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Reenchantment: A Case for a Cosmological Interpretive Strategy of Literature

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REENCHANTMENT: A CASE FOR A COSMOLOGICAL INTERPRETIVE STRATEGY OF
LITERATURE

by

SALVATORE TALLUTO

Under the Direction of Christopher Kocela, PhD

ABSTRACT

Abstract: Even before the likes of Max Weber and Frederic Jameson pushed forward the idea of disenchantment, feelings of dissatisfaction and meaninglessness caused by the technological and economic developments of what they called our modern and postmodern ages, it had been seen in much of our literature, art, and popular culture. A few early examples in drama would be Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Arthur Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, in which characters question the material world in search of what they feel is some elusive meaning in their lives. Some later examples of drama that tackle these issues are Paula Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home* and Sara Ruhl's *In the Next Room (Or the Vibrator Play)* in

which the issue of how we develop meaningful relationships is portrayed as essential to answering the question of how we can make our lives more meaningful. Examples in fiction which explore these issues of dissatisfaction and meaninglessness would be Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*, all of which deal with the issues of trying to navigate through a cosmos that is so much more powerful than one's self while trying to survive and maybe even change a society that just seems to lust after material things and power, often to destructive ends. This dissertation's contribution to an analysis of these artistic works is to synthesize the tools of process physics, process philosophy, process theology, and theopoetics in order to form a cosmological interpretive strategy of literature that leads towards the process of reenchancement, the idea that we as individuals are still integrally connected to society and the cosmos.

INDEX WORDS: Disenchantment, Reenchantment, Cosmology, Process Philosophy, Quantum Entanglement, Process Theology, Theopoetics, Modernism, Postmodernism, Theatre of the Absurd, Contemporary Literature, Literary Theory.

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SALVATORE TALLUTO

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DEDICATION

Thank you to my mother, Michele, and my not so little, little ones, Dominic and Dellila, for putting up with all of this doctoral and dissertation chaos.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past twenty to thirty years or so there has been a growing restlessness concerning what has come to be known as our postmodern age. Bruno Latour asks whether we ever were truly postmodern; Amy Elias, Christian Moraru, and Basarab Nicolescu all ask whether we are now past the postmodern age and in the formation of a new era; Judith Butler asks how far we can rely on scientific¹ and medical perspectives about the body and the soul; and Slavoj Žižek asks whether such questions themselves construct a discussion in such a way that no truth is possible. The names and defining characteristics of what is to follow postmodernism are still up for debate; however, one striking feature that can be found consistently in the work of critics like those above is a renewed focus concerning our place as humans within the larger cosmos. One frustrating issue that emerges from questions like those posed above is that, for the most part, they do not engage with contemporary literary criticism. This frustration has led these critics and others like David Ray Griffin, Suzi Gablik, James Buchanan, Nancy Howells, and William Beardslee to start thinking about new ways of interpreting literature that include cosmological questions. This is also why this dissertation proposes a new cosmological interpretive framework from which to analyze literature. This introduction will serve as a review of the theories and ideas which have inspired, influenced, and helped shape this discussion. This introduction is meant to be both academic and poetic in that it

¹ Viewpoints favoring science and material, physical observations over any sort of philosophical or theological viewpoints.

will try to set the stage and the mindset for a reading of the compilation of texts and theories found in this dissertation.

A cosmological interpretive strategy could potentially be used as an interpretive framework for any number of potential situations and topics; however, the main concern in this dissertation is about its use to interpret art, particularly literature. This discussion will privilege the Emersonian definition of art as it relates to nature. Emerson explains that “*Nature*, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. *Art* is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture” (Emerson 6). Art then becomes natural elements which are shaped by human effort, or through our will. When we speak, we use our mouths, diaphragms, and vocal chords to force air particles to vibrate at a certain level in a certain acoustic environment. When we write, we force our will on wood, graphite, ink, plastic, LCD crystals, etc. We create lines and shapes that we then imbue with meaning to represent a particular sound or letter. From Emerson’s standpoint, both speaking and writing become potential forms of art as a result. We speak to each other and write to each other as a form of communication which bears artistic potential.

Friedrich Nietzsche explains how such potentially artistic forms of communication developed as a social need between humans, stating “[c]onsciousness is really only a net of communications between human beings; it is only as such that it had to develop; a solitary human being who lived like a beast of prey would not have needed it” (Nietzsche 298). Nietzsche explains here how humanity developed communication, signs of speech and writing, for social use to express our needs and desires to each other. Nietzsche goes on to explain how this communication structures our consciousness: “[t]he human being inventing signs is at the same time the human being who becomes ever more keenly conscious of himself. It was only as

a social animal that man acquired self-consciousness--which he is still in the process of doing more and more” (Nietzsche 299). So, Nietzsche reveals here how the invention of signs for speech and writing is a path to self-consciousness because of the desire to express our needs and desires to other human beings. If we combine these two strains of thought—those of Nietzsche and Emerson--then, we can see that inventing signs, particularly for speech and writing, is to mix our will with our natural surroundings. Mixing our will with our natural surroundings produces what we call art out of our desire to communicate. The production of art then is also a social exercise; it is a form of communication by inventing signs. This communication by inventing signs then also leads to a path of self-consciousness that can continue to grow and develop.

Sometimes this growth and development is turned toward a consciousness about economics or relations between differing human cultures. When this consciousness is turned to our social interactions over time we call it history, and when it is turned toward our natural surroundings, we often call it science. Science can only measure what can be physically observed through repeated outcomes, however. The act of studying those things which cannot be physically observed in repeated outcomes is what we term philosophy and theology. Now, if we discuss the history of economic and social interactions between us as humans considering our natural surroundings, including energies and forces that we often cannot physically observe, we can call this combined approach “cosmology.” One issue that this dissertation aims to address is that art, as a form of communication that leads to our self-consciousness, has often been interpreted historically, economically, and culturally. However, until recently, such art has rarely been interpreted cosmologically. I will argue that a cosmological interpretation of art leads us to become self-conscious about our cosmological relationships through a process of “reenchantment.” In other words, art, as a form of communication which, when interpreted, leads

to self-consciousness about our cosmological relationships, also acts as a form of reenchancement. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the ways in which a cosmological interpretive strategy, used to explore contemporary literature already concerned with cosmological themes, can facilitate this process of reenchancement in its readers.

This discussion regarding the nature of art as a form of communication which can further our cosmological awareness through the process of reenchancement begins to reveal some of the major hallmark topics (not listed here in any type of hierarchical order) about which a cosmological interpretive strategy aims to inquire:

1. What is the status of our interdependence as humans with nature and the cosmic forces around us? Do we grow out and apart from nature as much of Western modern philosophy assumes, or are we as humans always operating within nature?
2. What is the status of our interdependence as living organisms with non-living material such as rocks, sticks (which at one point were living trees), or particles such as protons, neutrons, and electrons which we ourselves might be made up of but which, by themselves, are not considered living?
3. What is the relationship of our human perception of time to a larger geological or even cosmic time scale?
4. What is the larger significance of our ability to artistically shape nature relative to a concept like that of God? When we shape nature, are we shaping reality or God? If we are shaping nature and reality, does our will then mix with God's will?

The lines of inquiry listed above are addressed and explored by the theorists and literary authors presented within this dissertation, to whom a brief introduction will be helpful. One major inspiration for the desire, in this dissertation, to create a new cosmological interpretive

strategy for literature is Christian Moraru's *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary*. Moraru argues that we have entered a new era which he calls cosmodernism. Moraru formed the term from three main concepts: the concepts of modernism, cosmopolitanism, and cosmology. Moraru states that a striking development in our age is that "[t]he historically unrivaled intensity and extensity with which our relations with others recast our world and our representation of it are giving birth, [. . .] to a particular way of seeing this world and ourselves in it, to a new, "cosmodern" cultural imaginary if not to a new cultural paradigm altogether – to an entire 'cosmodernism'" (Moraru 2). Moraru's cosmodern cultural imaginary involves how we see ourselves in relation to the other--not just the human other but other forms of life and existence within the cosmos. Moraru sees a formation that is trying to preserve the marked cultural and individual differences that would allow for the continued definition of the self while also not objectifying the other. He calls this formation an "ecology" but explains that what is meant by ecology is "cultural ecology" (Moraru 49); he also explains this as a "bioculturally collaborative project," or a site where local traditions of "language and knowledge both shape and are shaped by" the natural settings "in which the culture exists" (Moraru 49). Moraru thus asserts an interdependence between nature and culture. Many other schools of literary theory including Marxism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, new historicism, and even postcolonialism assert that human culture is beyond or at least has grown separate from nature. Moraru here does not assert the separateness of nature and culture but instead insists on their fundamental relationship to each other as mutually corresponding. All the literary selections presented in this dissertation seem to affirm this understanding of the relationship between human culture and nature. The first goal of a cosmological interpretive

strategy for art and literature, then, is to see what the art and literature reveal about our understanding of this relationship of human culture and nature.

Moraru further develops his cosmological and ecological terminology with co-editor Amy Elias in the Introduction to *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century*. Moraru explains the shift to the term “planetary” by stating that many scholars felt the term “‘cosmos’ was too akin to ‘globe’ and ‘globalization’” in that it focused on too many “‘system specific’ rules.” As Amy J. Elias points out, these scholars’ views and interpretations “were ‘opposed to the dehumanizing context of cosmic space constructed by science’” (Moraru and Elias 168)². However, due to the nature of relationality, Moraru and Elias point out that planetarity ultimately comes back to the cosmic and cosmological underpinnings of our existence. Moraru and Elias state that “[p]lanetary relatedness is thus bioconnective” in that it connects “nested but nonhierarchical cultural and material ecosystems” through a “shared, affectively and materially interrelated, inhabited world space” (Moraru and Elias 269). Furthermore, the limit of such interconnective relatedness “is that of the cosmos itself, with planetarity both indexing and probing the world as a relational domain” (Moraru and Elias 252). The ideas of cosmodernism and planetarity then both entertain the same goal: to define the self in a manner which promotes the plurality of a diversity of cultures, --human and non-human, organic and non-organic-- to maintain a view of the ecology of the larger cosmos based upon the smaller or “nested” individual within it. That individual’s life and story is important not only in and of itself but also because it intersects with the larger story and history of the wider ecosystem and all the organisms that are connected to it. The story of the smallest speck of dust floating in

² Some works are first edition e-book releases without page numbers, due to this, the location number is being provided instead of a page number.

space is important in and of itself; its existence is a miracle and its story is also important because it belongs to a larger cosmic history containing many diverse entities.

This question of how our existence is entangled with the other entities in the universe is not just a cosmodern question. Moraru utilizes terminology from ecocriticism as well. One of the largest influences upon this new understanding of the interdependence between human culture and the cosmos has been Janet Bennett's ideas concerning vibrancy, or the ability of non-living material to work as a seemingly living system called an assemblage, which she elaborates on in her book *Vibrant Matter*. Bennett explains that much of today's criticism looks at agency within the cosmos through the lens of individualism in which the focus is on determining whether one entity is in control of his or her own action. Bennett explains, however, that when looking through a "congregational" and ecological lens "an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces" (Bennett 20). Bennett calls individual actants "modes" (Bennett 21) to elaborate that they are not just pieces of matter but a state of energy flowing through the cosmos and that this grouping of interdependent modes acts as a series of "assemblages" (Bennett 22). Bennett explains that "every mode, if it is to persist, must seek new encounters to creatively compensate for the alterations or affections it suffers. What it means to be a 'mode,' then, is to form alliances and enter assemblages: it is to mod(e)ify and be modified by others" (Bennett 22) and to have to navigate the tensions of such relationships. The interesting turn is when we move from looking at these assemblages at a local level to both a microscopic and macroscopic level. When looking at these assemblages from a microscopic level we begin to enter questions of quantum physics. Bennett in fact borrows her terminology about the modes of matter and energy from quantum physics. When discussing modes of matter and energy and the relationship

between those modes and their agency within the field of quantum physics, an amazing observation occurs: every entity seems to have a molecular relationship with everything else throughout the cosmos. Ervin Laszlo, known for his work regarding systems theory, comments upon this microscopic and cosmic relationship of modes, explaining that there is a “new paradigm at the dawn of the twenty-first century” which “sees the world as a whole system where all things interact and together constitute an entangled, quantum -like system in which all things are intrinsic elements in an integral whole” (Laszlo 574). This entanglement, which we call quantum entanglement, is based upon what Laszlo describes as the observation “that things may be at any finite distance in space and time but remain nonetheless connected. Such action-at-a-distance is an anomaly for the classical paradigm--even Einstein called it “spooky” (Laszlo 580). Laszlo is underscoring the fact that every mode of being in the cosmos is interconnected on a microscopic level and therefore is interconnected as a larger system on the macroscopic and cosmic levels. This reveals that existence as humans depends on these other entities and, at times, their existence depends on ours. Our existence, our histories, our stories are interconnected. Human existence is important not only to human history but to cosmic history. Thus, where many may say our human story may not have anything to do with that speck of dust, if we take a step back to get that cosmic perspective which a cosmologically interpretive framework leads us toward, we can see how our story as humans and the story of that speck of dust finally intersect as a part of a larger cosmic history.

The system of the cosmos which Laszlo describes works very similarly to Bennett’s assemblage; however, even Laszlo gets caught up in using the term “things,” which is an objectifying term. By uniting systems and quantum theory with Bennet’s idea of vibrant matter that has an agency of its own, along with the cultural perspective and chronicling of

cosmodernism, one begins to understand every mode of existence in the cosmos as a larger assemblage consisting of many individual actants working independently but interdependently. This understanding reveals that our agency is not entirely our own, but neither is it entirely predetermined; it is a complex web of everchanging factors. Basarab Nicolescu, in his book *From Modernity to Cosmodernity*, comments about this quantum entanglement and argues that “[q]uantum randomness is really a constructive gamble, which has a meaning--that of the construction of our own macrophysical world. A finer material penetrates a grosser material. The two coexist and cooperate in a unity that extends from the quanton to the cosmos” (Nicolescu 43). Nicolescu argues that our reality is not predetermined by chance, luck, cold probability, or some grand puppet master-like conception of God but by our actions interacting on several levels with the actions of the other existing agents in the cosmic and quantum world. This opens reality to an infinite series of outcomes and potentialities. The second goal of a cosmological interpretive strategy, then, is to analyze how art and literature reveal and underscore these cosmic intersections between entities and how those intersections contribute to each entity’s agency.

From this analysis of each entity’s agency, especially regarding human agency, it becomes possible to compare the human agent and the non-human agent. If the non-human agents, and, non-living substances such as rocks or even atomic particles like protons, neutrons, and electrons, are acting and reacting, then could this be a sign of consciousness and self-awareness as described by Nietzsche? If the entity is self-aware, is it aware of its existence as an entity in time and does it keep track of its existence? Does, then, this entity have a history of its own? The answer is a cautious yes. Just because we as humans discuss time in terms of human events does not mean that time did not pass before humans kept track of it. The time which we track as humans is mainly human time, and when we track it and discuss it, we call it history, or

human history. As seen in the work of Jane Bennett, however, a recent development has been to question whether there is too much focus on human accounts of existence, including time, and thus making time too anthropocentric a notion. There have been more and more calls to discuss the history of nonhuman entities in a way that does not try to reduce them to traditional human conceptions of time. This movement is called the nonhuman turn. In the Introduction to the collection of essays, *The Nonhuman Turn*, editor Richard Grusin writes that “[e]ven the new paradigm of the Anthropocene, which names the human as the dominant influence on climate since industrialism, participates in the nonhuman turn in its recognition that humans must now be understood as climatological or geological forces on the planet that operate just as nonhumans would” (Grusin 64). Grusin here reveals different levels of time: human time, climatological time, and geological time. Within this dissertation I will argue for a fourth conception of time: cosmic time. Cosmic time is not only about geological formations on our planet but about the creation of existence in this verse and all verses of the multiverse.

Recognition of cosmic time and multiple universes makes a cosmological interpretive strategy a theopoetical endeavor. Theopoetics, like verse here, is used as the understanding of cosmic creation as a natural, aesthetically, and potentially repetitive cycle of the becoming, or the coming into existence, of reality of which God is only one participant and not the only participant. A cosmological interpretive strategy looks to examine all participants in the composing of these verses including human, nonhuman, and divine participants. Grusin’s remark about the new conception of the role of humans in nonhuman history reveals how the old conceptions of human time have expanded to include attempts to understand these wider conceptions of time by recognizing human existence as one force within an ecosystem, acting and affecting the course of the history of the land and waterways we inhabit, our biomes, as well

as the history of the entire planet just as another organism or event may affect them. This is not to say that humans are the only exigent force within that history, but that human existence is seen as one of many factors in the development of the history of the earth. This further reveals a change in that historians have begun to recognize that other nonhuman entities have also had effects on the development of the earth's history. The earth resides within a solar system which resides in a galaxy which resides in the cosmos. This reveals that, like how weather and habitat have effects on humans and other organisms, humans and non-humans have also had effects on the history of the solar system, the galaxy, and the cosmos at large and are still doing so now.

This new conception about the agency and relationship between humans and nonhumans, or the nonhuman turn as referenced above, is not without its critics. Slavoj Žižek, using the language of Jane Bennett, calls this line of thinking New Materialism. In his book *Absolute Recoil*, Žižek discusses these questions, ridiculing the idea of a non-living entity that has some sort of sentience, saying that this New Materialism “is materialist in the sense in which Tolkien’s Middle-earth is materialist: as an enchanted world full of magical forces, good and evil spirits, etc., but strangely *without gods*—there are no transcendent divine entities in Tolkien’s universe, all magic is immanent to matter, as a spiritual power that dwells in our terrestrial world” (Žižek 12). Žižek here is attempting to defend dialectical materialism from this new line of thinking by reducing it to a mythical form of pantheism in which spirits govern the material world. This is antithetical to the idea of immanence and New Materialism. Žižek here, at least on this account, misses the point. The nonhuman turn and New Materialism does not dismiss dialectical materialism; it merely reconceptualizes its participants. Unlike pantheism, there is not a divine spirit puppet master; instead there is a recognition of the force of will of all participants and an interaction which occurs based on this will. Take for instance, a rock and rain water droplets.

The water droplets have a history of their own in terms of how they came to be molecularly formed, evaporated, and condensed into that form at that moment raining down on that rock. That rock has a molecular and geological history of its own and how it came to be in that location where the water droplets are raining down. When they meet, an interaction occurs, but who records this interaction for history? Instead of the old materialist ideas about water and rock being there and having no history because they are not human and truly other, as Žižek is suggesting, the nonhuman turn and New Materialism recognize that such nonhuman history exists separately from but intertwined with human history. Further, these movements recognize that, though the rock and the water cannot communicate as humans do, they do communicate: in the erosion patterns, the mineral deposits, the swapping of ionized molecular particles. This communication simply requires an audience, a reader--often times, a human reader. Just as we use materials, often nonhuman in nature, which are then left behind as signs or artifacts as a part of human history, so too do nonhuman entities. This makes nonhuman history and human history two categories of history which are truly discursive with each other while also existing as intertwining strands of a larger cosmic history. The third goal of a cosmological interpretive strategy then becomes to see how art and literature reveal a larger cosmic history that is composed of an intertwining of human and nonhuman history.

Based on this understanding of time and history, dialectical materialism is not the only postmodernist theory that a cosmological interpretive strategy may appear to be at odds with. A cosmological interpretive strategy may also be at odds with some interpretations and applications of deconstruction due to the differences in how a cosmological interpretive strategy views time on a cosmic scale within which the creation of art occurs owing to innumerable interactions between human and nonhuman actants in an ever changing, ever adaptive multiverse. Because of

the limitless interactions that could cause some new formulation of reality, this view can be described as upholding the perception of the cosmos as an endlessly creative, sacred, and mysterious place or set of places. The possibility for the view of an endlessly creative, sacred, and mysterious cosmos to disrupt a deconstructive view of art and literature is described by David Ray Griffin in the Introduction to the book *Sacred Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art*--a collection of essays by process philosophers and process theologians. Griffin makes the distinction between two visions of postmodern art and artistic analysis: "a deconstructive and a reconstructive version" (Griffin 11). Griffin goes on to explain that "Deconstructive postmodernism carries modernity's disenchantment of the world to its nihilistic conclusions" by reducing "pluralism" to "complete relativism, with no culturally transcendent standards of aesthetic or moral criticism" and which thus end up excluding "human creativity and originality, at least of any significant degree" (Griffin 11). Griffin argues here that deconstructive postmodernist views have led to disenchantment, or a process of continued alienation of individuals from each other and human society as well as alienation from conceptualizing their connections to a broader cosmic existence.

