saint or awakened being, and abstain from reaching enlightenment until all beings attain enlightenment, serving as a guide for Nao and many others to achieve a more ethical future (18). Buddhism asserts “that in every being there is the possibility of enlightenment, and in everything that seems ugly there is beauty. In everything that seems temporal, there is timelessness” (Humphries xix). Furthermore, Buddhist enlightenment teaches the opening of one’s mind to dispel suffering by ceasing to deny its existence (xix). Jiko does not avoid the suffering of others, as would be easy to accomplish from her mountain temple but seeks to ease the suffering of others through acknowledgement and prayer. Nao understands Jiko’s vow as an occupation and frequently provides Jiko upsetting occurrences plucked from news headlines for Jiko’s prayers. She muses, “sometimes I think the main reason she’s still alive is because of all the stuff I give her to pray about” (Ozeki 18). As Jiko guides Nao, Ruth and the reader discover that Nao’s assessment may contain a grain of truth, though Jiko seems more concerned with unburdening her great-granddaughter than focusing exclusively on “those poor high school girls and the perverts and all the being who are suffering in the world” (18). During Nao’s going-away party before she leaves the temple to return to school, Jiko selects a song titled “Impossible Dream” to sing for karaoke. Nao reflects that Jiko sings the sentimental song with genuine feeling and explains that the lyrics discuss “how it’s okay to have impossible goals, because if you follow your unreachable star no matter how hopeless or far, your heart will be peaceful when you’re dead,” and directly

associates the song with Jiko's vow to save all beings (243). Upon Jiko's death, Nao understands that Jiko surrendered her life to become a nun for the wellbeing of others, including Nao. Jiko's intention to save all *beings*, not all humans, suggests a universalist principle that rejects anthropocentric and hegemonic beliefs, creating a unifying worldview that encompasses and values all life. Jiko's teachings guide Nao to reconcile her relationship with Haruki #2, help her create a space of security and wellbeing through zazen, a form of Buddhist meditation, and encourage her to behave more ethically toward the beings around her and herself.

Jiko's performance of Buddhist principles exposes opportunities for environmental critique throughout the novel and leads Nao to pursue a mindset that rejects the binaries of anthropocentrism. The novel opens with a passage from Dōgen Zenji's *Shōbōgenzō*, or *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* that contains the refrain "for the time being," introducing the reader to the concept of the term "time being" encompassing all things that do or have occupied time (Ozeki 1). Dōgen's text emphasizes the sameness of all things in relation to time: "*A pine tree is time, Dōgen had written, and bamboo is time. Mountains are time. Oceans are time...*" (30). Jiko's notion of time beings is clearly shaped by Dōgen's influential Buddhist text along with her practice of zazen, "a moment-by-moment observation of the self that apparently led to enlightenment" (398). Jiko incorporated the ideologies and practices of Dōgen's teachings into her own practice of Buddhism and uses them to guide Nao and Ruth. Nao spends the summer with Jiko at her temple, learning the precepts of Buddhism organically. Jiko also instills an ethic that rejects anthropocentrism and embraces all life—not just human life—as equally important. Nao describes Jiko's theory of reality as the "not-two nature of existence" that denies binaries, including those of human versus nature or nature versus culture (Ozeki 194). One visible example of how Nao adopts Jiko's principles is how Nao lives in harmony with mosquitos,

respecting the insects as living beings. She reflects in her diary: “And soon there was no difference between me and the mosquitos. My skin was no longer a wall that separated us, and my blood was their blood” (204). Nao believes her new relationship with mosquitos is a result of her cultivation of her “*supapawa*” (or superpower), which later helps her endure bullying and assault at school. She is no longer a being separate from nature, but a part of the world she inhabits. By recognizing her impact on other creatures, even those as small and abhorred as mosquitos, Nao creates an equitable outcome for herself and other beings that is less influenced by the binaries of anthropocentrism that dominate modern culture.

Jiko’s resistance to binaries is exemplified through her understanding of time as another site of deep ecology which she considers through a practice of mindfulness. In the opening line of the novel, Nao defines a time being as “someone who lives in time, and that means you, and me, and every one of us who is, or was or ever will be” (Ozeki 3). In this way time is another sort of greater ecology that encompasses all life. She views Jiko as a deeply conscientious time being who “does everything really really slowly” to live mindfully and purposefully (25). According to Dōgen, “if we are not ourselves being mindful, we neglect other beings, we leave them out of our present and as a result we lose our own presence, our own being unto ourselves as time beings” (Dobson 129). Mindfulness is an essential practice for time beings to recognize their place within the greater ecology. Jiko’s “not-two nature of existence” continues through her understanding of time, equating her place within time with the same gravity as a mountain’s: “Jiko, mountain, same thing. The mountain is tall and will live a long time. Jiko is small and will not live much longer. That’s all” (Ozeki 194). Though the mountain will occupy far more linear time than Jiko and an anthropocentric viewpoint would prioritize human life above the existence of a mountain, Jiko insists they each hold unique but equal status within time. For Jiko, all things

that exist within our environment are time beings. When considering the concept of discovering lost time, Jiko writes, “For the time being/ Words scatter.../ Are they fallen leaves?” causing Nao to recall the large, old ginkgo tree on the temple grounds (24). Nao recognizes the tree as a time being, surviving through generations of human-experienced time. As Oliver indicates later in the novel, the ginkgo tree as a species has survived millennia, endured natural climate events, and reestablished its population worldwide through human intervention. Jiko does not address environmental issues specifically to Nao in the novel, but Jiko’s interpretation of Buddhism that deemphasizes an anthropocentric worldview and her incorporation of enduring life forms, such as the ginkgo tree, influences Nao to recenter her perspective on the greater ecology rather than herself.

Contemporary Buddhism and environmentalism presumably go hand-in-hand, but many criticize the surge of “Green Buddhism.” Skeptical scholars discount the existence of anything akin to contemporary ecological ethics in early Buddhism (Holder 114). Holder argues, “The typical study of Buddhist environmentalism is methodologically flawed because both the skeptics and the proponents of Buddhist environmentalism start with a contemporary way of framing environmental ethics and try to match that particular approach to environmental ethics with the ancient texts, doctrines, and practices of early Buddhism” (115). The ecological challenges we experience today, such as global warming, water pollution, deforestation, and human overpopulation “simply did not exist in the time of the Buddha” and therefore were not considered in early Buddhism (115). Additionally, early skeptics of Green Buddhism were troubled by an ethos of environmentalism that involved preserving nature or restoring it to pristine wilderness void of human influence, which is largely outdated and inconsistent with contemporary environmentalism in the twenty first century. Regardless of the skepticism

surrounding environmental ethics and early Buddhism, many contemporary Buddhists are actively practicing socially engaged Buddhism, which refers to “the active use of the religion and its teachings to address social issues, such as violence and war, economic development and inequalities, gender issues, and environmental degradation (Darlington 5). In Thailand, environmental destruction created by urban pollution and resource depletion generated some localized interest in environmentalism (2). Many Thai Buddhist monks, concerned with the negative impacts of environmental damage on the subaltern, began to participate in acts of environmental conservation. Initially, Buddhist-framed activism focused on the local, then “globalization not only brought capitalism and multinational business to Buddhist countries but also introduced alternative ideas intended to help people oppose dominant concepts of large-scale economic development and rapid growth (7). As a lived religion, Buddhism is subject to change based on the needs of the moment and while environmentalism may not have been a consideration for early Buddhists, “the goals of environmental Buddhism, based on both the ecological concept of interconnectedness found in deep ecology and the Buddhist concept of dependent co-arising, emphasize modern, scientific methods and ancient religious principles” (8). Ozeki, a practicing Zen Buddhist priest, does not specifically create Jiko to represent or participate in Green Buddhism, but by juxtaposing Ruth and Oliver’s environmental concerns with Jiko’s “not-two” Buddhist principles, the two concepts naturally become entangled for the reader, offering a path forward to create equitable tomorrows for Nao, Ruth, and the reader.

Nao’s Buddhist approach to considering time beings, directly influenced by Jiko, simultaneously minimizes the stress placed on individual beings to exist by recognizing our small places within the environment while respecting the importance of all time beings individually. Ozeki’s integration of the materiality through environmental criticism is entwined

with more intangible concerns (Simal-González 237). Nao's existential dilemmas derive from personal situations, such as bullying and family struggles, but additionally reflect "issues of an immaterial, philosophical, or eschatological nature, including the anxiety of living in a postmodern, globalized world" (237). After returning from her summer with Jiko, Nao becomes obsessed with evolutionary biology and species extinction. Nao dramatically writes in her diary, "please don't get me going on the topic of species extinction because it's totally depressing, and I'll have to commit suicide right this second" (Ozeki 25). As a form of stress relief and meditation, she began to memorize the Latin names of extinct species:

Jiko had given me a bracelet of pretty pink juzu beads, kind of a starter set, and for every dead species I would move a bead around, whispering their beautiful names to myself during recess, or walking home from school, or lying in my bed at night. I felt a sense of calm, knowing that all these creatures had lived and died before me, leaving almost no trace (265).