Griffin further states that these deconstructive theories demonstrate "a loss of temporal connectedness, a loss of the sense of connection between the present and the future" (Griffin 11). Griffin goes on to claim that these deconstructive theories then implicate a "resignation to the unredeemed world as irredeemable. This resignation translates into the artist's decision to attempt nothing more than to mirror the hollowness and inauthenticity of contemporary culture" (Griffin 11). Griffin argues that one method through which this disenchanting view can be fended off is through a panhuman perspective "portraying those elements that all cultures have in common...while equally celebrating our diversities, with which we can enrich each other"

(Griffin 12). Recognizing our connection to each other through our shared humanity while celebrating the rich variety of human existence becomes one way to fend off the feelings of alienation from society and the cosmos. As we consider our connections to other people, then we begin to consider our connections to the larger world and cosmos around us. Griffin's constructive postmodernist conception of art, as opposed to the deconstructive postmodernist conception of art, leads to an understanding of our relationship to the cosmos and other entities within it by recognizing "the creativity in us as awesome, having both divine and demonic potential, while recognizing it to be continuous with the creativity found throughout nature" (Griffin 12). Griffin argues that focusing on "our intuitions of patterns of 'rightness' inherent in reality" (Griffin 12) could lead to the of the "interconnectedness of all things" (Griffin 13). The attempt to use that interconnectedness to explain the "intuitions of 'rightness' found inherent in reality" is a process called reenchancement, which is a function studied within process theology. Griffin explains that combining process theology with "constructive or reconstructive art would help draw us toward a reenchanted world" (Griffin 12). Griffin has underscored the attempts of a constructive postmodern worldview to break disenchantment and to ameliorate the isolation and alienation one feels from a lack of connection to other people and to the cosmos. Both disenchantment and reenchancement are terms borrowed from Max Weber, Morris Berman, and Suzi Gablik. By revealing our interconnections to other entities in the cosmos and their contributions to our agency and ours to theirs through the critical analysis of art and literature, a cosmological interpretive strategy works toward its fourth goal: to demonstrate the power of art and literature to act as forms of reenchancement in which literature and art reveal our theopoetical participation in a discursive relationship in which we are acted upon by the cosmos and its

human, nonhuman, and divine participants while also acting upon them, causing reality to spring forth, or be shaped, through these transactions.

Both Morris Berman, and much later, Suzi Gablik, use this reenchantment to discuss the attempt of an individual to see past many of the cultural assumptions of the modern and postmodern eras that lead that individual to become what they call “disenchanted.”

Disenchantment is a term borrowed from Max Weber to discuss the effects modern life had on an individual--particularly effects from scientism and economic, technological, and theological predetermination, or the idea that we are not in control of our own actions or fate. In his work, *Essays in Sociology*, Max Weber recognizes that “the further the rationalization and sublimation of the external and internal possession of—in the widest sense—‘things worldly’ has progressed, the stronger has the tension on the part of religion become” (Weber 328). Weber is highlighting that a seemingly binary opposition exists between rationalization and its emphasis on worldly things and religion and its sense of the divine or the other-worldly. Weber advocates that this opposition has been promoted through the rise of a perspective pervasive in our society that all things must be viewed through a scientific lens: this primacy of science is called scientism. This scientism has led to what Weber later refers to as “the disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism” (Weber 350). Weber explains that because philosophy and science opted for a cause and effect-based, mechanistic view of the world, things that could not be explained or that were explained as being mysterious or otherworldly were treated with suspicion and hostility. The problem with this hostile treatment is that looking at the world in terms of mechanisms and machines is a form of reification--an objectification that not only dehumanizes us but allows for the treatment of the cosmos as a mere toy for human use. Weber

and, later, Morris Berman, both begin to hypothesize about how to undo these effects of disenchantment.

Morris Berman, in *The Reenchantment of the World*, writes about the difference between an enchanted world-view and a disenchanted world-view that have come about due to the rise of industrialization and the replacement of communal living and spiritual practices with secular, materialist culture. Concerning the processes of disenchantment and reenchantment, Berman writes:

What will serve to stabilize things today is fairly obscure; but it is a major premise of this book that because disenchantment is intrinsic to the scientific world view, the modern epoch contained, from its inception, an inherent instability that severely limited its ability to sustain itself for more than a few centuries. For more than 99 percent of human history, the world was enchanted and man saw himself as an integral part of it. The complete reversal of this perception in a mere four hundred years or so has destroyed the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche. It has very nearly wrecked the planet as well. The only hope, or so it seems to me, lies in a reenchantment of the world. Here, then, is the crux of the modern dilemma. We cannot go back to alchemy or animism--at least that does not seem likely; but the alternative is the grim, scientific, totally controlled world of nuclear reactors, microprocessors, and genetic engineering--a world that is virtually upon us already. Some type of holistic, or participating, consciousness and a corresponding sociopolitical formation have to emerge if we are to survive as a species. (Berman 23)

While Berman's view of human history may seem a bit nostalgic when he mentions alchemy and animism, what is not nostalgic is the view that even though humans are only one part of the wider cosmos, we are an integral one due to our potential to either be responsible stewards of the cosmos or irresponsible destroyers of it. Berman is correct in surmising that our society on its current path of enlightenment and capitalist secularism exhibits a pattern of ecological irresponsibility, industrial, technological, and militaristic dehumanization, and nuclear armament that threatens to destroy us and our planet. Like Berman, Gablik believes this disenchantment can be reversed.

Suzi Gablik elaborates on the idea of using art to achieve a newly reenchanted perspective on the cosmos in her essay "The Reenchantment of Art: Reflections on the Two Postmodernisms." Gablik argues that reading a text creates "an opening into the numinous, transpersonal dimensions of the psyche (which can be either ecstatic or terrifying)" where there is "no separation between inner and outer, between 'real' and 'imagined,' where there are no boundaries, so that all things flow into each other" (Gablik 185). The reader then is within a process of attuning him or herself to our larger home, the cosmos. This is not just attuning him or herself with others as a part of a collective, human consciousness, but as a part of a wider attunement to a cosmological consciousness. The active engagement of the reader's mind toward this acknowledgement and participation within a cosmological consciousness then becomes a step towards reenchantment which often occurs through experiencing a form of art such as a piece of literature. To use Bennett's terminology, art and literature then become actants within the process of reenchantment. By recognizing art and literature as actants, we come to understand that the process entails a series of back and forth, call and response style of interactions, and that the process, as described before, is discursive. Experiencing literature and

art, then, isn't simply mirroring reenchantment but through this discursive interaction between the nonhuman and human, literature and art become some of the tools through which reenchantment becomes and shapes reality.

This understanding of our cosmological interconnections as a form of shaping reality is further discussed by theorists such as Catherine Keller, Nancy Howells, Judith Butler, and, despite the reservations listed above, even Slavoj Žižek. For these authors, the realization of the interconnectedness of our individual narratives reveals, as discussed earlier, that we are involved in a quantum entanglement with other humans and the cosmic forces which surround us. By revealing our quantum entanglement, we can not only interrogate the issues of agency to see that we are interdependently reliant upon nature and the cosmos because we are a part of them; we also see that in being a part of them, we act within them, and our actions then reverberate and have effects that cause reactions within the cosmos. We are acting upon the cosmos, upon reality, as much as it is acting upon us. Even Slavoj Žižek recognizes the idea that there must be a give and take, call and response, action and reaction to the cosmos. In his book *Absolute Recoil*, Žižek discusses the idea of the beginning of the cosmos as that “[t]he zero-level, the starting point is not zero but less than zero, a pure minus” which functions as “lack/excess” (Žižek 413). This lack/excess is another way to explain the infinite possibilities of the results of energy and material acting and re-acting together. This then causes our idea of a “[n]othing (void)” to act as “the mirror (screen) through which less than nothing appears as something, through which pre-ontological chaos appears as ontic entities” (Žižek 413). This means that “the starting point is not the impossibility of the One [self] fully actualizing itself as One, but the impossibility of Zero (void)” which, as Žižek points out, is related to the idea that “the Void itself is irreducibly split between the pre-ontological chaos and the Void proper (what quantum physics theorizes as the

difference of two vacuums)” (Žižek 413). Žižek here admits that nothingness cannot exist, but neither can One exist in stagnation; instead, there develops an excess so that a second creation or second iteration of the One occurs as the “antagonism” of “the shadowy double” (Žižek 414). Žižek here is revealing that when one combines a quantum understanding of the universe there is always constant creation in the cosmos, and this creation affirms both material and immaterial existence since material existence cannot come from nothing (the void). One would think that this idea would depress Žižek if Žižek were committed to his old dialectical materialism, which posits that all which comes into being comes out of the discourse of material beings. Žižek, however, has adapted to a new cosmological reality. He recognizes that “the position of dialectical materialism is that there is no peace even in the Void” (Žižek 415), understanding that every material must come then from the background field of cosmic energy that exists and always existed.

The revelation of the idea of the plenitude of cosmic creation is called reenchantment but the idea of cosmic energy pervading the fabric of reality is also often called theopoiesis. Keller discusses the idea of theopoiesis using the metaphor of the cloud in her book *The Cloud of the Impossible*, in which, discussing the imagery of clouds, she states that “the unfolding infinity of the dark cloud” has often “signified ‘divinitization’ or ‘becoming God’” (Keller 6114). This “becoming God” does not refer to replacing God but describes a recognition that we are a part of God’s being, that all of reality is not separate but an infusion of divine or cosmic energy. This “*theopoiesis*, ‘God-making’” (Keller 6099) describes the unfolding of reality as not just being made by the cosmic power which we happen to label God but that we act out our reality as we are creating it so that “planetarity itself enfolds our earthbound participation in the whole unfathomable universe” (Keller 6139). The conception of God being described here is not a

particular incarnation of a divine being under a particular religion but as the possessor of the cosmic power to create universes, dimensions, and the infinite variety of life and matter, a power which humans cannot possess or mimic. This puts God as an actant in the cosmos as well. When experiencing art and literature, a cosmological interpretive strategy would seek to reveal depictions of the relationship between humans, nonhumans, and the divine participants in this unfolding of reality. The analysis moves from the working ecology of the artistic production, -- its assemblage of components, timeline, history, and narrative--to the ecology of the individual, including its timeline, history, narrative, and locale. In turn, analysis proceeds from the ecology of that locale to the culture of that locale, taking into consideration its timeline, history, and narrative until finally the broader ecology of the cosmos and its intertwined narratives emerge out of these interconnected relationships, acting as a form of reenchancement in the process.

Coming to understand how utilizing a cosmological interpretive strategy to analyze art and literature can help reveal how our reality is a shared reality. This approach will require a series of interconnected chapters that focus on one or more of the stated goals of a cosmological interpretive strategy. These chapters will analyze four pieces of drama and five pieces of prose fiction. While a cosmological interpretive theory can be useful to analyze any piece of art and literature, in an attempt to keep the parameters of the research within a workable limit, this dissertation will focus on literature. Furthermore, poetry has not been included due to the small sampling of cosmological analysis which already exists regarding the poet-priest dynamic. Since this cosmological dynamic has rarely been applied to drama and literature, this dissertation will focus on those genres. In addition, this dissertation will focus on modernist and postmodern works since, as the analysis in the chapters below will demonstrate, these works are often cited as having either rejected spiritual and cosmological concerns or as discussing them in a satirical

or irreverent manner. While many critics might ignore or gloss over these spiritual and cosmological concerns, I argue that these discussions of the spiritual and cosmological are attempting to address a need for a new conception of the cosmos that incorporates the cultural, scientific, and philosophical issues addressed above by theorists like Moraru, Nicolescu, Elias, Bennett, Laszlo, Žižek, Butler, Griffin, Howells, and Keller. To even this discussion, the chapters of this dissertation will alternate, the introduction here has focused on many of the theorists. The second chapter will focus on two modernist plays, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Arthur Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. The third chapter will analyze three prose postmodern works, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, and Don DeLillo's *Underworld*. The fourth chapter will discuss two contemporary plays, Paula Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home* and Sara Ruhl's *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)*, which I refrain from calling postmodern because they fall within the transition to the period which Moraru, Elias, and Nicolescu call cosmodern. The fifth chapter will focus on the contemporary prose of Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*. This alternation will more fully allow for the breadth of a cosmological interpretive strategy to be applied to these texts and the critical analysis which will follow.

In addition to a general overview of the structure of the chapters, it may be helpful to have a summary of each chapter and its contents. The second chapter of this dissertation will focus on a juxtaposition of Frederic Jameson's call for postmodern art to act as a proto-historical narrative of the new spatial and material order of our late capitalist/postmodern age with William Beardslee's call for a new art that recognizes the brokenness and suffering of our age while both disorienting us, opening us up to new ideas and experiences, and reorienting us towards a more holistic and interdependent view of the cosmos. As a philosophical approach to literature, a

cosmological interpretive strategy can be utilized to analyze any piece of literature, but it is most effective when examining works that already foreground cosmic themes. In this first chapter, my analysis will focus on Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Arthur Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. A cosmological interpretive strategy will reveal that rather than merely being focused with spatial and material concerns, these texts also demonstrate a concern with our relationships to cosmic entities. Through their narratives, both Wilder and Miller address the passage of time and the questions of agency which occur when thinking about time. Unlike Jameson's description of the individual's relationship with a totalizing economic capitalism and history, both Wilder's and Miller's narratives deny such economic and historical determinism. Instead, much like Beardslee, they reveal a set of interconnected narratives and histories that include the formation of rocks in the earth and babies being born, all of which influence the individual and are influenced by them.

The third chapter of the dissertation will discuss encounters with the fantastic and the absurd in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, and Don DeLillo's *Underworld*. *Gravity's Rainbow* is set in war-torn Europe during the middle and end of WWII and revolves around the journey of Tyrone Slothrop to investigate the German V-2 Rockets. Card gives voice to the worry about the influence of othering and dehumanization in his novel *Ender's Game*. *Ender's Game* follows the intense education of Ender Wiggin in the elite International Fleet Battle School under the direction of Colonel Graff. Ender is further groomed by the elite soldier, Mazer Rackham, to be the leading general in a war against the so-called Buggers, or Formics--a race of ant-like aliens. DeLillo gives voice to our collective worry about death and destruction in *Underworld* first through the loss of his character Nick Shay's father, who leaves when Nick is a child and never comes back. Nick attempts to overcome his loss by

having sexual relations with an older, already married, woman but ultimately ends up shooting his friend, George. Having to deal with these events for most of his life, Nick eventually comes to work for a company devoted to the technology of recycling. Through recycling Nick attempts to redeem himself by giving discarded, or dead, objects a new use through the recycling process, which signals a kind of re-birth. Through its emphasis on the theme of recycling, *Underworld* affirms the endlessly creative potentiality of the cosmos. All three main protagonists which I will examine in this chapter-- Tyrone Slothrop, Ender Wiggin, and Nick Shay--must make decisions with the fate of human existence and non-human existence in their hands. Using a cosmological perspective and interpretive strategy, Pynchon, Card, and DeLillo reveal how human existence is intertwined in the cosmos with non-human existence and they emphasize that how we treat one informs how we treat the other. *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Ender's Game*, and *Underworld* act as literary forms of reenchantment by showing how interacting with non-human entities such as plants, animals, other intelligent life forms, and even the material refuse which we throw away or recycle can make us realize the power and mystery of cosmological creation, as described by Emmanuel Levinas, Christian Moraru, and Nancy Howells. From this reenchantment, readers realize that if we do not treat other humans as well as non-humans with respect and reverence, then we only lead ourselves toward a path of self-destruction.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation will continue to use a cosmological interpretive strategy to discuss how our existence is not separate from that of the cosmos and nonhuman existence. More than just recognizing that nonhuman entities exist in their own right, the cosmological interpretation in this chapter will rely upon Judith Butler's ideas about performativity to show that humans do not just act out our identity but that many entities are acting upon us, shaping the performance of our identities. The performativity of our identity

under these circumstances raises questions about our agency within this new understanding of the interdependent relationships between these humans and nonhumans, whether those nonhumans are plants, animals, rocks, or even the molecules which make up our bodies. These interdependent relationships make up what is described here as our quantum entanglement. I will develop this argument through an analysis of Sara Ruhl's *In the Next Room (Or the Vibrator Play)* and Paula Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home*. This analysis will utilize not only ideas of performativity as discussed by Judith Butler, but also the ideas of quantum existence and agency as discussed by Nancy Howells and Ervin Laszlo. As dramatic works, *In the Next Room* and *The Long Christmas Ride Home* bring our attention to the performativity of our identities and how we perform and enact different identities for ourselves depending on the situation and the people around us. The enactment of these identities on stage in both plays becomes an entanglement of living and non-living beings whose identities are so intertwined that each entity recalls the other to the point that they can only partially be sorted or separated. These interconnected relationships remind us that our agency is not made from acting against others but is bound up with other beings and modes of existence, living and non-living, material and immaterial. By acting out our identities, we also then are making those identities come into existence, forming not just our actions but our reality. As described above, this bringing forth of reality into existence through the interdependent interactions of the various participants--human, nonhuman, and divine--is called theopoiesis. It is through this process of theopoiesis that these plays come to act as forms of cosmic reenchancement through their prompting of the reader/viewer to take up moral and ethical reflection on our roles, agency, and relationship with humans and nonhumans in the quantum entanglement of the cosmos.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation will use a cosmological interpretive strategy to analyze Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*. In this chapter I will focus further on the questions of ethical agency and our relationship to not just other individual entities but wider ecologies such as human culture, nature, and even our concept of the divine and God. Both *Parable of the Sower* and *The Fifth Book of Peace* present central characters who attempt to bring together a community to tackle some of the tough problems of their social reality such as war, ecological disaster, and government oppression. While these communities do not succeed in preventing these types of catastrophes, they do have material effects that alter the lives around them and challenge the systems attempting to oppress them. As a result, these narratives demonstrate how communal story-telling becomes a spiritual and cosmological technique to propel humans to be active agents of change within the cosmos. The type of collective agency described by Butler and Kingston is the embodiment of what Howell, Keller, and Žižek describe, in various ways, as requirements for participation in an immanent, theopoetic cosmos. Within this cosmos, the narrativization of how we view what is going on around us and our relations to others influences how we act, and how we act influences how others act, creating ripples in the larger cosmos around us.

The conclusion of the dissertation will provide a recap, considering the literary analysis in earlier chapters, the value of a cosmological interpretive strategy. I will summarize how these literary productions come to show us, through narrativization and discursive action, that our artistic creations become forms of moral and ethical reflection. In turn, they serve as forms of theopoetic cosmic reenchantment by reminding us that we are not passive spectators with predetermined destinies but that, despite all the forces acting upon us, we do have agency and the ability to imbue meaning within the world through creating, performing, and enacting our reality.

2 THORNTON WILDER AND ARTHUR MILLER: A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME, SPACE, AND MATTER

In this first chapter, I will use a cosmological interpretive strategy to explore questions about our conceptions of time, agency, and fate by exploring the themes of economic determinism and theological/divine determinism in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Arthur Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. These themes emerge in these two works of literature through the feelings of disconnect and dislocation between characters that are produced by technological advancements such as the automobile and factory work as well as the traumatic experiences of World War I and World War II. The effects of such disconnect and dislocation in these texts mirror Max Weber's descriptions of the process of rationalization in his essay "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," an essay which has led many theorists to critique so-called modernity and post-modernity as leading to a destructive commodification of nature, culture, and even life itself. Frederic Jameson hoped to explore a resolution to these issues in his book, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, by developing a new form of spatial and material mapping of our late capitalist/postmodern age. I will argue, however, that Jameson's economic and Marxist philosophies lead into a materialist trap: his concern with the physical appearance of and desire for objects participates in the same process of rationalization which Weber describes, ultimately providing no solution. Yet I will argue that this materialism is rebutted by Wilder's *Our Town*. Although this play is usually interpreted as an idyllic love story about the relationship between George and Emily in the rural New England town of Grover's Corners, when analyzed using a cosmological interpretive strategy, *Our Town* reveals an awe-inspiring network and assemblage of human and nonhuman entities whose mutual interactions allow for what can be described as the everyday miracles of human and cosmic life. Similarly,

Arthur Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck* also rebuts the materialism presented by Jameson just as it too elaborates a love story about the relationship between the characters David and Hester. David tries his hardest to make a good economic life for himself and Hester; but he constantly questions the world and his agency as a human when he sees so many people that he knows fail in their endeavors. My discussion of these two plays will focus, first, on using a cosmological interpretive strategy to trace within these works the thread of how the process of rationalization and disenchantment for these central characters occurs. I will then argue that this disenchantment is depicted in each play to reveal that we, as humans, are not predestined to any specific fate according to economic or theological determinism but, instead, can realize that our lives are interdependent upon each other and the entities in an even wider cosmos. When applied to Wilder's *Our Town* and Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, this cosmological interpretive strategy reveals that despite the vastness of cosmological creation unfolding around us and acting upon us, we still retain our own agency despite. This agency repudiates the economic determinism with which Jameson defines postmodernism and late capitalism. Using this cosmological interpretive framework, it can be seen in both Wilder's and Miller's works that rather than being beholden to theological, biological, or economic determinism, we fashion and sculpt our agency, our lives, not always in harmony with one another nevertheless interdependently and in keeping with unfolding of cosmological creation.

The struggle between a rationally ordered reality and the seeming chaos of an infinitely creative reality is described in Max Weber's analysis of the ascetic and mystical traditions in human culture in *Essays in Sociology*. In the chapter "Religious Rejections of The World and Their Directions," Weber states that, "[i]n our introductory comments, we contrasted, as abnegations of the world, the active asceticism that is a God-willed action of the devout who are

God's tools, and, on the other hand, the contemplative possession of the holy, as found in mysticism. Mysticism intends a state of 'possession,' not action, and the individual is not a tool but a 'vessel' of the divine" (Weber 325). Weber describes a categorical difference between ascetism and mysticism in which, under ascetism, the "devout" becomes an actor, an agent of God's will (Again, God here as a term for the cosmic creator). Under mysticism, however, the devout simply recognize that they hold within their corporeal form the divine essence from which everything flows, but which directly reject that corporeality. Weber states that both ascetism and mysticism are based on rationalization and abnegation of the worldly for the otherworldly. This categorization becomes important since most of our human history has been predicated on actors who not only claim to know God's will or uphold the divine essence in opposition to material reality, but who also twist it to fit their political or social desires. This trend can be seen in the reasoning behind the creation of economic and social caste systems; the development of purity rituals which reject natural processes or modes of being; the destruction of certain societies from Troy to Jericho, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Carthage; ; the development of genocide and sectarian violence such as the Roman purge under Constantine; the rise of the Islamic empires; the European crusades; colonialism and slavery; and eugenics. More recently, society has replaced the idea of God with other terminology that effects the same deterministic destruction whether it is called science, evolution, the invisible hand of the market, nature, or even democracy when used for colonized nation-building. Weber calls this process the rationalization of religion (within which he includes magic). Weber recognizes that "the further the rationalization and sublimation of the external and internal possession of—in the widest sense—'things worldly' has progressed, the stronger has the tension on the part of religion become" (Weber 328). It is this pervasive interlinking of mysticism, ascetism, rationality,

religion, the worldly and the divine or the other-worldly that leads to what Weber defines as “the disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism” (Weber 350). This process of rationalization and disenchantment is also highlighted and used in Wilder’s *Our Town* and Miller’s *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, which push these categorizations and rationalizations to their limits, while also attempting to counteract their destructiveness. Yet these processes of disenchantment are not often discussed in these plays due to a lack of theoretical approaches for focusing on such issues--a void which a cosmological interpretive strategy can help fill in order to more fully understand these disenchantments and their ramifications for our society.

Weber goes on to describe how the rationalization of religion first began when society turned from magical ideas about the world such as animism, shamanism, and certain forms of paganism to a society or community based around religions or religious ideals. Weber writes: “We have said that these modes of behavior, once developed into a methodical way of life, formed the nucleus of asceticism as well as of mysticism, and that they originally grew out of magical presuppositions” that were then systematized “to direct a way of life to the pursuit of a sacred value. Thus understood, the prophecy or commandment means, at least relatively, to systematize and rationalize the way of life, either in particular points or totally” (Weber 327). Weber is explaining the process of taking the idea of God and God’s will and putting it into a systematized order in which to build a supposedly coherent and unified society. This requires localizing God’s will to a specific group of people at a specific location in a specific time. Wilder’s *Our Town* attempts to de-emphasize this localization and specificity (as does Miller’s *The Man Who Had All the Luck*), thereby counteracting the process which Weber characterizes as a byproduct of mysticism and asceticism. As I will argue, these plays end up rejecting asceticism

altogether and forming a new paradigm for mysticism--one which does not reject the world and its "magic" but upholds it, even pointing us further towards immanence, the cosmological understanding of reality as the entwining of the material and immaterial where all of creation holds divine essence and is therefore sacred. Morris Berman, building upon Weber's work above, refers to this immanent understanding of reality as re-enchantment, stating that "the world was enchanted and man saw himself as an integral part of it. The complete reversal of this perception in a mere four hundred years or so has destroyed the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche. It has very nearly wrecked the planet as well. The only hope, or so it seems to me, lies in a re-enchantment of the world" (Berman 23). These ideas of disenchantment and re-enchantment require us as individuals to take on our own agency but also to realize that our agency works not in isolation but in concert with natural, economic, cultural, and other cosmic forces. As a cosmological interpretation of Wilder's *Our Town* and Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck* will show, these forces as well as our own agency are a part of the constant flux of innumerable interactions between us and other humans and nonhumans in a sometimes chaotic, but always creative, cosmos.

Many critics seem to gloss over the cosmological messages about agency and the relationship between humans and nonhumans within Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, preferring to discuss the historical, romantic, and dramaturgical issues within the play. Bud Kliment details the original critiques of the play on *Our Town's* Pulitzer Prize page, "The Birth and Life of an American Classic: 'Our Town.'" Kliment quotes many of the early critics' attitudes towards the play, for instance *Variety* stated that the play was "not only disappointing but hopelessly slow" (Kliment). Robert Gottlieb of *The New Yorker* is quoted stating about the movement and length of the play that "Our Town' goes on and on and on and on" (Kliment). Even Eleanor Roosevelt

critiqued the play stating that the play “moved and depressed [her] beyond words” (Kliment). Many other critiques of *Our Town* simply categorize it as a piece of nostalgia propaganda or toss it in with the larger mass of ‘carpe diem’ themed literature. Take for instance a 2007 New York Times critique of an *Our Town* revival performance with Hal Brooks by Sylviane Gold which states that “its absence of expensive props or scenery, “Our Town” has for years been a staple of school dramatics clubs and community theaters. But with familiarity has come a certain amount of inattention, if not out-and-out contempt” (Gold 1). Gold critiques the worn-out nostalgia of *Our Town*, hinting that the play has become boring and stale. However, toward the end of the critique, Gold acknowledges that one of the foci of *Our Town* is to remind the audience of the preciousness of life, stating that “[f]or most of us, the lucky ones, life is ordinary also. The things that happen in other plays do not happen to us. What happens in Grover’s Corners is what happens to us: we’re born, we grow, we die” (Gold 2). Gold only goes so far as to analyze the carpe diem theme of *Our Town*, never giving any consideration to the reasons why such life may be considered so precious and sacred and therefore never drawing his audience any closer to any discussions about human and non-human agency represented in the play.

Another critique qualifies on whether *Our Town* is universal to all peoples or just simply too outdated to be relevant to the marginalized people of the twenty first century. On the one hand, the West Washington University newspaper, *Winged Words*, published a multipage theatrical review of *Our Town* that critiques the language and culture of *Our Town*, stating that “Exclamations like “gee” and “golly”, though faithful to the period, sound contrived and forced to audiences today. Additionally, and obviously, the play offers a heteronormative, cisgendered, monoracial look at America. This cannot be surprising, as the play was published 1938, but the argument could be made that this contributes to the play’s irrelevance.” (*Winged Words*). Still,

within the same article, *Winged Words* then praises *Our Town*, stating “The relationship established between the actors and audience in the first two acts drives home the point that precious few humans appreciate what it is to be alive. This is *Our Town*’s magic and the reason it has stood the test of time” (*Winged Words*). For fear of offending either contemporary sensibilities or *Our Town*’s classic stature within theater, *Winged Words* acknowledges the potential of *Our Town*’s ability to lead the audience toward a reenchanting worldview but still questioning its relevance to the marginalized peoples of our contemporary culture.

Many more critics who do mention the metaphysical aspects of *Our Town*, also confine these discussions to historical analyses of turn of the century Christian religious fervor, ignoring many of the complexities of the spiritual and cosmological question which Wilder brings to the surface. For instance, in his book *Thornton Wilder and the Puritan Narrative Tradition*, Lincoln Konkle describes *Our Town* as being a part of Wilder’s tribute to puritan Jeremiad. Konkle asserts that *Our Town* can be seen as almost “a literal jeremiad in that its non-Aristotelian dramaturgy bears a close resemblance in form to a sermon with illustrative episodes, and its most prominent character, the Stage Manager, expresses a critical yet finally affirmative vision of life directly to the audience, like a minister preaching the gospel to his or her congregation” (Konkle 131). Konkle does comment on some of the larger metaphysical questions brought up within *Our Town* but does not spend any critical energy in truly addressing them. For example, Konkle observes about these more metaphysical topics that “Of course, a jeremiad would not be used to protest a timeless, universal, and unchangeable truth such as human mortality; however, what Wilder was responding to in writing *Our Town*—a global economic depression and escalating world war—was causing the death of many people short of their natural life span” (Konkle 136). Even when he is recognizing a topic that has theological and cosmological implications, such as

possible theological determinism, rather than delving into those discussions, Konkle historicizes the situation to Wilder merely reacting to current events. Adding to this line of thought, Christopher Wheatley, in his book *Thornton Wilder and Amos Wilder: Writing Religion in the Twentieth Century*, looks at Wilder's religious upbringing and his relationship with his brother Amos, who was a theologian. Wheatley admits that "both brothers share a profound vision of a changing role for religion and for literature about religion, because of the damage done to the existing structures" (Wheatley 31) and that "both thought it necessary to know what was lost before they could create a new expression for the religious impulse in the modern world" (Wheatley 32). However, Wheatley does not address these issues, only cautioning that "The overarching theme of [Wheatley's] book is to understand Thornton Wilder's works historically" (Wheatley 32). Wheatley freely admits that Wilder's plays were heavily influenced by cosmological concerns but ignores those concerns instead to focus more on the chronological and historical development of those concerns in Wilder's works. Wesley Longacre, in his dissertation "Important Things to Give Each Other": the Politics of Thornton Wilder's Drama," also admits Wilder's religious and cosmological questions and concerns but eventually downplays those concerns to emphasize Wilder's more humanistic tendencies. Longacre states about Wilder that "[h]e was, first, consumed and affirmed by the human ability to love and be loved. He was then attendant to the power of the written word and his adeptness at it. Finally, he was concerned with the "mysteries of the spirit", believing that, quite possibly, he would eventually be wholeheartedly consumed with "God". Yet his fascination with humanity—Wilder's brand of humanitarianism—remained paramount in his work throughout the course of his career" (Longacre 53). Longacre goes on to focus his dissertation on Wilder's politics and feminist leanings, focusing instead on the fact that "In *Our Town*, there is a female protagonist in

Emily who becomes the main focus of the dramatic resolution in the third act. Instead of painting a picture where the male counterpart in the play, George, serves as the focus and most worthy of divine, supernatural knowledge at the end of the work, the focus centers on and around Emily's journey from this life to the next" (Longacre 80). Here Longacre discusses the religious and spiritual nature of Wilder's *Our Town* and shows how that message empowers women but Longacre does not address any of the metaphysical questions or issues raised by *Our Town*. Because so many of the critics barely touch on the larger metaphysical questions raised in *Our Town*, a cosmological interpretive strategy would help to identify the leading lines of cosmic inquiry within the play such as our relationship as individuals to not just our family, town, or nation but to the cosmos as a whole.

I argue that through the use of its stage scenery and tone, Thornton Wilder's play, *Our Town*, reveals the struggle between disenchantment and reenchancement. The play begins with these stage directions: "No curtain. / No scenery. / The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage in half-light" (Wilder 5). It is only after this description that Wilder begins to give actual physical descriptions such as the town name, "Grover's Corners" (Wilder 5), and the date of the first act, "May 7, 1901" (Wilder 5). The initial setting is important because of its attempt to negate a localized time, place, and material reality in favor of a more mystical understanding of the cosmos. Elaine Nelson describes this as a universalizing effect in her essay "The Universality of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*," stating that "while retaining costuming and a few sound effects, Wilder abandoned a box set, an involved plot, and highly developed characters" (Nelson 5). Instead, Nelson explains, Wilder "sought universality through the utilization of brief, commonplace scenes, repetition of incidents and phrases, a stage which allows freedom in time and place" (Nelson 5). Nelson here explains how the lack of scenery allows the stage to

transcend any localized time or place, creating a mystical and even spiritual atmosphere that, I argue, helps lead the reader toward the path of reenchantment. Further, as much as Wilder presents us with plenty of uncertainty in *Our Town*, he also reveals with certainty the always changing but always present relationship between human existence and cosmological creation. Remember the fact that the stage, at the start, is empty and the lighting set at half-light; the audience is simply told by the Stage Manager that “[t]he time is just before dawn” (Wilder 5). The Stage Manager also notes that “The morning star always gets wonderful bright the moment before it has to go, - doesn’t it?” (Wilder 6). The Stage Manager not only describes the time as between night and day but, in doing so, also invites the audience to think about the morning star, which is usually associated with beginnings and even with birth and creation. Min Shen comments on this section of Wilder’s *Our Town* and associates it with fertility and creation as well. Shen writes: “The morning star, also known as Venus, has always suggested the feminine principle because of its association with the goddess of love and beauty. Aphrodite in the Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses. She represents, among other things, passionate sexuality which is linked with fertility” (Shen 7). [F]ertility, however, is also linked with death, since birth is only able to come about as things naturally mature, getting older and closer to death. Unlike many understandings of death as an end, Wilder shows us in these opening lines that death is part of a larger continuum though which leaving is associated with both beginnings and endings. We have a morning star that is announcing a beginning, a new dawn, while its momentary phase is ending. Wilder here creates an in-between state that defies categorization, becoming not quite a beginning but not quite an ending either: it is just a moment in an eternal continuum of a fertile, creative cosmos filled with a plurality of beginnings and endings, deaths and rebirths. Beginnings and endings are also markers of time passing, and by starting us out in an in-between

state that fuses beginnings and endings, Wilder begins to dismantle our notion of time, or at least human time, pushing us toward an understanding of cosmic time. Furthermore, these opening lines also begins to dismantle our notion of space since the scene is not quite empty, due to the presence of the stage and the audience themselves, but it is not full either, as it is devoid of props. The whole scene, stage, and audience are cast in an ethereal twilight that breaks down the Platonic binaries of dawn and dusk, light and dark, shadowy reflection and actual objective reality; this space is not quite barren but is pregnant with infinite creative possibility and potentiality. Using a cosmological interpretive strategy shows that Wilder's artistic creation begins in an eerie, nascent state, pushing the audience past notions of endings and beginnings and toward the realization that the cosmos is always in eternal flux. Wilder pushes the audience toward understanding of the cosmos that shows its mystical nature--a nature that defies categorization but not understanding. In reminding the audience of the mystical nature of the cosmos, Wilder moves the audience past disenchantment toward reenchancement, reminding the audience of the mystical nature of cosmic creation.

This mystical atmosphere is later revealed to be at odds with certain key facts that shape the characters' lives. For instance, the Stage Manager comments on the tragedy of war for Joe Cromwell, who "[g]oin' to be a great engineer, Joe was. But the war broke out and he died in France---- All that education for nothing" (Wilder 10). The Stage Manager's comment is very jaded and claims that Joe Cromwell had the potential to benefit society and the cosmos. Joe's profession was to be an engineer, and as engineers are creators, they build from our natural resources architectural structures that are then used by society.; but following Joe's death his education is "for nothing." The Stage Manager's jaded tone reflects the disenchantment many in society felt after World War I. Almost immediately after Joe's death is revealed, however, the

audience is told that Dr. Gibbs is returning home after being up all night delivering “twins born over in Polish Town” (9) and that Joe’s teacher is “getting married to a fella over in Concord” (Wilder 9)—events, traditionally associated with themes of marriage and new life. Wilder demonstrates to the audience how life may end for some but that the cosmos is generative; it keeps creating new life, in part through the interactions we as humans have with each other through marriage and sexual relations. Further, Dr. Gibbs asks Joe about his knee, implying that Joe has had some type of injury to it. Joe replies that his knee is fine but that, as Dr. Gibbs told him, “it always tells me when it’s going to rain” (Wilder 9). This comment may sound innocuous to a scientific worldview, and Joe’s power to predict might be explainable, in this view, by a change in air pressure acting on bodies. A cosmological perspective, however, would want to indicate that the point goes beyond this superficial understanding and that the molecules are acting, not just on us but in us, in our very bones, and in the very molecules that make up our bones. Wilder demonstrates how our lives, our flesh and bone, and our very molecules are intricately linked to our natural surroundings. These surroundings have their own existences, their own actions and agency, their own time, and perhaps even their own history, just as we do.

The intertwined existence we share in this way is what is termed our quantum entanglement. Bruno Latour comments on this quantum entanglement in his book *We Have Never Been Modern*. Latour explains how actors from Copernicus to Boyle have based their scientific ideas around the idea that humans are separate from nature but that they did not consider the connection between our molecular composition and the molecular composition of the objects and elements we interact with. Latour states: “[t]here was indeed a contingent history, but for humans alone, detached from the necessity of natural things” (1672); instead of this contingent history he argues that “each entity is an event” (Latour 1663) in time and history. If we then “redistribute

essence,” or the ability to act according to our own will, “to all the entities that make up this history” (Latour 1667) then these entities “become mediators – that is, actors endowed with the capacity to translate what they transport, to redefine it, redeploy it, and also to betray it” (Latour 1667). Further, Latour argues that this redistribution of essence transforms our understanding of time and history such that “[a]ll the essences become events, the air’s spring by the same token as the death of Cherubino. History is no longer simply the history of people, it becomes the history of things as well” (Latour 1677). Latour’s flourish in this comment, linking spring, a time of marriage and rebirth with the death of Cherubino, the young page from Mozart’s opera *The Marriage of Figaro*, reflects the situation at the opening of *Our Town*. As we have seen, this play begins by linking the spring of a new century, May 1901, with the birth of the twins, the teacher’s marriage, and Joe Cromwell’s looming death in World War I. When this context is considered, the comments of Joe and the Stage Manager are incredibly powerful as an index of the interconnected relationship between new life and future death. Wilder’s *Our Town*, through the comments of Joe and the Stage Manager, advance a step toward the process of reenchantment, reminding the audience of the passage of time and how short our time is here on Earth, but also how much how many atmospheric, molecular, and social interactions it has taken from so many entities in the vast history of the cosmos to bring our lives into being and to let us act them out for just that short little miracle of time.

Furthermore, if our existence is a product of the interactions of multiple entities, then our agency also derives, in part, from those interactions. This view rebuts the theological and divine determinism of the old ascetics and mystics as described by Weber. Such determinism is not confined to theology or asceticism, however; [e]conomic determinism is at the heart of the Marxist thinking to which theorists like Fredric Jameson subscribe. According to Jameson, late

capitalism is predicated on the subjugation and suffering of others. Jameson writes that the goal of *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capital* is to trace “a protohistorical narrative in which something is affirmed about the specificity of this particular period, including its waning and its imminent transformation into something else--this narrative is most clearly grasped in economic terms” (Jameson 192). Jameson does admit that postmodernism can be defined as a literary period, but he feels that the best means of distinguishing postmodernism from what has come before is to attend to the transformations of late or multinational capitalism, which, in his view, radically problematizes the ability of literature to contest its ideology and provide a counterpoint to economic determinism. Of course, Jameson also believes that economic determinism is nothing new; it is taken for granted in the Marxist methodology which he employs to diagnose it; however, Jameson believes that this economic determinism has become something sublime in postmodernism.

Just as the opening of *Our Town* reveals and addresses the disenchantment caused by war, Arthur Miller’s *The Man Who Had All the Luck* addresses both theological/divine determinism and economic determinism in ways that counteract, at times, Jameson’s view of global or multinational capital. In the introduction to the Penguin Classics version of the play, Christopher Bigsby notes that Miller’s *The Man Who Had All the Luck* premiered “at the Forest Theater in New York on November 23rd, 1944,” (Miller viii). One could argue that Miller’s play is a bridge between the modern and the postmodern, debuting just a few months before the end of World War II, which is often identified as the starting point of the postmodern age. Because of its positioning in time, many critics focus on the economic issues within *The Man Who Had All the Luck* and Miller’s other works, seeing them solely as critiques of capitalist culture. In the play, David Beeves seems to find success everywhere he turns but he feels sometimes he does

not deserve this success and, at other times, he feels like the unfortunate experiences of others are not deserved. David begins to become disenchanted, questioning why such troubles and horrible events must occur and who is responsible for such events. He also begins to question whether these events are caused by human agency or through some deterministic forces outside the realm of the human. This line of questioning leads David to the point of paranoia, fearing that some catastrophe will be sent his way to counter all of his successes. This fear is often seen as guilt toward capitalist culture. For example, in her essay, ““The Psychological Politics of the American Dream: *Death of a Salesman* and the Case for an Existential Dialectics,” Lois Tyson states that the main focus of Arthur Miller’s works is “the myth of the American dream, the belief that, because one’s socioeconomic success in America is limited only by one’s ability and ambition, socioeconomic success is the measure of one’s value as a person” (Tyson 262). Tyson believes that Miller critiques this belief and shows that the myth only perpetuates amoral behavior. Even in Jane Dominik’s compilation of theatrical reviews of Arthur Miller’s works, aptly entitled “Critical Receptions of Arthur Miller’s Works,” Dominik reduces the nature of the critics’ reviews to Miller’s themes of “guilt, responsibility, illusions, dreams, family, betrayal, the “birds coming home to roost” (Bigsby, Company 49), and success and failure in capitalistic America” (Dominik 72). Other critics focus on the breadth of Miller’s topics and his dramaturgical style, for instance, Dominik quotes critic George Creeley’s analysis of Miller’s slice of life rendering of *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, stating specifically that Miller’s deficiency was “to focus his plot and his characters so that a clear dramatic image will be created” (as quoted in Dominik 74). Creeley felt that the play is ambiguous as to what its overall message should be.