Contemplating the existence and disappearance of time beings that came before her becomes a necessary form of solace for Nao as she navigates the complications of young adulthood. Her memorization of names and the use of juzu beads serves as a form of mindfulness for Nao. She feels released from her existential dread and the responsibility for her father's safety by reflecting about the inevitable passing of all individual things and species. As Dōgen writes in the *Shōbōgenzō*, "*if you understand time as only passing, then you do not understand the time being*" (260). Understanding time in relation strictly to the self or humanity disregards the existence of time in relation to all things and prevents a holistic understanding of time. By engaging with the history of extinct species as time beings, Nao is better able to understand her place as a time being. According to Dobson, "Jiko plays a role in separating Nao's understanding

from the present and from modernity, simultaneously delinking the two terms—modernity and the present—so that she becomes more able to determine her own values and concerns” and assess herself in relation to other time beings (128). Jiko guides her great-granddaughter on the path to a more ethical future through mindfulness and a broader understanding of individuals as time beings within a greater ecology that contains all time beings.

Throughout the novel, Jiko guides Nao to recognize her identity as an individual and develop a self-care regimen comprised of mindfulness and gratitude that allows her to cope with stress. Nao is shocked and amused with the habits of the Buddhist nuns as they act out ritual gratitude while completing daily tasks, such as “washing their faces or brushing their teeth, or spitting out their toothpaste, or even going for a crap. I’m not kidding. They bowed and thanked the toilet and offered a prayer to save all beings” (Ozeki 166). Initially, Nao views the practice as silly and irrelevant, but finds herself offering thanks while performing everyday tasks. Similarly, bathing at the temple involves rituals beyond the behaviors typical of those associated with public baths Nao was used to in Tokyo. The nuns prefer not to speak while in the bathhouse, though sometimes Jiko “broke the rule and then it was ok for us to have a quiet conversation, which felt really peaceful” (166). Simply by participating in the ritual of bathing, Nao achieves a state of comfort that can be replicated through continued practice. By modeling the practice of rituals that encourage gratitude and mindfulness, Jiko is able shift Nao’s perceptions to allow her to create a more beneficial mindset for herself that enables her to better consider her place in the world and how she can more effectively practice resiliency and her *supapawa*.

Jiko’s guidance allows Nao to develop the mental resiliency to withstand her often unsatisfactory circumstances and a deep sense of empathy for the suffering of others, shifting her focus to creating a more favorable path for herself. Nao spends the summer with Jiko largely

because of the *ijime* (bullying) she experiences at her Japanese school. Initially, Nao is subjected to teasing by her classmates who mockingly call her “Transfer Student Yasutani,” though they quickly began to physically attack her with pinches and small cuts to her skin and tearing her school uniform with nail scissors (Ozeki 48). Eventually the children and faculty begin to ignore Nao in the classrooms and hallways, leading to a mock funeral for Nao who has apparently disappeared. A video of the funeral titled “The Tragic and Untimely Death of Transfer Student Nao Yasutani” is posted online and received thousands of hits. At the temple, Jiko notices Nao’s scars from the bullying and encourages Nao to express her anger and pain. Jiko resolves to assist Nao in developing a superpower, or *supapawa*, to protect Nao from the violence she experiences at school. The development of Nao’s *supapawa* draws on her participation in rituals of gratitude and mindfulness. Nao recalls, “Jiko was helping me cultivate my *supapawa*! by encouraging me to sit zazen for many hours without moving, and showing me how not to kill anything” (204). Nao can find peace and strength in the practice of zazen, writing that it “feels like coming home” (182). Unfortunately, after the summer break the bullying intensifies into sexual violence as a group of bullies knocks Nao to the ground in the school restroom and threatens to rape her. Nao recalls, “I just lay there, perfectly still. It was pointless to struggle or scream... they could break my body but they wouldn’t break my spirit. They were only shadows, and as I listened to them arguing, I felt my face relax into a gentle smile. I had summoned up my *supapawa*” (277). While she cannot physically overpower the bullies, she now has the mental resilience to withstand their attacks. Jiko cannot protect Nao from the dangers of everyday life, but Jiko provides her with the tools to resist nonviolently while remaining mentally resilient. Additionally, Nao develops a deep compassion and empathy that allows her to finally communicate effectively with her father, creating the opportunity for a more beneficial future for them both.