This focus on the practical dramaturgy of *The Man Who Had All of the Luck* is what seems to really pervade criticisms of the play. Martin Gottfried chronicles such critical reception in his book *Arthur Miller: His Life and Work*. Gottfried quotes Lewis Nichols of the New York Times stating about the play's debut that he saw only "'one or two effective moments' amid 'the confusion of the script [and] its somewhat jumbled philosophies'" (as quoted in Gottfried 81). Another critic, Howard Barnes of the *Herald-Tribune* reportedly disliked Miller's writing style and dramaturgy, stating that the play was "incredibly turgid in its writing and stuttering in its execution" (as quoted in Gottfried 81). Finally, it was George Jean Nathan of *New York Journal American* who homed in on many critics' apprehension of *The Man Who Had All the Luck*: it's ending. Nathan states about the ending that he was "confidently expecting the final curtain to come down upon the spectacle of everyone on the stage squirting seltzer siphons at one another" (as quoted in Gottfried 81). Gottfried himself explains what many critics saw as an unbelievable ending, stating that "The play finally expires of too many twists. An Arthur Miller who is unable or unwilling to decide whether he wants David to commit suicide straddles the issue" (Gottfried 80). Miller himself comments about this issue concerning the ending of the play, stating about the advice one critic gave him, "the critic for the Hearst paper, *The Journal-American*, asked me to meet him at the New York Athletic Club. He was the first critic I'd ever laid eyes on, a good-looking guy named Anderson. He said, 'That play was a failure, but the mistake you made was not to make it a tragedy'" ("What is a Play" 37). Critics just could not get over the fact that fate does not come for David Beeves and give him his catastrophe. These critics essentially accept David's worldview which the ending rejects. David believes that he is not responsible for his success, but that either fate, destiny, or divine providence is instead. However, a cosmological interpretation reveals how the ending rejects this premise, showing that David is responsible for

his success. Unbeknownst to him, David is given feed for his mink that has been tainted with worms. David combs through the feed, meticulously throwing away any spotted or discolored feed, disposing of the infected pieces without even knowing that the batch of feed has been tainted. Though reacting to a situation that originally was beyond his control, the distribution of the tainted feed, David becomes the author of his own fate, ensuring his animals are safe and succeeding in saving his family from ruin due to his own hard work and diligence.

This discussion about determinism is first brought up by David's friend, Shory at the beginning of *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. Shory raises the issue when he remarks "A man is a jellyfish. The tide goes in and the tide goes out. About what happens to him, a man has very little to say" (Miller 19). Shory seems to be implying that there is a determining force which holds absolute power over our actions and fate. David seems convinced and agrees with Shory. This questioning of the human capacity for agency continues further as Dave asks about his own success relative to his brother Amos's failures: "Why? Is it all luck? Is that what it is?" (Miller 48). Dave goes on to ask, "Am I that good and he that bad?" to which he then exclaims, "I can't believe it. There's something wrong, there's something wrong!" (Miller 49). Further emphasizing the anxiety about a predetermined reality, Dave here seems to believe that there is some cosmic conspiracy that is producing his good fortune and his brother's misfortune. In contrast to Dave's developing sense of determinism, however, other characters in Miller's play clearly reject the notion of a predetermined cosmos. The baseball scout Auggie Belfast explains to Amos and Pat, Amos's father, that it wasn't luck or fate or God behind the fact that Amos doesn't get selected to the baseball draft. Instead, it is a result of the Amos's inability to concentrate on the ball field: "as soon as a man gets on base and starts rubbin' his spikes in the dirt and makin' noise behind your boy's back, something happens to him...your body, Mr.

Beeves is floating somewhere out in paradise” (Miller53). In Auggie’s view, Amos’s lack of concentration is not a cosmic mystery, but a result of the fact that Pat and Amos have been training in their cellar since Amos was nine years old. Auggie tells Pat that “[i]n the cellar there is no crowd. In the cellar he knows exactly what’s behind his back. In the cellar, in toto, your boy is home” (Miller 54). Auggie goes on to explain that once Amos “gets out on a wide ball field, and a crowd is yelling in his ears, and there’s two or three men on bases jumpin’ back and forth behind him, his mind has got to do a lot of things at once, he’s in a strange place, he gets panicky” (Miller 54). So, it is not luck, fate, or God that determines Amos’s failure but, instead, Amos and Pat’s decision to practice only in their cellar rather than outside or on an actual ball field. The cellar’s effect on Amos is that it trains Amos to focus only in the quiet solitude so that once he is out in the noise of the rest of reality, he cannot focus his attention. This is not a predetermined outcome but a direct result of the agency of Amos, Pat and their interactions with their surroundings. David’s disenchantment results from his refusal or inability to recognize that he, Amos, and Pat are in part responsible for their own agency in connection with their interactions with other entities.

Despite her belief in Miller’s works as critiques of capitalism, Lois Tyson observes a similar refusal to recognize agency in Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* when Willy Loman does not accept his responsibility for contributing to the cutthroat and immoral atmosphere that leads to his own failures. Tyson explains that “Willy's failure to see the obvious unscrupulous underside of Ben's financial success, like the rest of his apparent moral confusion concerning his and his sons' success-oriented ethics, is not the result of innocence or ignorance, but of selective perception” (Tyson 264). Tyson argues that Willy’s success or failure is the result of how he has perceived and reacted to the opportunities and examples around him, including adopting

unethical practices and behaviors. Willy is in part the agent of his own actions, his own downfall, and is not simply the victim of deterministic economic conditions of capitalism. Tyson goes on to question how agency in literature has traditionally been interpreted, stating that “[o]nce we begin to see the ways in which the individual subject is neither wholly an autonomous agent nor merely a social product, the conceptual space thereby opened makes room” (Tyson 261). Tyson elaborates on this point, arguing for not “a return to the autonomous subject the ethical critics want to construct, but for a return to and dialectical reformulation of the existential subject” which has largely been “neglected since the advent of post-structuralism” (Tyson 261). Tyson here reminds us that emphasizing agency does not mean taking a stroll down a nostalgic memory lane but, instead, reevaluating our current perceptions and conceptions of agency and determinism, particularly when current theoretical models do not seem to fit the social circumstances. Just as Miller, according to Tyson, uses Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* to explore these questions of agency, so too does Miller use David in *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. David’s disenchantment is a result of his lack of understanding of his agency and the agency of others. By bringing attention to the question of agency, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* leads the reader toward a process of reenchantment. Whether we appreciate all that the cosmos provides, whether we are good stewards of what is provided, and whether we recognize our own agency in our lives are central issues informing both Miller’s and Wilder’s plays.

In this context it is important to remember that the title of Miller’s play is *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. Use of the word “man” rather than “Dave” in this title is significant in that, like the title *Our Town*, no specific person, time, or place is evoked; instead, the audience or reader is asked to think about the general conditions that might make any “man” lucky. Nor is it a coincidence that the two titles and themes evoked by them are so similar; on the contrary,

Miller studied Wilder's work and was deeply influenced by *Our Town* in particular. Stephen Marino, in his essay "Thornton Wilder and Arthur Miller" in Drew Eisenhauer's collection *Intertextuality in American Drama*, reminds us that Miller was fond of conversing with Wilder and writing about his works. Marino discusses Wilder's influence on Miller's writing, stating that Miller was very much concerned with *Our Town*, praising it as a "poetic drama" as opposed to a "realistic" play" (Marino 1403). Marino explains how Miller saw that "the entire play is occupied with what the title implies: the town and the society, and not the family" (Marino 1420-1423). The title itself, *Our Town*, is a poetic device representing a set of interconnecting relationships; in this manner it breaks away from modernist objectivism by refusing to just say "the town" just as it also breaks away from the individualism of the first person singular possessive represented by "my town," favoring instead the more communal and universal *Our Town*. As a communal phrase, "our town" also de-emphasizes any particular time and place in favor of the consideration of the town as a collective series of relationships. Similarly, Arthur Miller styled his title, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, in a way that could refer to anyone at any time. This human being is the one who has all of the luck; but luck is simply good fortune and good fortune is another way of saying a person who has a good fate. The question which Miller concerns himself is who is responsible for doling out such fortune/fate: is it God, the economy, or some combination of these with the possibility of human agency? The titles of *Our Town* and *The Man Who Had All the Luck* become prompts to engage in cosmological questioning about human agency. These universalized titles deny localized time and place; furthermore, as the plays themselves unfold, the time and place within the text keeps switching. This constant flux of time and place within both plays throw into doubt ideas of either divine determinism or Jameson's economic determinism.

One major issue with Jameson's work is that it falls directly into the trap of objectivism and scientism where only the materially observable reality is of use or importance. Take for instance Jameson's attempt to recapture the sublime of history in his 2003 essay "Future City" in which he details the history and contemporary status of the shopping mall, one of the prime examples for Jameson of the deterministic monotony of late capitalism. Jameson writes that "[t]he problem to be solved is that of breaking out of the windless present of the postmodern back into real historical time, and a history of human beings" ("Future City" 5). Jameson goes on to say that he intends for the essay to be a "dystopian appearance" that acts as a "sharp edge inserted into the seamless Moebius strip of late capitalism" ("Future City" 5). Jameson admits though that even, he, at times can find "trajectories with their magical moments" that have pseudo-temporality of matter ceaselessly mutating all around, moments of rare, breathtaking beauty" but that such moments are "scarcely enough to compensate for the nightmare" ("Future City" 4). This is economic and philosophical materialism at its worst. Despite wishing for some magic to reenchant his existence and compensate for the existence of the used and reused "Junkspace" ("Future City 3) as he calls it, Jameson is only concerned with our spatial existence within the confines of the flow of material wealth within our social and economic power structures. By limiting his discussion to only these material concerns, Jameson gives these structures totalizing and deterministic narrative power over our lives and, as he says, over the course of human history itself. This has been the problem historically with many of our philosophical, theological, and teleological narratives, that have tried to be the only narrative about reality. Now, all our social and economic structures, secular and religious, have come into question. William Beardslee reacts to Jameson's nightmarish materialist world in his article "Stories in the Postmodern World: Orienting and Disorienting" from the collection of essays, *Sacred*

Interconnections: Postmodern Spirituality, Political Economy, and Art, edited by David Ray Griffin. Beardslee states: “In the world as it is, one single story [such as late, global capitalism] is no longer sufficient to give us direction. Whatever the orienting story is with which we identify, it must be woven into others, and how we do that and still find a way of expressing a genuine loyalty to our faith, or to our country, is what we need to discover. To learn to live in our organizing stories as part of a rich and complex fabric of interwoven, interdependent stories is one of the tasks of storytelling today” (Beardslee 165). Beardslee goes on to say that “The fate of narrative is tied to the social process; it is indeed an imaginative question, but not one for the imagination of the isolated subject, and the orienting story to which we attach ourselves will have to relate to the brokenness and suffering of our world” (Beardslee 172). Beardslee concludes finally that:

If our own stories are created by the interaction of data from the past with continual purposive events of unification of experience, then narrative is far more than the arbitrary play it often seems to be in literary postmodernism. Stories are indeed an interweaving of many strands, and not the single story which they often seem to be. A principal task of postmodern imagination is to help us see ourselves in this more complex way. To do so, we still need to relate ourselves to overarching stories. These stories cannot simply be invented. We are, as the French are fond of saying, "bricoleurs," tinkerers, cobbling together a structure out of rather miscellaneous elements given to us by our pasts. But the elements from the past are not mere unrelated fragments, despite their miscellaneous character. They offer us tracts of meaning, directional, transformative possibilities as we relate our own stories to them” (Beardslee 172).

Beardslee and Jameson agree on the importance of our ability to link our narratives together to find some sense of identity and purpose. One of the major differences between them, though, is with regard to scale. Jameson is specifically talking about a “global system” (Jameson 92). This “global system,” as large as it is when compared to our tiny individual selves, is small when compared to the overarching reality of our universe. Furthermore, our own universe is even theorized by quantum mechanics to be only one within a much wider multiverse that reveals and reminds us of the fact, as Beardslee is supposing, that we are a part of a truly complex narrative of cosmological creation. Both Miller and Wilder attempt to reveal this plurality of worlds in their texts.

While Jameson is concerned with the postmodern world, Wilder and Miller devote a narrative layer to the social and economic power structures associated with postmodernism but are also concerned with humanity’s relationship to an existence beyond the control of these social and economic structures. In Wilder’s *Our Town* and Miller’s *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, characters are constantly having to navigate a rapidly changing world and landscape that exceeds economic determination. Wilder and Miller fill their stories with happy moments along with moments revealing disenchantment, brokenness, and suffering, as Beardslee puts it, that are essential to human experience. Rather than being focused merely with spatial and material concerns, which for Jameson define most postmodernist literature, I argue instead that much of modernist and postmodernist literature is concerned with questions about the cosmic order. There are many implied cosmic questions within both *Our Town* and *The Man Who Had all the Luck*. One of these implied cosmic questions emerges when Miller’s character J.B. comments about his infertility issues: “Yeh, no kids. Too old. Big, nice store with thirty-one different departments. Beautiful house. No kids. Isn’t that something? You die, and they wipe your name

off the mailbox and...and that's the ball game" (Miller 4). This question is not mere barstool rambling but reveals the disenchantment felt by the populations of Wilder and Miller's time concerning theological and scientific depictions of a vast and mechanistic world they have become trapped within—a world governed by random "luck" or divine fate. If luck is dished out exclusively by these forces or others like them, say economics, history, genetics and biology, then our reality is completely predetermined for us. Basarab Nicolescu, in his book *From Modernity to Cosmodernity*, explores the idea of luck, fate, and chance, explaining "The word *chance* corresponds to the word *hazard* in English. In turn, the word comes from the Arab *az-zahr*, which signifies "play of the dice" (Nicolescu 43). Nicolescu explains further that "the quantum event" was seen as "an accidental event, owing to a play of the dice (played by whom?)" (Nicolescu 43). Nicolescu is reminding us here that in classical understanding even the existence of matter and particles was seen as chance, as someone playing a game or toying with reality. The question of who was playing the game has changed from time to time, shifting from God to nature, economics, biology, history, or culture. As Nicolescu notes, however: "Quantum randomness is really a constructive gamble, which has a meaning--that of the construction of our own macrophysical world. A finer material penetrates a grosser material. The two coexist and cooperate in a unity that extends from the quanton to the cosmos" (Nicolescu 43). Nicolescu reveals that our reality is not predetermined by chance, luck, or cold probability but by our actions interacting on several levels with the actions of the other existing entities in the cosmic and quantum world. This opens reality to an infinite series of outcomes and potentialities. Miller too is tapping into this acknowledgement in order to combat the economic, divine, and cosmic determinism of his day.

In his essay “Arthur Miller and the Art of the Possible,” Steven Centola argues that Miller recognizes that the possibilities inherent within the whole dramatic event are limitless” (Centola 64). Centola goes on to say that for Miller, “the fundamental indeterminacy of meaning--an indeterminacy that Roland Barthes says inevitably results from the plural nature of the play text as a discourse that can be experienced only in the art of production-- poses no nihilistic threat in Miller's world” (Centola 64-65). Centola recognizes that Miller’s plays reveal not a predetermined result but an openness to varied and rich experiences, even when these plays end in tragedy. In Centola’s view, “the theater is a place where nature is transmuted into art, where reality meets and fuses with illusion, where text and subtext, character and action, word and gesture become one, where opposites are held in balanced suspension, and that, of course, is why the theater is the realm of the possible” (Centola 66). Centola’s analysis helps us to see that the , [b]y raising these questions about the fairness and agency responsible for life’s outcomes, Miller and Wilder reflect the anxieties their audiences had about the nature of human existence and cosmological creation and assure them that despite tragedy, one’s results in life are not foregone conclusions but the collection of innumerable opportunities and choices that one makes as an individual in relation to others and to the cosmos. In turn, *Our Town* and *The Man Who Had All the Luck* lead the reader toward the process of reenchantment by reminding the reader of their own agency and how that agency is intertwined with the agency of other entities in the cosmos.

Wilder gives more examples of this plurality of worlds through the letter Rebecca tells George that her friend Jane Crofut “got from her minister when she was sick” (Wilder 45). Rebecca goes on to say that the envelop was addressed to: “Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover’s Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America” (Wilder 45). When George questions why that is so important, Rebecca replies that “it’s not finished: the

United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God” (Wilder 45). Wilder here reflects Nicolescu’s comment about the finer and grosser materials, revealing how a look at our physical location reveals that we start with someone seemingly so small, Jane Crofut, who is located within a larger physical structure, her farm, but then that is located within a larger relational structure, the town of Grover’s Corners. Further, this expands to the larger physical structures like the continent and the Earth. However, as we start to spread out further we get into finer and finer distinctions, like the Solar System which is not an actual physical structure but, like a town, is a relationship between different entities within a given area of a larger relational structure, the Universe. Finally, Wilder widens the interconnections of these relationships until the moment of revelation, realizing that all of existence is located within the Mind of God as a part of the larger cosmic being. As humans, we can see our brain as a physical structure, but we cannot see our mind as a location of consciousness. Similarly, Wilder here configures a theo-poetical understanding of reality. Theopoesis literally means “god creating” and suggests that the basis of our newly expanding perception of agency reveals that we are influenced by the creative forces of culture and the cosmos but that we too are influencing the future creative outcomes of our culture and the cosmos, including our concept of God. Wilder unveils this theo-poetical conception of God in that the structures of our material reality are seen as the physical manifestation of the mind and the consciousness of God, which would mean that God’s consciousness, God’s divine essence, is interwoven in every physical aspect of our reality. A cosmological interpretive strategy reveals how our material reality is filled with a host of physical entities and as we as humans interact with all these physical aspects and entities, we enact our quantum entanglement as described by Latour and Nicolescu. We act on these physical entities and they act on us. If

God is woven throughout our physical existence in us, in our flesh and bones, in our molecules and we are acting with God and on God, then we are enacting a theo-poetical existence with God, creating reality as we go. By using a cosmological interpretive strategy, it can be shown how Wilder's *Our Town* leads the reader toward the process of re-enchantment by revealing to the reader the theo-poetical nature of our reality.

Miller also reveals a theo-poetical concept of reality in *The Man Who Had All the Luck*. Dave becomes upset when, towards the end of the play, while dabbling in Mink farming, he double-checks the purity of the animal feed and finds tainted feed but forgets to call his neighbor and mentor, Mr. Dibble. Dibble, who fails to see the tainted animal feed, is ruined, leaving Dave horrified again that the universe has determined that he should succeed while others experience misfortune. Dave's wife Hester and his friend Gus, however, question this deterministic conspiracy theory. Hester states that Dave's ability to avert disaster by throwing the tainted feed away "wasn't something from the sky, dear. This was you only. You must see that now, don't you" (Miller 82). Hester tries to remind Dave that it was his attentiveness to his farming and his hard work in sorting through the feed that allowed him to avert this disaster. Dave's friend Gus echoes this sentiment stating that "[o]f course bad things must happen. And you can't help it when God drops the other shoe. But whether you lay there or get up again--that's the part that's entirely up to you, that's for sure" (Miller 83). Gus explains to Dave that despite the challenges he comes up against, where others take success for granted, relying on faith or cosmic providence, it is Dave himself who does the hard work to solve those challenges through double-checking his feed and avoiding catastrophe. Dave's only problem is that he has resented his success rather than embracing it and appreciating it, so Gus finally tells Dave to "grin and bear it" (Miller 83). Gus's comments here reveal how our existence is intertwined with the actions of

other entities; but it is our ability to react to those interactions that allows for us to move forward and not be paralyzed by a situation. To act and react in this way is to explore the full extent of our agency. In acting, we then cause our own luck, our own fortune, pulling forth and unfolding the reality of our existence in that moment. In this sense, Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck* also serves as a literary form of reenchantment by revealing a theo-poetical concept of the cosmos and of God, not as a concept of some puppet master removed from reality, but as a force we encounter and interact with at every moment.

Wilder does confine his theo-poetical conception of agency to this one section of the play. Just as this concept suggests, Wilder reveals a path toward this theo-poetical concept of God by weaving discussions throughout *Our Town* about time and the eternal--something which is beyond time and is a term generally used to refer to God's essence. Early on the Stage Manager tells the audience that the "day is May 7, 1901" (Wilder 5) but that the "[f]irst automobile's going to come along in about five years" (Wilder 6). The Stage Manager uses the future tense, but he is not telling a prophecy here but instead is putting the audience in two sequential times at once. The Stage Manager does this again when he asks Professor Willard to come and give details about "our past history here" (Wilder 21). Professor Willard reveals that the town "lies on the old Pleistocene granite of the Appalachian range. I may say it's some of the oldest land in the world. We're very proud of that" (Wilder 21). Professor Willard adds that there is also "a shelf of Devonian basalt" and "vestiges of Mesozoic shale, and some sandstone outcroppings; but that's all more recent: two hundred, three hundred million years old" (Wilder 21). These facts are then contrasted with the Stage Manager's request for some words "on the history of man here" to which Professor Willard replies by referring to "Early Amerindian stock" that unfortunately is "now entirely disappeared" except for "possible traces in three families" (Wilder 20-21). Despite

the possible disappearance of this Native American stock, there is a possibility that it has continued in the blood of new migrants who “English” and “Slav and Mediterranean.” Even more interesting is that, when the Stage Manager asks for the population of “our town,” he is told by Professor Willard that it is “2,640” but is then corrected by the Stage Manager’s whisper to “2,642” (Wilder 21). This revised number recalls the first pages of the play, when the audience is told about “some twins born over in Polish Town” (Wilder 9). Wilder here is pushing us back and forth between the past, present, and future, forcing us to reconsider our concept of time. Wilder reminds the audience that the now is not isolated but part of in an infinite continuum.

This concept of the now as part of an infinite continuum is not unique to Wilder, of course. In Amy Elias’s edited collection, *Time: A Vocabulary of the Present*, Heather Houser explains that there are several layers to time. There is human time based on “human biological” rhythms and nonhuman or geological time that works on “planetary rhythms”; according to Houser, these two types of time “partially harmonize around seasonality” (Houser 3196). Houser goes on to describe a third type of time, the “inhuman time of instrumentation, computation, and mathematicization that mediates the entrenched binary of human and planetary time” (Houser 3196). Houser further explains that using geologic time is important because it “evokes a past whose residues await discovery in the present; it thus captures the then, the ‘now,’ and what carries ‘on’ into the future” (Houser 3201-3206). To put this in perspective, Wilder gives us an imaginary character, the Stage Manager, who reminds the audience of these various types of time, creating a “now” in 1901 that also looks ahead to known events in 1906, when the first automobile will arrive. This Stage Manager, with the help of the Professor, then throws us back millions, if not billions of years into geologic time, showing us all of the processes that it took just to allow the conditions for those human twins to exist. Using a cosmological interpretive

framework in this way, one can see how Wilder goes beyond Jameson's and even Weber's accounts of human history and rationality to a cosmic notion of time that details parallel human and non-human histories and the relationship between human and non-human existence that takes place as a result. A cosmological interpretive framework helps to dismantle our common notions of time to call attention to this relationship between human and non-human existence.

Use of an ephemeral and geological setting is one method by which Wilder attempts, through an act of imagination and drama, to lead audiences away from materialistic concerns toward a cosmic unknown in which all things which we might imagine are potentially possible. In the introduction to his collection *3 Plays: Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, The Matchmaker*, Wilder remarks that nineteenth and early twentieth century playwrights "loaded the stage with specific objects, because every concrete object on the stage fixes and narrows the action to one moment in time and place" (xi). Wilder saw this as antithetical to the power of the theatre because "as an artist (or listener or beholder) which truth do you prefer – that of the isolated occasion, or that which includes and resumes the innumerable?" (x; author's parentheses and quotes). Wilder answers that "The theatre is admirably fitted to tell both truths. It has one foot planted firmly in the particular, since each actor before us (even when he wears a mask!) is indubitably a living, breathing 'one'; yet it tends and strains to exhibit a general truth since its relation to a specific 'realistic' truth is confused and undermined by the fact that it is an accumulation of untruths, pretenses, and fiction" (xi; author's parentheses and quotes). It is in attempting to show this plurality of truths that Wilder juxtaposes the lives of humans with the surrounding territory. This plurality of truths is seen again when Wilder's character Emily is depicted in the afterlife, desiring to visit the land of the living just one more time.

After marrying her childhood sweetheart, George, and dying during the birth of her first child, Emily is depicted in the afterlife re-examining her earthly life. After seeing how her family members barely paid attention to one another while they lived, Emily cries out: “Oh, earth, you’re too wonderful for anybody to realize you” (Wilder 100). Emily then goes on to ask: “Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? – every, every minute?” to which the Stage Manager replies “No.” but then after a pause says “[t]he saints and poets, maybe--they do some” (Wilder 100). This all leads the reader and audience to open their minds to the third act, which takes place while Emily exists simultaneously in the spirit world and the physical world, reliving a past life that that is also the present for those she is witnessing. This overlapping of realities leads Emily to understand that there is always so much “going on and we never noticed” (100). Wilder has stated that his play is not a “speculation about the conditions of life after death” (xii); instead, I argue that Wilder is most concerned with allowing humans to recognize the beauty of life through revealing that death is not the end but just a transformation into another phase of a mysterious yet infinitely creative universe. The Stage Manager’s answer to Emily here helps to explain this. The Stage Manager identifies poets as the cosmically holy and anointed ones who roam the earth. The poet watches and observes the cosmic beauty of the world and puts this beauty into language. This is an act of creation. Within *Our Town*, this act of creation not only allows the poet to appreciate and better understand the wonder of cosmic creation but to enact it in miniature through the creation of his art, which attempts to render the cosmic creation into language for the understanding of the masses. It is in this respect as translators of the beauty of cosmic creation that Wilder places the poets, writers, and artists alongside those divinely chosen speakers of cosmic creation, the saints. The play then becomes the impetus for us to question our material reality and what some call the theopoetical nature of the cosmos. The theopoetical

aspect of *Our Town* leads the audience toward the process of reenchancement by making the audience become aware of the innumerable possibilities and potentialities of creation within the cosmos—and of our agency within that cosmos.

The questions about space, time, place, and agency brought up through a cosmological interpretive approach to *Our Town* and *The Man Who Had All the Luck* reveal a growing shift in literary representations of our relationship to the cosmos, moving us away from religious, theological, biological, social, economic, and technological determinism to a more theo-poetical perception of agency. Dave in, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, accepts the help of Gus while becoming a successful mechanic, thoroughly checks his feed every day while becoming a successful mink farmer, and takes his health and his wife seriously and lovingly and is thus able to have a healthy child. Dave has not been the sole reason behind his success, but he is one of the agents most responsible for it. Similarly, Emily in *Our Town*, recognizes that there is opportunity for an incredibly numerous array of meaningful experiences in human and cosmic life. We sometimes just shut ourselves in our little boxes; but it is entirely within our own power and our own agency to engage with the multiple possibilities of the present to make our lifetime a truly rich experience.

3 ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ABSURD: *GRAVITY'S RAINBOW*, *ENDER'S GAME*, AND *UNDERWORLD*

Modernization and mechanization within literature, especially within the science fiction genre, often leads to miraculous advancement such as a bionic hero or new developments in space exploration. However, as often as this miraculous advancement benefits all humankind it is often also a destructive force. If this destruction is not the physical mushroom clouds on a bleak and hopeless horizon, it may be the spiritual and mental dehumanization of the postmodern human. In 1973, during the Cold War and at the close of the Vietnam War, Thomas Pynchon and other artists and intellectuals, such as Orson Scott Card, felt an urgent need to analyze which path humanity was traversing. Pynchon gave voice to this complex worry in his novel *Gravity's Rainbow*. *Gravity's Rainbow* is set in war torn Europe during the middle of WWII and revolves around the journey of Tyrone Slothrop to investigate the German V-2 Rockets. Slothrop, however, finds he is mysteriously drawn to the V-2 Rockets such that their presence alone causes him to undergo a whirlwind of hormonal impulses. Slothrop eventually finds out that his actions are in part caused by behavioral conditioning he underwent as an infant with the chemical Impolex G. Due to the questions about agency and the destructive power of the V-2 rocket, Slothrop's experience reveals Pynchon's worry about the path which humanity is heading down with all these so-called scientific and technological advancements. Card gives voice to the worry of the path of humanity in his novel *Ender's Game*. *Ender's Game* follows the intense education of Ender Wiggin in the elite International Fleet Battle School under the direction of Colonel Graff. Ender is further groomed by the elite soldier, Mazer Rackham, to be the leading general in a war against the so-called Buggers, or Formics, a race of ant-like aliens. DeLillo's *Underworld*

gives voice to our collective worry about death and destruction by introducing the readers to the traumatic events in the life of the character Nick Shay. Nick's father abandons Nick and his mother, conditioning Nick to always worry about such abandonment again. Further, Nick relieves his anxiety by engaging in a promiscuous relationship with the wife of his friend which ultimately leads to Nick shooting his friend. Nick attempts to deal with these traumatic experiences his entire life, finally finding comfort in the act of recycling. When a cosmological interpretive strategy using the theories of Emmanuel Levinas, Christian Moraru, and Nancy Howells is applied to *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Ender's Game*, and *Underworld*, it can be seen how they act as forms of reenchancement by showing how interacting with non-human entities makes us realize the power and mystery of cosmological creation. From this reenchancement, we realize that if we do not treat other humans as well as non-humans with respect and reverence, then we only lead ourselves toward a path of self-destruction.

Gravity's Rainbow chronicles the attempts of American and European forces to discover the secrets of the German V-2 rockets and their mysterious connection to the sexual habits of the American Lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop. Pynchon includes in *Gravity's Rainbow* a vast variety of characters and episodes which include the development of the notorious V-2 rocket, also called the "Schwarzgerat," "S-Gerat," and the "00000" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 297) by Dominus Blicero and his lover Gottfried who turn the event into a sexual, sadomasochistic version of "Hansel and Gretel" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 96). Pynchon here, through the characters of Blicero and Gottfried, connects the desire for geopolitical domination through the use of the rocket, a phallic symbol, with the desire to sexually dominate other people, including other men. This connection between the destruction of the rocket and sexual desires is further explored through the novel's focus on the American, Tyrone Slothrop, who is hunted by the various characters and governments across

the war-torn parts of Central Europe called, “the Zone” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 268), because of his connection to the V-2 rockets by the sexual conditioning of his “infant hardon” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 86) by the Swiss behaviorist Laszlo Jamf. Jamf conditions baby Slothrop to become aroused anytime the mysterious plastic Impolex G (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 245) is present. Impolex G is also the secret material used in the construction of the V-2 Rocket, the eventual revelation of which explains why Slothrop’s sexual encounters overlap with the timing of the Rocket strikes. Slothrop’s search for how he is connected to the rockets leads him to become entangled in the lives of many of the other characters showing the reader how our lives, too are intertwined with the lives of so many other people and entities around us. Through this entanglement and Slothrop’s hormonal impulses, Pynchon is leading the reader to question the nature of our agency and whether our actions, our very lives, are our own or simply the product of conditioned responses.

Pynchon continues to question the role our entwined lives and conditioned responses play in our agency when he introduces Margherite Erdmann (also known as Greta van Erdmann), her daughter Bianca, and her current husband, the Greek Miklos Thanatz. These three characters all attempt to steal away in safety on the black-market steam ship the “*Anubis*” led by a female captain, “the gleeful Frau Gnahb” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 466-69). Margherite was an actress but also shot “dozens of vaguely pornographic horror movies” under the direction of the famed director Gerhardt von Goll (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 400). Von Goll is famous throughout the zone for subversive and pornographic films and has been working with the Argentinean Graciela Imago Portales on a film adaptation of the poem *Martin Fierro* depicting the legendary Argentinian “gaucho” guerilla Martin Fierro, who deserted the Argentinian military to protest the “exterminating” of the native peoples living in that region (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 393). On the

Anubis is also where Slothrop meets the Japanese Ensign Morituri who tells him about his meetings with Greta at the German spa “Bad Karma” and Greta’s mysterious “absences” from the spa (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 483-84). It is only after meeting all these people and questioning Greta one more time that Slothrop finds that he has been sexually conditioned with Impolex G, the hidden substance in the “methyl methacrylate” replica of the “Sangraal,” and the secret ingredient in the V-2 Rocket which Slothrop has been chasing (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 495). Eventually Slothrop undergoes a transformation in which he fragments: “Past Slothrops, say averaging one a day, ten thousand of them, some more powerful than others, had been going over every sundown to the furious host” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 636). Obviously, this web of allusions and individuals does not occur in as linear a fashion as depicted here, and the web is constantly being broken by other structures and events like scene cuts, sing-a-longs, fantasies, and dream sequences.

The critical perceptions of Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* are as varied as the characters which populate the book; however, one trend that tends to pervade this critical reception is the preoccupation with its narrative structure and the seemingly endless set of episodes which it contains. One of its earliest critics, Brooke Horvath in her essay “Linguistic Distancing in *Gravity’s Rainbow*” gives a seemingly unending list of the faults of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Horvath states that *Gravity’s Rainbow* contains characteristics that “remove the reader from empathetic participation [and] place Gravity’s Rainbow in the modernist camp” (Horvath 1). Horvath continues explaining that these characteristics “include its emphasis on process over product, the forwarding of multiple realities, the renunciation of any desire to communicate, the dismissal of traditional means of characterization and narration, the element of play apparent throughout, the constant reduction of man to his biological and/or brute features, a rejection of

Humanism” (Horvath 1). Horvath actually rejects the idea of *Gravity’s Rainbow* as a postmodern text, believing that its preoccupation with obfuscation is more in line with modernist sensibilities. To prove this, Horvath goes on to describe many of the linguistic constructions which she sees as keeping the reader from being able to have any meaningful engagement with *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Tony Tanner in his essay “*Gravity’s Rainbow: An Experience in Modern Reading*,” also upholds Horvath’s interpretation stating “[a]s you read the book you seem to pass through a bewildering variety of genres, behavioural modes, and types of discourse” (Tanner 71) and that “[t]here is only one text but it contains a multiplicity of surfaces; modes of discourse are constantly turning into objects of discourse with no one stable discourse holding them together” (Tanner 71). Gary Thompson, in his essay “Pynchonian Pastiche,” solidly categorizes *Gravity’s Rainbow* as postmodern but does also tend to agree with Horvath about the linguistic conventions used, stating that the “mixture of realistic description, song numbers, poems, and profound reflections on civilization produces a distancing effect” (Thompson 172). Unlike Horvath however, Thompson argues that the ultimate goal is to actually interact with the reader and make the reader realize that in reading the novels “we necessarily participate in the re-creation (and recreation) of history” and it “compels readers to reimagine their acquired knowledge of the past, seeing again what we thought we knew.” (Thompson 174). A cosmological interpretation of *Gravity’s Rainbow* supports Thompson’s idea of an interactive discourse showing that Pynchon is attempting to engage with the reader to make the reader evaluate their moral and ethical positions within contemporary culture.

This interactive discourse is evident in structural and thematic components of *Gravity’s Rainbow* such as the sing-a-longs like the Banana Breakfast song which starts off “Gather Your Arse Up Off The Floor (Have a Banana)” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 9). In these instances, the audience

in the narrative and the reader are meant to call back the lines in the parentheses, creating a call and response pattern between the text and the reader. There are also instances of psychic manifestations such as in the sequence when Pirate Prentice is shown to have the ability to live out Lord Blathenard Osmo's re-occurring nasal fantasy: "It was a giant Adenoid. At least as big as St. Paul's, and growing hour by hour. London, perhaps all England was in mortal peril" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 15). Pirate Prentice is living out another narrative world through this psychic experience just as the reader is experiencing another narrative world, this time the world of *Gravity's Rainbow*. A third interactive episode is the scene when many of the characters attempt to explore the spiritual world using séances: "This sitting, like any, needs...a basic, four-way entente which oughtn't any link of it be broken: Roland Feldspath (the spirit), Peter Sachsa (the control), Carroll Eventyr (the medium), Selena (the wife and survivor)" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 32). In this case, Carroll Eventyr acts as a medium, a nexus in which the narrative world of the spirit realm and the narrative world of Eventyr's reality meet. Just like how the reader is the medium between the narrative world of *Gravity's Rainbow* and their own reality. Then of course there are the dream sequences, especially drug induced ones such as Slothrop's obsession over the linguistic and tonal variations of phrases regarding the Kenosha Kid right before the Roseland Ballroom episode. The narrator explains that "[t]hese changes on the text "You never did the Kenosha Kid" are occupying Slothrop's awareness as the doctor leans in out of the white overhead to wake him and begin the [Sodium Amytal] session" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 62). In this last scene, Slothrop was asleep while his subconscious contemplated changes to and plays on the text of the phrase "You never did the Kenosha Kid." Slothrop's experience in playing with the grammatical phrasing mirrors the experience of the reader trying to do the same during the reading of the text of *Gravity's Rainbow*. This reveals a connection in which Slothrop's

experiences are tied to the reader's experiences as well. These interactive episodes are not only thematic components but structural components which add to the complexity of the structure because they create many tensions and dialogues within the novel which Pynchon keeps deftly balanced and constantly in "play" with each other. The textual, linguistic and tonal structure of *Gravity's Rainbow* is constantly, fluidly morphing and accenting itself. This is also a form of "play." Therefore, the amount of characters, the sing-a-longs, the fantasies, and the dream sequences, rather than acting merely as fragmentation that frustrates the novel or the reader, are really structures that just mimic the "play" of discourse. However, the implication is more serious than just mere substitution or novelty. Using a cosmological interpretive strategy, these structures are revealed as interactive techniques which facilitate a discourse between *Gravity's Rainbow* and the reader that results in leading the reader to a period of ethical and spiritual meditation. *Gravity's Rainbow* acts as a piece of meditative art which facilitates the process of reenchantment. This new reenchanting view of a holistic, infinitely creative, and sacred view of the cosmos leads the reader toward a more responsible stewardship of humankind's destiny, the destiny of the planet, and the destiny of the entire cosmos.

Pynchon uses these myriad interactive episodes as a method to toggle the reader between the imaginative fiction within the text and the reader's own reality. Another such method is the use of historical fact and storytelling. Within the text of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon's focus is mostly on a fictitious representation of the historical basis of how the postmodern world came to be. Steven Weisenburger, in his early analysis from his essay "The End of History? Thomas Pynchon and the Uses of the Past," observes that Pynchon incorporates actual historical facts but expands those facts "beyond the limited ethical vision of the historical source from which he has drawn [them]" (Weisenburger 56), especially in relation to General Walter Dornberger, whom

Pynchon uses as the template for Franz Pokler. This expansion is done through Pynchon's layering of character upon character and each of the stories we get about those characters. Pynchon weaves in the story of Werhner von Braun as the historical basis for Lieutenant Weissman, a.k.a Dominus Blicero. In his essay, "The Comet and the Rocket: Intertextual Constellations about Technological Progress in Bruno Schulz's 'Kometa' and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*," Bruno Arich-Gerz observes:

In Pynchon's novel, it is not some comet coming from outer space that threatens to annihilate the blue planet, but the technical device of a supersonic rocket: the German *Aggregat 4* or V-2 *Vergeltungswaffe* (retaliatory weapon), which ever since its first successful launching by a crew of engineers around Wernher von Braun and General Walter Dornberger on October 3, 1942, was held to be the most progressive ballistic missile of the time. . . . [and] later became the urmodel for U.S. and Soviet spaceflight and warfare rocket programs. (Arich-Gerz 235)

These historical references represent the scientific story of our human culture but also a cosmological history of how as individuals, we have interacted with human and non-human existence. Rather than understanding our interdependence and entwined existence within the natural, cosmological world, humans have used science, weaponization, and colonization to take from it and from others what humans desire and create complex systems of power and destruction to control such resources. In addition to these stories, humans have the history of European colonialism such as the German occupation of Sudwest and the enslavement and destruction of the Herero civilization (*Gravity's Rainbow* 103). Humans have the beginnings of the business cartel with Herr Rathenau and its later use as a model for the state by the German Corporate Nazi's and American/European bureaucracies and multinational corporations such as

Shell, IG Farben, and General Electric (*Gravity's Rainbow* 167). Then humans have the infamous references to scientific terms and mathematical equations such as “absolute zero” (*Gravity's Rainbow* 4), the “Poisson equation” (*Gravity's Rainbow* 55), and the “ ΔT ” (*Gravity's Rainbow* 161). Now it is not that, Pynchon does not concern himself with detailing the origins of the universe within *Gravity's Rainbow*, but that, as will be shown, a part of the mysticism of *Gravity's Rainbow* consists of information that humans can never truly know. A cosmological interpretive strategy reveals that it is precisely these contrasts between the known and the unknown, the historical and the fictional, which allow *Gravity's Rainbow* to not only enter in to discourse with the reader but entwines its narrative world with that of the reader's, altering the reader's perceptions through disorientation. *Gravity's Rainbow* therefore leads the reader toward the process of reenchantment, acting as a type of counterforce to the systems of power, control, and othering at work in our society. Orson Scott Card conducts a similar endeavor in his novel *Ender's Game*.

In *Ender's Game*, Card forces the reader to confront how society indoctrinates us with ideas about how we view and perceive the world. Only in confronting what we are shaped to view as the other do humans begin to break the hold which society's taboos have created. Card makes the reader confront the idea of the taboo in *Ender's Game*. Card takes the reader through Ender's journey of rejection (Card 4) when his monitor is taken out by Colonel Graff. Card forces the reader to grapple with the idea of government regulated birth control through the idea that Ender is a “Third,” a forbidden birth from the government regulated two child mandate. Ender's classmates make this distinction when picking on him by saying to him, “We're people, not Thirds, turd face” (Card 7). Card even makes the reader question the “rules of manly warfare” when the group, picking on Ender, gang up on him, in order to protect himself, Ender

kicks Stilson “again in his crotch” (Card 7) while Stilson is down because he feels he must “keep them from attacking him in a pack tomorrow” (Card 7). Card reveals how by othering Ender, it becomes convenient to break the societal rules about fighting but it also forces Ender to have to abandon such rules because of the vicious attacks taken against him. Possibly deeper than the breakdown of human-constructed social norms, Card brings to the reader’s attention the idea that humans are not the only form of life, let alone intelligent life or war with an alien species of “buggers” (Card 25). Card wishes to force the reader into exploring imaginatively such challenging situations in order to show the relationship between othering non-human life, such as the Formics as the so-called “buggers” are properly called, and the othering of human life, such as children.

As Card mentions in the “Introduction” to *Ender’s Game*, many adults felt his depiction of children was “unrealistic” (Card xix) because children could never think or talk the way *Ender’s Game* had depicted them. Card explains that “I forced the audience to experience the lives of these children from that perspective- the perspective in which their feelings and decisions are just as real and important as any adult’s” (Card xx). This quote from Card reveals how the reader of *Ender’s Game* is prompted to re-evaluate even simple ideas about our reality, such as the way we view children. The children as described here in Card’s novel are not considered as persons but simply as weak, inferior beings who do not have thoughts or personalities of their own and must be protected by the parents and society that thinks so highly of them that they are sending them to be slaughtered in an intergalactic war. Sara Day, in her essay “Liars and Cheats: Crossing the Lines of Childhood, Adulthood, and Morality in *Ender’s Game*” comments about this disparity in how we often view children. Day comments that “[t]he young characters who populate Ender’s world also demonstrate a capacity for cruelty,

dishonesty, and injustice. In the process, Card's characters, regardless of age, draw attention to the ways in which the typical concept of morality itself depends on often arbitrary binaries of right and wrong that, when challenged, grow slippery" (Day 2). These observations by Day and Card himself, reveal a process of othering which occurs with regard to how we often view children.