Jiko often serves as a guide by example, displaying her deeply held feminist views and sense of ethics to those around her, including Nao. Nao describes Jiko as an “anarchist-feminist-novelist-turned-Buddhist-nun of the Taisho era” (Ozeki 19), “who had plenty of lovers, both males and females,” introducing feminist and queer critique to the novel (6). Nao refers to her great-grandmother as a “New Woman,” a Japanese phrase from the early 1900s used to describe “progressive, educated women who rejected the limitations of traditional gender-assigned roles” (6). Raichō Hiratsuka, a co-founder of the early twentieth century Japanese feminist magazine *Bluestocking* stated, “I am a *new woman*. As *new women* we have always insisted that women are also human beings. It is common knowledge that we have opposed the existing morality, and have maintained that women have the right to express themselves as individuals and to be respected as individuals,” a sentiment Jiko clearly believes as well (Sato 14). Jiko named her daughters after the feminist icons Emma Goldman and Kanno Sugako, substantiating Jiko’s commitment to gender equality and incorporating instances of Eastern and Western attempts to overthrow patriarchy (69). Jiko transcends socially constructed boundaries of association and models this behavior for her relations. Marlo Starr explains, “Jiko has the ability to straddle multiple identities. Her presence raises questions about the fixity of individual identity because she simultaneously transgresses multiple categories and classifications” (Starr 101-102). Jiko embodies the ideals she dedicated her life to pursuing and Nao becomes enthralled with her great-grandmother’s accomplishments and persona, even dedicating the journal to cataloguing the life of Jiko for posterity. Ruth becomes similarly enthralled with the nun’s life, dedicating many hours to research Jiko’s I-novel which has seemingly disappeared from existence as the only trace of the novel is in an article abstract that disappears when Ruth attempts to read it. Both women intentionally and unintentionally emulate Jiko’s behaviors, which assists them in seeking

more equitable outcomes for themselves by questioning societal pressures to conform to predetermined binaries and identities.

Buddhism and feminism have overlapping principles that reject binaries and emphasize the fluidity of identity as a product of individual and collective experience. As a New Woman, Jiko resists the binaries of gender traditionally forced on Japanese men and women and continues her practice of resistance as a Buddhist nun. In her article “Beyond Machine Dreams: Zen, Cyber-, and Transnational Feminisms in Ruth Ozeki’s *A Tale for the Time Being*” Marlo Starr explains, “Buddhist philosophy is also appealing to feminists because of its emphasis on nondualistic thinking. The idea that the self is unitary and separate from others is illusory in Buddhist thought, and therefore, perceived differences between the self and others and between races and genders are also deemed illusory” (101). Jiko’s Buddhist and feminist teachings influence her great-granddaughter, encouraging Nao to consider the world through a non-dualistic perspective that will allow for broader understanding of circumstances beyond herself. Nao observes Jiko’s body as a form that resists the rigidity of binary or classification, “simultaneously transgress[ing] multiple categories and classifications” (102). Nao perceives Jiko as “part ghost, part child, part young girl, part sexy woman, part yamamaba [mountain witch, mountain hag], all at once,” representing every stage of her existence through one corporeal form (Ozeki 166). The overall impression of Jiko described by Nao was developed over several weeks as Nao progressed in her acceptance of practices such as mindfulness and gratitude and as she witnessed her great-grandmother’s behaviors. Nao begins to adapt Jiko’s “not-two” way of thinking as an approach to considering alternate possibilities, such as the real reason why her family relocated to Tokyo from California or Haruki #1’s idealistic sacrifice. Nao overcomes her closemindedness and her own pain to seek a greater understanding of her

father's choices and circumstances, ultimately closing the widening rift between father and daughter. Through Jiko's teachings, Nao is better able to open her understanding to additional perspectives and create more constructive prospects for her family that transcend the individual and positively influence their interactions with other beings.

Jiko's feminist and Buddhist teachings also influence Nao's interactions in cyberspace, allowing her to communicate with Jiko and withstand repeated online bullying. The increased interaction of humans on the internet has allowed for the progression of modern feminism and the deconstruction of gender and other norms in online spaces, extending the greater ecology beyond the traditional confines of the physical. Participating in online discourse "allows the human mind to merge with technology, collapsing traditional binaries between mind and machine, and Buddhist practice seeks to reveal the connection between self and others" (Starr 101). Critical posthumanism addresses the inseparable relationship between humans and technology, while rejecting "human exceptionalism (the idea that humans are unique creatures) and human instrumentalism (that humans have a right to control the natural world)" (Nayar 17). Technology, from the rudimentary tools created by early humans to cell phones and airplanes, is inexorably linked to our existence and development. Humans are evolving alongside all other lifeforms and technology, creating an ecology that incorporates cyberspace. Starr discusses how Donna Haraway

invokes the image of the cyborg as a postcorporeal amalgamation, blending human and machine to undermine traditional ways of perceiving and categorizing human bodies. Rather than seeing the body as a natural formation, this hybrid image shows that the human body is historically and culturally constituted. The cyborg does not reinforce

binaries like man/machine, mind/body, and male/female but instead exposes how these dualisms are constructed through cultural ideology. (Starr 101)