James Campbell sees this othering as institutional as well as social, commenting on the tensions in the novel between homosocial relations and patriarchal dominance, stating that "[t]rue to most unsentimentalized depictions of educational establishments, Card's Battle School is a nasty, competitive, and alienating institution mediated through a discourse centering on images of the phallus and the anus" (Campbell 494). Campbell is certainly correct that the power struggles which occur in the novel are alienating and tied to phallic conceptions of power. Campbell's reading, however, does not take into consideration the roles of Valentine, Petra, Major Anderson, or the Formic Queen, revealing that this othering is not limited to children or males and is often combatted or countered by these figures. Campbell also does not consider non-human modes of being. Elaine Radford reads *Ender's Game* as an attempt to historically and morally assimilate the atrocities of othering and massacre seen in the Twentieth Century, namely the Jewish Holocaust at the hands of the Nazi regime. Radford states that "Because Hitler/Ender committed genocide to preserve the existence and dignity of what he defined as human, he is not a monster but a true Superman who willingly shouldered the heavy responsibility thrust upon him" (Radford). Radford argues that Card is attempting to humanize and relativize genocide and other atrocities committed with the betterment of society in mind as a way to potentially excuse the historical crimes which Christianity is accused of. John Kessel agrees with Radford, seeing within *Ender's Game* a "bait and switch stratagem" (Kessel 9) in which "those of us concerned

about understanding the “other” are redirected from worrying about the alien to worrying about the killer of the alien, and thus our condemnation of genocide reemerges as a sign of our prejudice and small-mindedness” (Kessel 9). *Ender’s Game* is not as encyclopedic in nature as Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, but it does interrogate a larger diversity of being. What many of these readings fail to address, which a cosmological reading would, are the intentions and motivations of the Formics as nonhuman entities. Most of these readings also ignore the fact that the Formics were not helpless nor were they innocent in the war, being the initiators of an intergalactic invasion. This does not excuse the genocide in any way; however, it is a component within this critical field of study that has yet to be thoroughly explored. The trend that all of these examples highlight, though, is the way we reify, objectify, and other those people and beings which we see as different from us. By creating a perception that a being, whether living or non-living, is of no inherent value, it leads to the further perception that the entity is simply beneath our own status and stature. The entity then loses any ability to make coherent decisions and take meaningful action on its own, becoming simply a play thing, like the children becoming the toy soldiers for Colonel Graff and the International Fleet in the war against the Formics. Card is attempting to make the reader aware of this objectification. By leading the reader to this awareness, *Ender’s Game*, leads the reader toward the process of reenchancement and acts as a sort of counterforce to thwart such objectification, just as Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* acts as a counterforce as well.

The awareness about the objectification of others through systems of power and control shown in *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Ender’s Game* is further developed in Don DeLillo’s *Underworld*. In the story of *Underworld*, the character Nick Shay must face the fact that his father, Jimmy, abandoned him. The narrator states that Jimmy “went out to get a pack of

cigarettes and never came back. This is a thing you used to hear about disappearing men. This is the final family mystery. All the mysteries of the family reach their culmination in the final “passion of abandonment” (*Underworld* 87). First, the idea of mystery is presented here as “a thing you used to hear,” an everyday occurrence that was talked about openly but still having an element of the unknown to it that has deep and lasting effects. The whereabouts of these men is unknown and because of this there is a constant quest to obtain knowledge of their whereabouts or what happened to them and why they disappeared. In addition, these men introduce a metaphorical death in his family, a death from which there can be no closure because they are not truly dead but at the same time their whereabouts and the reasons surrounding their disappearances can never be known. This anxiety about the fate and destruction of others in *Underworld* because of the abandonment of his father causes Nick to feel a sense of awareness that their family dynamic has changed. First, Nick is left with questions about his father’s disappearance, even inventing the story that the mob “had put out a hit on him” (*Underworld* 465). Then Nick is left with uncertainty and doubt about the answers to these questions which lead him to frustration and anger because, without a father, he is unsure of his own manhood. With his own father abandoning him, Nick questions his own worth, wondering whether he was the cause of his father’s departure. Further, being left with no male role model, Nick is unsure of how to even act like a man should act and whether he himself will abandon those he loves just like his dad. Nick’s existence and wellbeing then becomes linked to his father’s existence and abandonment. The destruction of one, his father, even if this was caused by the father’s own actions of walking out on his family, causes Nick to feel othered, leading him down his own self-destructive path.

The othering felt by Nick is often commented on by critics with regard to his accumulation of historical memorabilia and his future career as a waste management professional. Just as Card focuses on both the human and the non-human, living and non-living, many critics have noticed that Don DeLillo focuses on these topics as well in *Underworld*. In particular many critics focus on the representation of Nick Shay's obsession with trash as a form of nostalgia. Take for instance, Johanna Isaacson's interpretation in her essay "Postmodern Wastelands: *Underworld* and the Productive Failures of Periodization", stating that "Trash can signify a residual dimension of the novel and an elegiac, nostalgic orientation toward older forms of politicization, proletarian energy, political parties, and modernism" (Isaacson 32). Isaacson goes on to explain that the main character of *Underworld*, Nick Shay, falls into this trap. Nick "reflects the impasse felt by white middle-aged middle-class men. Nick's moment of engagement, energy, and eventfulness occurs before the main action of the novel, when his identity was dynamic, working class, and ethnic" (Isaacson 32). Tim Engles also agrees with Isaacson's description of Nick's nostalgia, claiming in his essay "White Male Nostalgia in *Underworld*" that Nick has attached more meaning to objects, to material accumulations of things, than to his relationships with other people. Engles states that "Nick's racialised identity is also exposed as that of a constructed, script-following white person, not unlike the Demings; his fealty road-driven constructions of the stage-set of his life, and of his role in it, has meant attaching more meaning and value to props and well-acted roles than to anything char might feel more real" (Engles 207). However, these readings mainly discuss Nick and DeLillo's focus on the Cold War and Postmodern politics and miss a larger cosmological point about what Isaacson says she is concerned with: relationships. In his essay, "The Obsolescence of Mystery and the Accumulation of Waste in Don DeLillo's *Underworld*," Todd McGowan reminds us that "the

proliferation of waste corresponds to another dramatic change in the structure of society: the turning away from the Other and toward narcissistic self-absorption” (McGowan 124).

McGowan is concerned that the level luxury and leisure time in society, the global nature of our capitalistic culture, and the continued concern we have for our own comfort rather than in experience “create a world of overwhelming immediacy and presence, a world in which subjects suffocate from the proximity of the Other” (McGowan 125). Unfortunately, even though McGowan starts down the track toward a cosmological interpretation, even bringing up the same concern which Christian Moraru has, the shrinking of the proximity of the Other, he stops there. McGowan goes on to explain that this shrinking proximity is due to the disappearance of the Freudian and Lacanian “*objet petit a*” (McGowan 125; author’s italics) which McGowan says is the driving desire for individuals to want to have true interactions with the other. McGowan explains that the *objet petit a* “is the secret treasure we believe to be hidden in the Other, the seeming mystery of the Other that incites our desire” (McGowan 125). One of the fundamental issues which McGowan neglects is to explain why the proximity of the Other matters cosmologically, instead focusing on Freudian and Lacanian desires. In fact, such a psychoanalytical approach only further exoticizes and fetishizes the Other rather than reconciling the situation. Lewis Kirshner comments about these limitations in his article, “Rethinking Desire: The *Objet Petit A* in Lacanian Theory,” stating that “[i]t should be obvious that actual loving relationships between partners cannot be explained by an abstract concept like the *objet petit a*, any more than by the Freudian notion of libido” (Kirshner 85). Kirshner explains how psychoanalysis can theorize about desire and why we are initially attracted to someone or something, but with all of the issues and psychological conflicts that such an approach dredges up, psychoanalysis cannot explain why a long term, loving relationship is able to surmount such

circumstances. In contrast, a cosmological interpretation of *Underworld* will reveal how our interactions with the Other are not particularly exotic and instead make up many of our daily interactions whether it be with other humans, food, inanimate objects, animals, plants, or the molecules that make up our bodies and everything around us. As the reading of Emmanuel Levinas later on will reveal, these interactions remind us of our common source of being: cosmological creation. Recognizing this common source of creation highlights another major issue with this interpretation and the concept of psychoanalysis in general which is that these approaches fetishize and exoticize the other entities with which we interact. This fetishization and exoticization is what turns them into the Other. A cosmological interpretive strategy, by asserting the acceptance of the inherent value of the various entities of cosmological creation on their own, sees not some exoticized difference but a difference in which there is a shared and recognized cosmic beginning. By recognizing the other entity as being whole in its creation, rather than having a surplus, the individual recognizes their own wholesomeness. When encountering another being, the individual recognizes the commonalities rather than the differences, leading the individual to further recognize that the two beings come from the same cosmic source. Therefore, rather than attempting to fill some mythological lack with an equally mythological hidden treasure, the individual, instead gains an appreciation for what already exists within the individual and a further appreciation of the other entities which exist apart from the individual. However, if the fetishization and exoticization of these entities continues to exist, these entities will continue to become used, abused, and often needlessly destroyed at the hands of selfish individuals simply to keep fellow individuals from enjoying the benefits of those entities. This scorched earth policy can be seen in the references to the nuclear waste from the Cold War in *Underworld* which was governed by the policy of mutual assured destruction which

is what will happen if humans do not recognize a cosmological need to treat human and non-human entities with the respect and value inherent in their existence.

The constant questioning Nick has about the truth of his father's disappearance, the otherness which Nick feels, and the self-destructive habits Nick engages in are what create an anxiety crisis in Nick which leads to his rebellious behavior. Nick's rebellious behavior in turn leads to his friendship with George, an older man in the neighborhood whom Nick later shoots in the head. The crisis comes to its peak when Nick and George's relationship grows to the point that George becomes a sort of father-like figure. Nick seems to collect George just like someone may collect some other type of memorabilia. George shows Nick a shotgun which Nick "pointed at George's head" and asks "[I]s it loaded?" (*Underworld* 780). George answers "[n]o," and "Nick pulled the trigger" (*Underworld* 780). Nick mentions how the action took less than a second but kept replaying in his mind. Nick goes on to replay the events of his shooting of George in his head for two whole pages. The first page above is how the event occurred in reality:

Nick pulled the trigger.

In the extended interval of the trigger pull, the long quarter second,

With the action of the trigger sluggish and rough, Nick saw into the

smile on the other man's face.

Then the thing went off and the noise busted through the room and even with the chair and body flying, he had the thumbmark of George's face furrowed in his mind.

(*Underworld* 780)

In this first iteration, the events are explained in chronological order. We can see with George's smile that they seemed to be joking around when Nick actually pulls the trigger, shooting and

killing George. From that moment onward, the second page becomes full of Nick's contemplation of the events:

He felt the trigger pull and heard the gun go off and he was left there thinking weakly he didn't do it.

But first he pointed the gun at the man's head and asked if it was loaded.

Then he felt the trigger pull and heard the gun go off and the man and the chair went different ways. (*Underworld* 781)

In this scene, Nick discards George like he feels his father discarded him, making him feel disposable like a piece of trash. DeLillo is concerned in this scene with the passage of time, memory, language, and reality in this moment as it is being recounted to the reader. The story is being told from a third person objective point of view narrating the life of an adult, middle aged Nick and a young, teenage Nick. The first page is composed in chronological order to reveal narratively to the reader what happened in the reality of the moment at the time of Nick's shooting of George. This moment is presented as the present. However, this narrativization comes well after the reader has been introduced to the future life of the adult, middle aged Nick. The moment of the shooting of George is told in the present but also presupposes that Nick has grown up and has continued to think about this moment in the future, which brings up the topic of time and how we conceive of time. The topic of time in DeLillo's works is discussed by David Blakesly in his essay "A Burkeian Reading of *White Noise*." Blakesly uses the dramatic theories of Kenneth Burke to analyze the use of fear, dread, and the supernatural in *White Noise* but that discussion also includes commentary about the use of time in *Underworld*. Blakesly comes to conclude that "In *White Noise*, as in so much of DeLillo's work, (but especially *Libra*

and *Underworld*), the future is always anticipated in the present as a type of prophecy, not unlike the self-fulfilling prophecies of the airborne toxic event's symptomology" (Blakesly 179). Here Blakesly also opens his dialogue to include more of DeLillo's works, specifically important here, *Underworld*. Blakesly points out the existence of a present and future which coincide. Blakesly calls this a prophecy but the prophecy always ends in some way with death because death is the logical and immediate conclusion of any human contemplation about the future because each individual gets older as time goes on. As we get older our bodies begin to break down and this continues until the future of our physical bodies ends when we die. When Nick "saw into the smile of the other man's face" (*Underworld* 780), the act carries with it a sense of prophetic sight in which Nick views not just George's death but a glimpse of his own future death as well. Further, by retelling the narrative to himself, Nick is attempting to make meaning, make sense out of the event that seems to him, even as a participant, to be such a mystery. The event, though, is not just about George, it is about Nick. Nick shoots George, who had become like a father figure to him. Nick kills his metaphorical father, replaying in a new configuration, the past loss of his biological father. Nick then goes to jail for the shooting. While in jail, Nick continues to contemplate the mystery of his participation in the shooting, stating about himself that "[you were the shooter and the witness both and you can separate these roles. The second was helpless to prevent the first from acting... could not manage it and finally did not know how to perceive it" (*Underworld* 510). Nick here is frustrated that he knows he shot George but he feels like he was not in control. Nick does not seem to be able to take responsibility for his agency, his actions in the shooting, turning the event into a mystery which must be revealed. In particular, Nick is fixated on what he sees as the mystery of the body flying out of the chair, stating that "It was too down deep even as it reached his eyes, your eyes...the resignation of life and breath to this

vehement depth of gesture, man and chair going different ways” (*Underworld* 510). The man and the chair here become intertwined in their existence even though they are going the separate ways. Nick’s comments hint at how he was seeing in the moment of George’s death, that George’s body, though human and once full of life, upon his death has simply become as inanimate and objectified as the object of the chair itself. Nick contemplates having this conversation with the psychologist at the prison, Dr. Lindblad, imagining that Dr. Lindblad would say “This is how consciousness looks. This is how it flails and thrashes when the end is sudden and violent and the mind is unprepared” ((*Underworld* 511). At this point, Nick imagines that he “might have said, “You’re talking about his mind, how the end is sudden, or mine?” (*Underworld* 511). This quote about an imaginary conversation, essentially a conversation which Nick is having with himself, reveals how Nick sees in George’s death his own mortal destruction and the destruction of the way of life he had known up until the moment of the shooting. Nick’s past, present, and future are all coalescing into that one moment which will then cause him anxiety about these events and his role in them, disrupting every moment of his future life.

In DeLillo’s own essay “American Blood: A Journey Through the Labyrinth of Dallas and JFK,” DeLillo comments on this process of contemplating events over and over again and the disruption such contemplation can cause. DeLillo states that “Power events breed their own network of inconsistencies. Loose ends, dead ends, small mysteries of time and space” (“American Blood” 22). A power event for DeLillo is “that moment” when an individual has “entered a world of randomness and ambiguity, a world totally modern in the way it shades into the century’s ‘emptiest’ literature, the study of what is uncertain and unresolved in our lives, the literature of estrangement and silence” (American Blood” 22). DeLillo explains that these power events leaves the individual with many questions regarding the mysteries of reality, that these

events make us wonder why they occurred, how they occurred, and what effect they have on the individual. Jimmy's abandonment of his family and Nick's shooting of George represent these power events in Nick's life; the small mysteries occurring in time and space and how they are connected. Further, DeLillo's narrativization of these events goes against the traditional "rational" understanding of time and space. These events, such as Nick shooting George, are reconfigured into their component parts but randomly, not in any chronological order, causing an anxiety crisis because they go against our sense of reality. Bernard Lonergan explains the anxiety crisis by distinguishing that "Ordinary conscious living is a patterned flow of consciousness in which your world, yourself, and what you do have meaning" but that the "patterned flow of consciousness can break down, and when it breaks down you have an anxiety crisis" (Lonergan 276). Lonergan goes on to describe this crisis as a presentation "with brute reality. It is there, and there is no meaning to it...the source of meaning is the flow of consciousness, the structured flow of consciousness, that has broken down" (Lonergan 276). This anxiety crisis can be countered by accepting the idea of the infinite that has no ends but simply transformations. The occurrences between the daily sublime and the characters within *Underworld* can be seen then as a moment in which there is this anxiety about death. The hope from Lonergan is that through this anxiety, the individual will eventually develop an awareness of the continuous flow of consciousness. This awareness about the continuity of consciousness is the moment of immanence at which the past, present and the future exist together and the unknowable finally can become known. This is DeLillo's concept of the eternal moment: a moment which stretches beyond the definition of the limited length of its actual occurrence. A problem occurs when an individual cannot develop an awareness of the continuous flow of consciousness and instead becomes stuck or scattered from this moment, focusing on their historicization, trying to

rationalize the events by fixating on their chronological order by categorizing their happening through time. When an individual becomes stuck on these events, rather than becoming an eternal moment, the event becomes one of DeLillo's power events.

Jimmy's abandonment of Nick and Nick's shooting of George become events which tease out the play between these power events and eternal moments. Jimmy's abandonment represents a metaphorical death for Nick. Jimmy is gone, no longer there and there is no one else who comes in and fills that role except some years later when George appears. Nick then shoots George. This is a physical death of a father-like figure. Nick's shooting of George becomes for Nick a moment in which past, present, and future all coalesce but the moment is stretched out because Nick lives on, constantly contemplating and reliving the moments of those events. In these moments, because time seems to stretch out, consciousness is stretched also, trying to maintain a grasp on the past, present, and future. These moments are filled with the constant tension to act or not to act and mimic the ultimate tensions between living and dying. This tension can be seen in Nick's own words about shooting George. Nick states "But first he force-squeezed the trigger and saw into the smile and it seemed to have the spirit of a dare. Why would the man say no if it was loaded? But first why would he point the gun at the man's head? He pointed the gun at the man's head and asked if it was loaded?" (*Underworld* 781). Nick uses the phrasing of the narrativization to examine how the event happened, why it happened, and who was responsible. Nick becomes a 'he,' not an I. Nick became an object of his own contemplation; he becomes othered because of his inability to make sense of this event, just like he becomes othered by the abandonment of his father. These events for Nick have a lifetime effect. For instance, when they are both adults, with Nick working in recycling and nuclear waste, Nick's brother Matt comments about these tensions he observes in Nick, stating "Nick

had a graveness that was European in a way. He was shaped and made. First unmade and then reimagined and strongly shaped and made again” (*Underworld* 416). Matt refers to how Nick is constantly being stretched and shaped and then compacted and stretched and shaped again, only it is not so much Nick’s physical appearance but his consciousness. Matt’s comment reveals how these moments and their repetition within Nick’s mind have created an otherness about Nick that is perceptible to those around him. This otherness is a result of Nick disenchantment with the world due to his father’s abandonment and his subsequent killing off of the only other meaningful relationship he had developed at that point in his young life, his relationship to George. DeLillo’s depiction of Nick’s otherness is similar to the characters in *Gravity’s Rainbow* as the war drags on as well as being similar to the children Card mentions and to Ender’s feelings of otherness for being a Third in *Ender’s Game*. These authors are attempting to show how so-called rationalization has led only to disenchantment in the form of otherness and destruction rather than the affirmation of life and creativity. The only way for Slothrop, Ender, and Nick to develop some sense of meaning and meaningful identity is to disrupt the process of disenchantment which would require undergoing the process of reenchantment, leading the reader to also undergo this process of reenchantment. This process starts by recognizing the continuity between consciousness and its ultimate relation to reality and the other entities which inhabit that reality.

The Catholic Theologian, Karl Rahner, in his essay “The World and History as the Event of God’s Self Communication,” lays out a very important theological and philosophical idea concerning how to begin this process of reenchantment: the idea of immanence. Immanence is to recognize how the cosmic is enfolded into the events of reality and history. Rahner states that life as we experience it is predicated on “one, vast, all-embracing, all-distinguishing event: the self

communication of God” (Rahner 193). Rahner explains that individuals must attempt to find where reality and history intersect with the cosmic and to investigate those events, “whether it really does, and where, is the unfathomable secret of God” and that “it can occur anywhere, in forms ever new, and does in fact occur, though we can never point with certitude to any particular evidence” (Rahner 195). This distinction separates itself from previous theological thought which held a dualistic concept of the material world here as humans experience it and the divine world somewhere in “Heaven,” “Hell” or some other plane of existence. Rahner’s concept of immanence is a theo-poetical concept in which the divine and spiritual is a part of physical reality and can be encountered. Rahner opens up the ability of humans to experience the divine in their everyday routines rather than seeking out some specific ritualistic quest or desolate wilderness as had been a traditional convention in literature as well as theology, i.e. the Greco-Roman epic quests and visits to the Underworld (or their allusions to it like in DeLillo’s *Underworld*), the depictions of the spiritual journeys of Buddha, Moses, and Jesus into the desert, Arthurian quests, and the Romantic and Transcendental views of the sublime in nature, etc. This idea of immanence is also hinted at by John McClure in his book *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* by attempting to loosely define his idea of postsecularism without boxing it in. McClure states that postsecularism is “a mode of being and seeing that is at once critical of secular constructions of reality and of dogmatic religiosity” (“Preface”). McClure states that at the very least, a postsecular text “is little more than a cautious probing, and the process of ontological opening is extremely subtle: a quiet loosening of the fabric of “the real” and momentary almost indiscernible, interruptions of the “laws of nature” (“Preface”). McClure is showing how postsecularism is simply a nudge to make us question what we think of ourselves and our interactions with others and nature. This simple explanation

of what postsecularism is and what it does may seem too broad but it also becomes inclusive, keeping postsecularism from being as dogmatic and rigid as the ideologies it questions. As McClure also notes in his “Preface” that postsecularism “has been a feature of literary thinking since the romantics” and that “in American fiction alone” it can be seen in the works of “the transcendentalists and the modernists” (McClure 72). McClure acknowledges the fact that authors have been attempting to use their writings for centuries to describe both the physical and the spiritual experiences one may have over the course of his or her life time. This hints at again how the opposition between the physical and spiritual aspects of our cosmos are more a perceived conflict than one occurring in actuality. A cosmological interpretive strategy helps to reveal these everyday encounters and lead to reenchancement by revealing to the reader the different layers of narrative and time being presented to them within literature, in this case within *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Ender’s Game*, and *Underworld*. This understanding of the narrative layers of time then leads the reader to recognize how every entity in reality experiences its own time and therefore its own history but that such an individual history is connected to a larger cosmic history which connects it to every other entity in the cosmos. When an individual recognizes how its history is connected to a larger cosmic history, that individual also then recognizes that its own agency and consciousness is not isolated but that such phenomenon continue within each entity, leading, not to an experience of othering, but to a recognition of the inherent value of each entity.

A cosmological interpretative strategy of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Ender’s Game*, and *Underworld* recognizes that these texts all act as instruments of artistic reenchancement. This reenchancement is in opposition to the rise of the Enlightenment mentality of a scientific, rational world and attempts to lead toward a more holistic, sacred view of the cosmos. This term

reenchantment is modeled off of the concept of “disenchantment” discussed in the previous chapter by Max Weber and Morris Berman. As John McClure notes “*Gravity’s Rainbow* contains a number of references to, and echoes of, the theories of Max Weber. It was Weber, mentioned by name in the text (464), who wrote some one hundred years ago, about the ‘disenchantment of the world’” (McClure 29). McClure goes on to state that *Gravity’s Rainbow* does not simply “echo Weber’s proclamation that rationalization is irresistible. *Gravity’s Rainbow* is designed both to drive home the power of this order and to begin exploring ways to break the spell” (McClure 30). Pynchon not only attempts to break the spell of “disenchantment” but also lead the reader toward a newly reenchanting perspective of a sacred cosmos. These instances can be seen where Pynchon breaks between fiction and reality, particularly when confronting the power events of history and attempting, not to rationalize them, but to confront them and the anxiety which they cause, revealing this reenchanting perspective of the cosmos. An example of this is Pynchon’s re-construction of the history of the Herero of the Southwest region in Africa. Pynchon re-creates this African tribe’s narrative and adds a startling message through the characterization of the tribe’s fictional leader, Oberst Enzian, Blicero’s former lover and protégé. Enzian has many militant followers who form the Schwarzkommando and who want to use the Rocket to restore his people’s might and glory doing so in part militarily but only to further their goal of reaching “the Moon” to find its “true message,” whether that be as a “bringer of evil” or an “avenger” of wrongs (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 327). Then there is the rivalry between Enzian and Joseph Ombindi. Ombindi is the leader of a particular sect of the Herero called Erdschweinhohle, or the Empty Ones, who wish to commit mass suicide as a form of “Tribal death” in protest of the wrongs done to their people through the “Christian death” enforced by Colonial forces, particularly the forces of Dominus Blicero (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 322). Pynchon re-constructs this narrative from the history of the Herero based on accounts of their

colonization and attempted extermination by the Germans in 1904 and the attempt by the Germans to re-colonize Africa during World War II. In a letter dated 1969 to Thomas Hirsch with whom Pynchon had correspondence regarding Hirsch's research of the 1922 uprising of the Hottentots against their German oppressors, Pynchon wrote:

The problem...with getting the African side of it, is that the Hereros were preliterate and everything available from them is (a) anecdotal and (b) filtered through the literate (McLuhan), Western, Christian biases of European reporters, usually missionaries. But I feel personally that the number done on the Herero head by the Germans is the same number done on the American Indian head by our own colonists and what is now being done on the Buddhist head in Vietnam by the Christian minority in Saigon and their advisors: the imposition of a culture valuing analysis and differentiation on a culture that valued unity and integration.
(quoted in Witzling 159)

In this excerpt from his letter, it is clear that while conducting his research concerning the Herero, Pynchon did have an ethical perspective concerning the dehumanization and destructive treatment of other humans and his perspective was utter rejection. Pynchon chooses to graphically detail these dehumanizing and destructive events within *Gravity's Rainbow* in order to remind the reader that there is a choice to not give into these horrible behaviors because eventually they will lead to cataclysmic events like nuclear annihilation. The thought of these cataclysmic events forces the reader to re-evaluate not only his or her own life choices but also forces the reader to re-evaluate his or her place in the world. This is similar to an encounter with the sublime or some sort of divine force, not because of the mechanism, the Rocket, which creates the cataclysm, but because of the mental journey which the reader is taken on leading up

to the moment right before the Rocket actually lands and presumably explodes. This leads to the other use of the term “end of history” as a term within eschatology, particularly Christian eschatology.

David Leigh details the description of the Christian eschatological end of history as explained by Zachary Hayes. Hayes states that the end of history represents the “final moment, goal and purpose, and fulfillment, in which occurs in Christ the ‘self-transcendence of history into eternity’” (quoted in Leigh 17). The cataclysmic or apocalyptic event then becomes the “final breaking through of the victorious presence of divine grace that has been present throughout history” and through which allows for “both human and divine freedom and in which final judgments are loving encounters of human freedom with divine affirmation” (Leigh 17-18). Again, as seen above, within *Gravity’s Rainbow* this apocalyptic event is the development and use of the Rocket threatening to destroy each character. Each character is then given the choice to act in concord with this loving relationship with the cosmos, the divine, and with other humans or against those relationships. This ultimate revelation is pointed at by each of the many seemingly fragmentary episodes found within *Gravity’s Rainbow* and is pointed at by the intricate web of events and people which Pynchon creates.

Based on the evidence provided by these interactive episodes and reconstruction of historical events, *Gravity’s Rainbow* was never meant to be seen as a static object but as the beginning of a discussion with the reader and with society at large. Similarly, Frederic Jameson, who himself was using a medieval theological framework for his analysis based on interpretations of Christianity as a mode of culture and hermeneutics developed by the lower class medieval serf, or slave, came to the conclusion in his article, “On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act,” that “all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the

destiny of a community” (“On Interpretation” 70). Even within Jameson’s point of view, even though the creation of literature and even the reading of literature may be done alone, it is not meant to be experienced alone because it concerns the entirety of the community. In the case of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, that community, as will be shown further, is the entirety of the human race. In addition, in his essay, “Creation and Cosmos: The Symbolics of Proclamation and Participation,” postmodern theologian James Buchanan concludes that “There is only one symbol which truly captures the idea and feeling of the fullness of language. This symbol is creation. Only the word as creative actualizes its potential” which alters “one’s mode of being from one of detachment to one of participation” (Buchanan 41). From combining these concepts, it becomes clear that in their production *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Ender’s Game*, and *Underworld* are intended for a reader whose interpretation cannot occur without meditation on the destiny of the community within which the reader is a part, i.e. the human race. Therefore, it is not just in its writing and its existence afterward, but specifically through its discourse with the reader and through the reader with society, that *Gravity’s Rainbow* (along with *Ender’s Game* and *Underworld*) becomes actualized and takes part in the process of reenchancement as a radical participation within the cosmos. This discourse is in actuality occurring within the reader’s mind and therefore the reader him or herself is also pulled into a process of reenchancement through the radical acknowledgment of the existence of and participation within the cosmos.

The choice to use the term “reenchancement” is not to emphasize a nostalgic desire for times past but for exiting a stoic and gnostic duality and returning to a state of oneness in which it is okay to feel, to feel pain and ecstasy, separate and distinct but as one part of the ultimate joy of simply being alive. As seen, this is shown in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, but is also shown in *Ender’s Game* as well when Ender must enter into the virtual world of the “Battle Games.” Ender at first

enjoys the games. The narrator tells the reader “Ender liked it better, though, when two boys played against each other...it quickly became clear which of them was worth anything at the strategy of it” (Card 46). This all then becomes uprooted when Ender explains how he began to be bored or “pall” at the games because “The boys” had been “so trained by the computer” that they “tried to emulate the computer. Think like a machine instead of a boy” (Card 46). This type of machine thinking is binary, in literal terms, as computer code, but also, metaphorically, as the artificial binary thinking ushered in by the type of rationalizing of the world which Max Weber, Morris Berman, and John McClure speak about. This is exemplified through Ender’s experience in the “Giant’s Drink” episode.

In the episode, the player of the game, in this case Ender, is forced to pick between “two liquids” which a Giant has set forth on a table and the player is told “One is poison and one is not” and that if you “guess right,” the Giant will “take you to fairyland” (Card 63). We are told the liquids “had never repeated” (Card 63), shifting forms and colors every time, making the player feel as if there was a new chance in every iteration. However, after several drinks, Ender realizes both liquids kill him no matter their appearance. This is the idea of the false binary. We are often forced to choose between options which are often not truly viable such as choosing between lives of flesh or lives of spirit or choosing between the success of the human race over the success of the environment. Ender opines that “it isn’t fair,” and “it’s stupid,” and “[i]t’s rotten” (Card 64) to have to make such choices. Ender pokes through these false binaries when he makes his final choice. At this point the reader is told that Ender goes back another time, “up the hills until they turned into bread” (Card 64). Instead of drinking the potions, Ender “kicks one over, then the other,” to which the Giant cries, like the boys bullying Ender, “[c]heater, cheater” (Card 64). Ender again ignores the rules and “clamber[s] up” the Giant’s “lip and nose

and began to dig in the Giant's eye. The stuff came away like cottage cheese" (Card 64) as the Giant fell. At this point the reader is told "the view shifted" as the Giant fell with "intricate, lacy trees all around" and a bat which Ender offers "a handful of the Giant's eyestuff" to which the bat speaks saying "Welcome to Fairyland" (Card 65). This scene seems like a triumph for Ender as he finally pushes his way past to his own success, throwing away the false binaries given to him. The problem lies in how Ender achieved his goal. However, Ender guiltily admits he murdered the Giant: "I am a murderer, even when I play" (Card 65). Ender is making the same mistake here which he will make at the end of the novel with the buggers, following the same pattern of othering, conquering, and destroying to get what he wants.

Some important details about Card's focus on countering these processes of othering and conquest emerge from the details by which hills turn to "bread," the game revolves around the transforming "liquids" and the transformation of the eyes into "cottage cheese." These are food resources, things which we imbibe into our bodies and which give us sustenance. Card is making a direct reference to how, as humans, we often compete and fight for available resources to the point of destruction of those around us. All of these scenes also involve the transformation of the landscape, the liquid, and the Giant's body. Transformation is not just a sign of change but of life, fertile life. The computer simulation is not just reacting to code here but as Ender comes to realize, is also reacting to him. Major Imbu reminds Colonel Graff when he is upset that he does not have control over the simulation and that "[t]he mind game is a relationship between the child and the computer. Together they create stories. The stories are true in so much as they reflect the reality of the child's life" (Card 121). Card is reminding the reader that as much as this is being called a game, it reflects real life - real life attitudes, real life actions, and of course real-life consequences. The computer is not just a program of code but has a creativeness in

which it is shaping reality and interacting and entering into discourse with Ender. Jeremy Proulx writes about this discourse in terms of Max Weber's philosophical forebear, Friedrich Schelling in his article "Illusions of Freedom, Tragedies of Fate: The Moral Development of Ender Wiggin" in the collection *Ender's Game and Philosophy: The Logic Gate is Down*. Proulx explains that for Schelling good and evil actions must be understood as a "balance in terms of an organic model: 'an individual body part, like the eye, is only possible within the whole of an organism'" (Proulx 24). Proulx goes on to explain that "[a]s independent individuals, we answer only to ourselves. But we're also dependent on the social order and we can only become individuals in the context of this" (Proulx 24). Proulx here is reminding us, like Wilder and Miller, that as individuals we do have free agency; our actions are not programmed but they are responses to the world around us and our own moral code about what is right and wrong. Card is also showing us that our agency can be manipulated but it is incumbent upon us as individuals to not only understand that risk but to take responsibility when we transgress on someone else's agency. Proulx is still stuck in an anthropocentric mindset, however, as he is only discussing human sociality.

Instead of dealing only with humans, Card includes other agents which Ender must contend with and consider his actions against, including the Giant and later the Formics. Card is forcing us out of our anthropocentric perspectives which often are used to justify transgressions against other living and non-living creatures and instead is reminding us of the creative aspects of non-living existence such as the food and shelter it provides as shown in Ender's simulation. Further, Card reminds us as readers that both living and non-living creatures have existences of their own that must be understood and respected rather than conquered or forced to do what we want when we want it. Adding to this picture, the reader is told toward the end of the novel that

the Formics had “built this place for me, and the Giant’s corpse and the playground and the ledge at the end of the World” (Card 320). The world of the game and of the simulation was not mimicking reality; it was becoming reality, including Ender’s choices to conquer and murder to achieve the results he wanted. Ender manipulated the world around him, othering it, to the point that he could not see the life teeming within it, through it, trying to reach out to him and coexist. Card’s *Ender’s Game* comes to act as a form of reenchancement by bringing the reader to become aware of not just false binaries but the way in which we interact with the entities, living and non-living around us, causing reality to usher forth from these reactions, creating a feeling of working in concert with the cosmos.

Just as Card focuses on both the human and the non-human, living and non-living, so too does DeLillo focus on these topics in *Underworld*. As seen above, Nick’s efforts in *Underworld* to rationalize Jimmy’s abandonment of him and his actions in regard to his shooting of George, at first lead only to empty contemplation ending in his frustration as an adolescent. It is Nick’s uncontrolled frustration which brings him to feel this sense of disenchantment as a loss of identity and loss purpose. Dr. Lindblad, the psychologist at the prison Nick is assigned to, attempts to restore that sense of purpose in Nick by telling him that he has an obligation to try to make sense of the events of his life. Nick calls his shooting of George “a gesture without history” (*Underworld* 509). Nick is attempting to avoid the fact that murder and death occur every day and that his actions were also linked with George’s actions. What Nick is attempting to do is to localize and particularize the event to his own being without thought of the other participants in the event. The event entirely paralyzed Nick and separated him from what was before considered his reality. Nick may have felt as if the gesture had no history but as Dr. Lindblad states Nick’s “father was the third person in the room the day” he shot George. Dr. Lindblad tells Nick, “You

have a history...that you are responsible to..... You're required to try to make sense of it. You owe it your complete attention" (*Underworld* 512). Dr. Lindblad's comments above attempt to restore in Nick a drive and purpose by telling him that he must try and make sense of the events in his life not by isolating the event to his own person but to examine all of the participants, their roles, and coming to terms with any inconsistencies or mysteries that might still remain. This message is later echoed by Fr. Paulus at the Jesuit school Nick gets sent to. Fr. Paulus asks Nick rhetorically "how serious can a man be if he doesn't experience a full measure of the appetites and passions of his race, even if only to contain them or direct them, somehow usefully?" (*Underworld* 539). Fr. Paulus goes on to state that "only intense actions will strengthen a habit...An intense and persevering will...constancy...A sense of purpose. A self-chosen goal" (*Underworld* 539). At this point Nick actually begins to listen and to act upon the advice of both Father Paulus and Dr. Lindblad and tries to come to terms with his past. Dr. Lindblad and Fr. Paulus's comments also point out that the shooting of George did have a history and its history was related to the metaphorical death of Nick's father and Nick's desire to find closure with that event. This desire led Nick to seek out George as a father-like figure and a possible subsequent desire to kill George as a proxy for his own father, finding completion in the well-known Oedipus cycle. Theoretically, by completing the cycle, Nick would have been able to throw off the influence of his father and become his own man. However, that does not occur. Instead Nick is now faced with the metaphorical death of his father which he still has no answers to and the physical death of George for which he holds some of the responsibility, although George had told Nick the gun was not loaded. Therefore, the ambiguity and uncertainty with which Nick is now double what it was before. In addition, Nick must now face questions about whether he is a "bad person," "a murderer," or a "delinquent," questions of public and personal judgment but

which also lead to questions of cosmic or divine judgment especially in the Catholic New York culture of the 1950s and 60s of which Nick was a part. The answers to these questions are also what Dr. Lindblad is getting at. By developing this sense of history, Nick would also be creating for himself a purpose which would be to make sense of the events in his life by acknowledging that they happened, that he took part in them, and by using them as lessons to learn from. This would also create an identity for Nick which would be Nick Shay the person who has experienced the events and gained a sense of self because of them. Nick is left with the choice to act upon this advice or not and take control of his own history, his own narrative. Nick's narrative is then connected to the narrative of George, of Nick's father, and of all of the people around the world and all of the existence within the cosmos. This cosmic narrative is displayed through the narratives concerning recycling and waste management.

After his studies at the Jesuit school in Minnesota, Nick comes to study waste and the processes by which waste is recycled and contained. It is not just Nick's career that becomes associated with waste management but his home life is consumed by it: "we remove the wax paper from the cereal boxes...We do clear glass versus colored glass...the yard waste, the paper bags flattened" (*Underworld* 807). Nick becomes obsessed over ritualistic minutiae about waste. Nick, now an adult in the novel, believes that "[w]aste is a religious thing. We entomb contaminated waste with a sense of reverence and dread." (*Underworld* 88) For Nick, and DeLillo, material waste comes to contain an element of history in that the objects become reminders our past experiences. The use of the words "entomb," "reverence," and "dread" all refer to death and religious respect for the dead, not because of their death but because of what it implies for us, the coming of our own death.

This concept of recognizing our own death in our refuse is discussed by Lee Rozelle in his essay “Re-surveying DeLillo’s “White Space on the Map”: Liminality and Communitas in *Underworld*.” Rozelle explains that “[p]erhaps the fact that our refuse will survive us is one reason the clergy of garbage represented in *Underworld* appears so fixated on its potential for generating fear, reverence, and paranoia” (Rozelle 449). This is further explored by Samuel Chase Coale in his essay “Quantum Flux and Narrative Flow: Don DeLillo’s Entanglements With Quantum Theory,” Coale states that “As far as we can tell about the quantum world itself, which remains inaccessible, invisible, unanalyzable, and unknown, it exists in a state of perpetual and random flux, forever fluid, foggy, blurred, contradictory, and of such a radical otherness no one has yet been able to fully understand or fathom it” (Coale 264). Coale quotes about this entanglement that the real mystery is in the connection between matter and energy which DeLillo traces through his descriptions of waste and action. Coale states “DeLillo has seized on the notion that power lies in human perception, the way we see and construct our world, related to “the vast amounts of energy stored in matter . . . This is the real power. How the mind operates. How the mind identifies, analyzes and represents. What beauty and power” (*Underworld* 735)” (Coale 282). Coale further writes that “Such power expresses itself in transition from matter to energy and back to matter, from conscious thought and/or intuition to other” (Coale 282). Again, it is the fact that we as humans die and waste continues on, if only for just a few decades more that creates this disturbance, this fear, reverence, and paranoia over waste. Nick’s colleague Jesse Detwiler at the recycling company Whiz Co. explains this concept to Nick at the company training event, stating that “Garbage always got layered over or pushed to the edges...[b]ut it had its own momentum. It pushes back. It pushed into every space available, dictating construction patterns and altering systems of ritual. And it produced rats and

paranoia” (*Underworld* 287). Implied in Detwiler’s commentary is that waste piles up because we die faster than it takes for the waste to organically or chemically break down. Detwiler also mentions rats. This seemingly innocuous comment is important because rats, and the fleas they carry, are thought to be carriers of disease, including the bubonic plague. So, waste itself, in its ability to attract rodents potentially carrying diseases, becomes a threat to human civilization. If we break this down further then it is seen that it is not even the fact that the waste itself survives that is at issue but instead the issue is the fact that we die because we are made of matter but we are also made of thoughts, out of consciousness, and of energy, so what happens to that energy? If energy moves on to other matter, then does our consciousness move on too?