The invocation of the cyborg allows for the deconstruction of limiting social norms established through systems of oppression and provides a means for individuals to forge an identity free of restrictive binaries. Haraway's cyborg analogy reflects Nao's description of Jiko's classification-less body that resembles components of herself historically and culturally. Jiko physically and ideologically resists labels and while Jiko exists largely in the physical world, she defies expectations when she utilizes cyberspace to communicate with her great-granddaughter and continue to guide her toward a more ethical future.

As she leaves Sunnyvale, Nao imagines cyberspace will be a way for her to maintain transnational relationships with her childhood friends via email and her blog. The internet provides the possibility to transcend boundaries, as Haraway's cyborg does, and to "facilitate gender and racial equality" (Starr 103). Individual identity can become untethered to physical reality, allowing those who have been habitually affected by systems of oppression to escape those systems. The internet can be a way for people to connect without being hindered by biases and participate in discourse their physical situation may not permit. However, this initial cyberfeminist theory is considered blindly optimistic as cyberspace is often employed to exploit vulnerable groups, such as the exploitation of women and children through pornography or trafficking with minimal accountability for perpetrators. While Nao experiences bullying and both physical and sexual abuse by her peers in person, cyberspace becomes another venue for her harassment. When she discovers her classmates' intention to hold a funeral for Transfer Student Yasutani, she skips class to avoid the humiliating experience, only to have a link to a video of the funeral emailed to her afterward. The evening after her classmates assaulted her in the school

restroom, a classmate emails her another link to a video of that horrific scene and a link to a “burusera [schoolgirl uniform] fetish site where hentais [pervert, a sexual deviant] could bid on my blood-stained panties” (Ozeki 278). Nao’s cyberbullying situation is an example of how cyberspace can negatively alter the greater ecology by ostracizing and harming individuals through compounding means. Nao’s experience is not a single moment in her life to be compartmentalized and forgotten, but “published to the Internet, this moment of sexual abuse is frozen in time—disseminated to a wider audience, with the potential to be looped, rewatched, and re-experienced over again” and cannot be easily erased or forgotten (Starr 106). The internet is not a place of fluidity and easily altered identity—content is static and even if the individual initiating a post removes it, likely someone else shared or captured the post, ensuring its eternal posterity. Ozeki challenges the ability to escape to cyberspace and emphasizes the inseverable connection between reality and cyberspace—cyberspace is an extension of the greater ecology and is no more or less ethical or equitable than the physical world. The solution to unethical behavior in cyberspace proposed by the novel is the fantastical application Mu-Mu the Obliterator, created by Haruki #2 to expunge undesirable content from the internet, such as the videos of Nao. Jiko’s feminist paradigms permeate the entire Yasutani family, and Ruth by association, to generate a favorable solution by individuals dedicated to equitable behavior.

Conclusion: Leading Readers Toward Equity for All Beings

A Tale for the Time Being’s various guides serve to propel the characters on more equitable routes; however, the reader is the ultimate recipient of knowledge presented by the crows and Jiko. Nao and Ruth model the act of pursuing the guides, offering an example for the reader to follow. Ozeki does not suggest that the path will be free from complications or travails,

yet the reader must consider the benefits of discarding a mindset that does not actively engage with the greater ecology and seek out a more constructive path. Though readers likely will not have a guide at the ready to propel them in the most favorable direction, they may reflect on Jiko's teachings to improve their mindset through mindfulness and gratitude and shape their choices by rejecting predetermined binaries and seeking equity for all beings. Readers may apply the crows' philosophies to question nativity and the interconnectedness of deep ecology while not disremembering stories to create change in their lives and futures. Ozeki weaves contemporary topics in environmental criticism, such as the use-value paradigm and critical posthumanism, with feminist theory to underline the connections between all beings, regardless of status or classification, allowing her guides to step the characters and the reader through to a more ethical future informed by their collective wisdom.

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