The mystery of waste also becomes the mystery of the death and the questions of the transformation of existence after we die, transformations that occur innumerable every day throughout time. Eric, a friend of Nick’s brother Matt, worries about these transformations in regard to news he has heard about nuclear testing. Eric worries about nuclear energy seems to destroy everything, a destruction that is really a transformation of the matter back to its basic components. Eric states about the effects of nuclear radiation that “you wake up one morning and your teeth start flipping out of their sockets, painlessly and bloodlessly” and you wrap them in “cold wet gauze” but then later “you take the gauze out....and there’s nothing there but a small mound of powder” (*Underworld* 414). Eric goes on to analyze the situation stating that “these things that last a million years in the jaws of prehistoric people, in the skulls that we dig up and study. Turned to dust in your pocket in six frigging minutes” (*Underworld* 414). Eric reveals the truth of why Nick and Detwiler Coates’s ideas about the believe waste is sacred. Waste becomes our archaeology. Our way to tell our history. As Eric points out, part of our waste is also our dead and decaying body. Up until this point culture was built on a notion of the sacredness of the

material object, including the materiality of our bodies. However, our experiments into nuclear radiation and quantum physics have forced us to reimagine what is left of our material existence: dust and energy. Our material bodies break down and are transformed into dust, which becomes soil, from which new life will begin. Much of our particular mass, the particles which make up our bodies, will be broken down and reconfigured somehow. The concept does not end there. In this same scene, DeLillo places Matt, Nick's brother, looking at "Landstat photos shot from space" contemplating how "[t]he photo mosaics seemed to reveal a secondary beauty in the world, ordinarily unseen, some hallucinatory fuse of exactitude and rapture. Every thermal burst of color was a complex emotion he could not locate or name" (*Underworld* 415). Matt here is in awe of the ability of the satellites to read the thermal energy being radiated off of the earth and to differentiate it and digitize it into pictures. The thermal energy is caused by the absorption of energy of matter and the energy given off through metabolization, the destroying of one thing to create energy for another, and decomposition, which one could argue is another form of metabolization. This means that our bodies are made up of the metabolized particles of other entities and that those other entities are also made up of such particles. However, notice these pictures come from a satellite in space, so human life, our waste, is not limited to the earth; it is in space, becoming our space junk. Again, that means these particles that were once human are now making up cosmic matter and we are made up of the dust from long dead stars. This is the quantum entanglement. This quantum entanglement then reveals that the dissolution of Nick's anxiety through embracing the idea of recycling is really about embracing this idea of transformation so that death does not need to be conquered. Further, by recognizing our particles make up various alternate entities, these entities do not need to be othered and conquered as the International Fleet believes regarding the Formics in *Ender's Game*. Neither do humans need to

attempt the continuation of life through synthetic plastics and machines like in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Instead, DeLillo's *Underworld* leads to the process of reenchantment by leading the reader to recognize that our particulate composition is the same composition of the rest of the cosmos and the entities within it, including our concept of God, and therefore our existence is intertwined and interdependent upon these other entities.

This interdependence of existence is further shown in *Gravity's Rainbow* through the de-centering of Tyrone Slothrop. Slothrop's de-centering occurs two thirds of the way through the book, leaving the final third of the book to be populated by the adventures and actions of the other characters. However, the journey of the rest of the novel does not end up becoming Slothrop's or any other character's in the book but the journey of the reader leading toward the moment at which the Rocket is descending on the Orpheus Theatre. Each of the other characters' stories moves the reader closer to that moment. The de-centering of Slothrop begins when Slothrop learns his connection to the V-2 rocket via the sexual conditioning of his "infant hardon" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 86) by the Swiss behaviorist Laszlo Jamf in connection to the mysterious plastic Impolex G (*Gravity's Rainbow* 245) which is used in the construction of the V-2 Rocket, which, again, is about two thirds of the way through the novel. Slothrop's fragmentation and de-centering occurs when "Past Slothrops, say averaging one a day, ten thousand of them, some more powerful than others, had been going over every sundown to the furious host" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 636) occurs in the middle of this last third of the novel and just a few pages into the fourth and final section called "The Counterforce." The fact that Slothrop's de-centering occurs within the first few pages of "The Counterforce" is one indicator that Slothrop is not the main concern of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Like the use of the call and response, dream sequences, and the historical events mentioned earlier like Pynchon's concern for the

Herero, Slothrop's story is one of the many interweaving narratives which the novel uses to represent the collective human experience. This collective experience acts as a form of re-enchantment by effectively reconnecting the reader with his or her own humanness and the distinctness of our species while still respecting each individual narrative story. The creation of this collective experience is not limited to human existence though. This collective human experience is situated within Pynchon's other area of concern, our place within the much larger cosmos. This represents what David Ray Griffin describes as "panentheism" in which "the relations between things are regarded as internal to them" as a part of the cosmological function of which "their participation in the universal web of interconnections" is "itself holy or sacred" and is "the source of all value and power" (Griffin 20). This is a form of theopoetics in which the concept of God is not a static entity but built within the fabric of reality, so not only can this conception of God act in the cosmos but our actions affect God as well. Nancy Howells states about this non-human existence in her chapter "Relating to Nature" from her book *A Feminist Cosmology: Ecology, Solidarity, and Metaphysics*, that "diversity is a value to be cultivated within nature in its variety and among humans in their variety" (Howells 60). This leads Howells to recommend that "because of the continuity within nature and the ecological relationships within nature, values in nature and humanity are connected; therefore, choices should consider the contributions of existents to the well-being of other existents and the biosphere" (Howells 60). This leads Howells to conclude that "this continuity means that nature and culture are mutually implicated in sustaining the value and potentials of human, organic, and inorganic existents" (Howells 60). Howells' statement reminds us that our world and our community grow out from nature and as much as we try to separate ourselves from nature, nature and culture are interdependent on each other. If nature, a type of other, loses its variety, then just like differing

cultures losing their variety, the ability of the self to create boundaries and define a sense of self becomes hindered. Defining that sense of self is to generate a level of agency in which one's actions are infused with one's will. Howells explains that humans rely on the natural and cosmic world around us as a "mutually" responsible partner, stating that "nature and culture are mutually implicated in sustaining the value and potential of human, organic, and inorganic existents" (Howells 60). Howells explains how the will of the self and its actions act upon and are acted upon by the other entities in the cosmos, creating an interdependence between humans and the rest of the cosmos.

Pynchon represents this larger, interconnected cosmological existence through depictions of existence outside of the human race and human perceptions of and interactions with this larger cosmological existence. Pynchon includes episodes such as the Dodo birds and their extermination at the hands of settlers such as Katje's ancestor, Franz Van der Groov. In this section Pynchon includes descriptive text of the island Van der Groov was exploring, explaining that "uplands where the craters of old volcanoes cupped rainfall blue as the sky in upward offering" and "jagged mountains in full daylight flaring as he watched into freak saffrons, streaming indigos, the sky his glass house, all the island his tulipomania... southern stars too thick for constellations teeming in faces and creatures of fable less likely than the dodo" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 111). At one point, Van der Groov sits waiting for a baby dodo bird to hatch so that he can kill it: "There they were, the silent egg and the crazy Dutchman, and the hookgun that linked them forever" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 111). Pynchon goes on to write: "Only the sun moved: from zenith down at last behind the snaggleteeth of mountains to Indian Ocean, to tarry night" and that "The egg, without a quiver," was "still unhatched" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 111). Van der Groov thinks to himself "He should have blasted it then where it lay: he understood that the

bird would hatch before dawn. But a cycle was finished” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 111). Further, the scene of the Dodo birds is linked directly to Slothrop. Van der Groov is Katje’s ancestor. Katje is the double agent whom Slothrop saves from the Octopus Grigori when he “tosses the crab a few feet along the beach, and what do know the octopus goes for it all right” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 189). The Octopus Grigori has been conditioned to seek out Katje by Pointsman through conditioning at the White Visitation government research facility where Katje posed for a film that “follows as she moves deliberately...an adolescent wideness and hunching to the shoulders, her hair not so bluntly Dutch at all” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 116). Katje ends up at the White Visitation after Pirate Prentice tells her to go there after he saves her from the Shußstelle 3. At Shußstelle 3, Katje was supposed to be spying on the German General Dominus Blicero and his V-2 Rockets but instead became a prisoner in Blicero’s playing the sadomasochistic Hansel and Gretel “Oven-game” with “the yellowhaired and blueeyed youth,” Gottfried, her “silent double” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 103). Gottfried may be the double of Katje but he is “strangely opposite to the African- a color negative, yellow and blue” to Blicero’s other sex partner, the Herero “Enzian” whose name is given to him by Blicero in honor of “Rilke’s mountainside gentian of Nordic colors” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 103). It is Enzian who appears to Slothrop in a fantasy-dream sequence and explains to him that he believes he and his people are “here, but only in a statistical way” because “[f]orty years ago, in Sudwest, we were nearly exterminated” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 367). Enzian goes on to explain that “[t]o those of us who survived the Trotha, it also means that we have learned to stand outside our history and watch it, without feeling too much” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 368). Enzian further elaborates on a sense that “we grew so close to the Rocket” because of an “awareness of how contingent, like ourselves the Aggregate 4 could be-how at the mercy of small things...dust that gets in the timer...a film of grease you can’t even see” then the

whole thing combusts prematurely. Enzian gives a detailed account of the colonization, the othering, the attempted destruction, and the forced labor the Germans put the Herero people through. Enzian's account of the German occupation of Sudwest is similar to the experience of the Dodo bird. Enzian even recognizes that if any factor had changed, a piece of dust floating into the wrong place, then the Herero would have become extinct like the dodo birds which Van der Groov hunted. Pynchon's emphasis on the connection of events, including the cyclical nature of the events, helps to tie the novel to and lead the reader toward the ongoing processes of the cosmos of which we as humans are only a tiny part but over which we have much influence.

Pynchon demonstrates here the inextricable link between the various layers of existence. The Dodo bird is small, awkward, and fragile and so is dependent in part on our actions as humans whether those actions be to shoot it, to send pigs or dogs to kill it, or to ruin its natural habitat through colonization or development of human settlements. We humans are also dependent of each other to not enslave and kill each other individually or culturally such as the destruction of the Herero. At the same time, we as humans are dependent on the wider cosmic creation such as the volcano whose lava created the land Van der Groov was standing upon and whose rain, cupped in the ancient mountains and volcanoes, provides drinking water and acts as a natural water shed for the spread of vegetation such as the saffron, indigo, and tulips. All of this earthly existence is then posited in an even larger universe teeming with stars so plentiful that Van der Groov could not even make sense of them or control them by ordering them into a series of constellations. Even more startling is the fact that Van der Groov can only see a tiny fraction of the stars that are actually out in space. This again demonstrates the mysterious, miraculous and limitless power of cosmological creation and our interdependent relationship

with it. Our relationship to each other as humans and to nature and the cosmos is further commented on at length by theorists like Emmanuel Levinas and Christian Moraru.

Christian Moraru begins *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary* by defining the significant development which makes the cosmodern age different than the modern and the idea of the postmodern. Moraru states that a striking development in our age is that “The historically unrivaled intensity and extensity with which our relations with others recast our world and our representation of it are giving birth, I argue to a particular way of seeing this world and ourselves in it, to a new, “cosmodern” cultural imaginary if not to a new cultural paradigm altogether – to an entire ‘cosmodernism’” (Moraru 2). Moraru goes on to explain that we are in an age where it is getting harder for the “self and other” to find places where they “could opt out of the mutual “defining” context of each other’s proximity, influence, and inquiring gaze” (Moraru 3). The implication of this proximity is an inability to escape the gaze of the other and vice versa and that means that there is now a “condition of knowledge of representation, and self-representation” that Moraru calls the “cosmodern condition” (Moraru 3). Moraru goes on to explain that this condition happens when there is a breakdown between the “familial and familiar,” but this relation is not entirely separated or “decoupled” but that “their overlap, renders “hereness” (Moraru 3) less homey, less certain, and full of certainties to the residing self and therefore correspondingly thought-provoking, rife with the questions presented by the defamiliarizing presence and beliefs of others” (Moraru 3). Moraru here is alluding to the fact that we define ourselves by defining what is the not us-- aka the other. Moraru is concerned that because we are becoming an ever-globalized culture able to constantly be in contact with each other, our differences, are being eroded and therefore our sense of self is also coming into question. Our sense of self is

predicated on this difference and how this difference allows us to interact with the various different entities we come in contact with. Therefore, it is in our best interest to keep the wide diversity of both human and cosmic nature, otherwise we limit our own potentialities. These statements incorporate and assume Emmanuel Levinas's ideas about how the conceptions of the self are formed.

Emmanuel Levinas in his chapter "The Proximity of the Other" states that "Even the philosophy that questions the meaning of being does so on the basis of the encounter with the Other" (Levinas 97). Levinas goes on to further describe this process as "subordinating knowledge, objectification, to the encounter with the other that is presupposed in all language" (Levinas 97). The relationship that is being described is that in order for language to exist there is presupposed someone to communicate that language to/with. There then is a desire for an "encounter" to communicate with the not "I" but even before the self can materialize as a self, as an "I" in thought, there must be some juxtaposition that requires the self to define itself. Definition implies that the self has boundaries and those boundaries imply a proximity, a placement near something that is not the self. Therefore, in order to have any desire to define one's self, there must be a first desire to encounter or be placed in proximity to the other, that makes possible the creation of the boundaries of the self. The revelation of the boundary of the self and other leads to the thought about cosmic creation and how every entity is a product of such a process. Because we rely on these other entities for our resources and our sense of self, and the other entities do the same, then we become interdependent agents toward each other's existence.

Ender's Game also emphasizes this interdependency of existence when Ender is taken to Eros, one of the original forward colony stations of the Formics. Ender is chided by Mazer

Rackham “Ender, look around you. Human beings didn’t carve this place” (Card 269). Mazer is specifically talking only about that forward colony but this passage is also metaphoric in that it refers to the fact that humans did not build the cosmos. We are a part of it but we did not build it, yet just like the humans on the forward colony, we live in nature, surrounded by it reminding us of just how non-human it is yet how much we rely on it. As Mazer Rackham goes on, we see just how dependent human society has become on the Formics: “We learned gravity manipulation because they enhanced the gravity here. We learned efficient use of stellar energy because they blacked out this planet” (Card 270). Rackham is explaining how humans have now learned how to utilize gravity and energy given from the stars, similar to the solar energy we use today. Humans did not create these items, instead, they were provided to human society by nature and the cosmos. Humans did not invent the ideas of using stellar energy or photonic particles but formulated them from Formic ideas. Rackham even explains earlier that “The buggers don’t talk. They think to each other, and it’s instantaneous, like the photonic effect. Like the ansible” (Card 267). The ansible is the piece of technology which allows humans to control the photonic particles throughout the cosmos which allows them instantaneous communication like the Formics. This is because the humans learned the technique from the Formics as Graff points out “It’s the most important thing we learned from them” and that “we built the ansible” based on their “photonic physics” (Card 249). Despite the risk of scientism, when we adhere only to scientific viewpoint of what can be seen or sensed materially and the same repeated fashion such as when Graff does not believe the Formics can physically communicate with humans and so he plans for Ender to destroy the Formics because “[i]f the other fellow can’t tell you his story, then you can never be too sure he isn’t trying to kill you (Card 253). Graff cannot materially quantify the thought process of the Formics so he automatically others the Formics and decides that they must die

because they pose a threat because of their otherness. Now, science is not to be mistaken as an evil, science taught humans that we can learn truths from nature as well as facilitating many of our technological discoveries. The problem is when we allow scientism to take over then we begin to other and demonize the things that are not like us such as the Formics, nature, people of different races, genders, and sexualities. This is not one sided either, as Mazer Rackham explains “Don’t start apologizing for them, Ender. Just because they didn’t know they were killing human beings doesn’t mean they weren’t killing human beings” (Card 270). Card here is showing how entities work in a dialectical manner, we act and react. However, this is not predetermined, since no one tells us what the action or reaction should be, or whether murder is the best reaction to murder. What Card is revealing to the reader is that rather than being against these different entities, we could be working with them in concert.

What is sad is that this technology which Graff and Rackham explain humans gained from the Formics is what helps create the International Fleet’s “Dr. Device” also known as the “Molecular Attachment Device” and the “Little Doctor” (Card 272). This device “sets up a field in which molecules can’t hold together anymore” such that “where you had a ship” or say a Formic, then “you now have a lump of dirt with a lot of iron molecules in it” (Card 272). This is the device which Ender eventually uses on the Formic home planet at which point “the entire planet burst apart” (Card 295). This passage reveals that it is not biological or economic determinism which destroyed the Formics but their own technology in the hands of the humans who they mistakenly killed in their own scientific explorations. The Formics inability to understand humans as intelligent, moral and ethical beings, combined with humans’ inability to see Formics as intelligent, moral and ethical beings is what led to the destruction and genocide of the entire Formic race, similar to the Dodo Birds of *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

Pynchon's description of the Dodo Birds and Van der Groov's actions in *Gravity's Rainbow* demonstrate the human capability for massive, irrational destruction, not for food or survival but for the mere pleasure of it. Pynchon demonstrates our ability to choose: to choose to let dodo birds live; to choose to minimize destruction simply to the needs of survival and sustenance. The cosmos has the ability to provide beyond the need of humans and beyond the needs of all creatures if we just take care of it responsibly because our existence is inextricably tied to the existence of these other creatures and the larger cosmos. This also ties back to the discussion between *Gravity's Rainbow* and James Buchanan's concept of the sacred cosmos in which our relationship to the cosmos is predicated on our conscious effort to see the inherent value in each entity. When humans consciously interact with that entity's value in mind, even in the consumption of resources, as humans, we begin to recognize that entities' interconnected relationship to ourselves. This conscious effort is what Buchanan describes as the radical participation within the cosmos. This participation not only incorporates taking action, but at times, slowing down or refusing to take action such as in *Gravity's Rainbow*, when Wimpe is questioned about the Soviet/pure Marxist desire for bloody revolution to which Wimpe replies that "if History's changes are inevitable, why not *not* die" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 715). As can be seen from Wimpe's comment, participation also includes refraining from action, especially destructive behaviors such as the irrational extermination of dodo birds and other human beings or entities such as the Formics in *Ender's Game*. Through this thematic example and through the interactive discourse found within *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon is providing a pathway toward reenchancement by encouraging our participation within that sacred cosmos, but a responsible participation, in which we acknowledge our own humanness, our ability for creation and destruction, and our interdependence on the wider cosmos for the cosmological creations like

food, water, and air which we rely on. Levinas states in “The Word ‘I’, The Word ‘You,’ The Word ‘God’” from *Alterity and Transcendence* that in the call to the individual, the desire to define the self as an individual is being called to interact with the other and that other must include some inherent difference between it and the self. Levinas goes on to state that when the self as ‘I’ and the other interact “the difference between the I and the other remains. But it is maintained as the denial, in proximity which is also difference, of its own negation, as non-indifference toward one another” (Levinas 93). Levinas goes on to describe this as “like the non-indifference between close friends or relatives” which manifests itself as “being concerned with the alterity of the other: fraternity” (Levinas 94). This fraternity does not delete difference but recognizes it. However, there is still a concern for the other that stems from some deeply invested relation between the self and the other. This relation of “fraternity can take on an importance in excess, a fraternity through which the God who 'opens up my lips' (Psalms 51:17) immediately becomes meaningful” (Levinas 96). Levinas here explains that in searching for this deeply invested relation, the self finds a common source, that of cosmological creation for which Levinas uses the term God here and in other places, the Infinite, and in other translations than this, “the wholly other.” For Levinas, the interaction with the other always presupposes a desire for that interaction because of a lure the self has to “the unconditional foundation of the world and cosmology, and reveals, in the face of the other man, the secret of his semantics” (Levinas 96). Levinas describes here that the desire to interact with the other is a desire to get to know the common source of their existence and of the world and the cosmos around them. If we follow this desire to know and to understand the fellow entities around us, living, non-living, intelligent, plant, animal, insect, etc., then we can at least be on a path to prevent the othering of those

entities and prevent the genocides such as the Dodo Birds and Herero from *Gravity's Rainbow* and the destruction of the Formics in *Ender's Game*.

Suzi Gablik widens Levinas' ideas about a desire to get to know the other as a way to combat the destructive forces at work in our society and come to a less destructive understanding of the cosmos. Gablik states that “[r]econstructionists, on the other hand, are trying to make the transition from Eurocentric, patriarchal thinking and the “dominator” model of culture to a more participatory aesthetics of interconnectedness, aimed toward social responsibility, psychospiritual empowerment, deep ecological attunement, good human relations, and a new sense of the sacred” (Gablik 180). Rather than Van Der Groov's destructive obsession with the Dodo bird, this participatory aesthetics of interconnectedness is best demonstrated by the transcendent experience of Slothrop. Slothrop goes out to the woods where he comes across “a set of bagpipes” which he plays for several days and nights until he “began to notice that offerings of food were being left” (*Gravity's Rainbow* 635). Yet Slothrop is still “kept alone” spending “whole days naked, ants crawling up his legs, butterflies lighting on his shoulders, watching the life on the mountain” (*Gravity's Rainbow* 635). Slothrop has become so spiritually attuned in nature that he strips down to his primordial self but that he still has interactions with others through his music, a form of art, in which he wonders “Either he was supposed to be a bagpiper's ghost or just purely sound itself” (*Gravity's Rainbow* 635). However, Slothrop continues to interact with others by scratching and “drawing” the “A4 Rocket” (*Gravity's Rainbow* 637) over doorways, on walls, and on outhouses. Next it is said that Slothrop was cleaning up trash, “picking up rusted beer cans, rubbers yellow with preterite seed, Kleenex wadded to brain shapes hiding preterite snot, preterite tears, newspapers, broken glass, pieces of automobile” (*Gravity's Rainbow* 638). The narrator further tells the reader that “days when in

superstition and fright he could *make it all fit*, seeing clearly in each an entry in a record, a history: his own, his winter's, his country's...instructing him, dunce, and drifter, in ways deeper than he can explain" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 638). Here, Pynchon's vision matches up with the constructive postmodern vision discussed by Griffin and Gablik. Rather than seeing all of these objects as heaps of trash, a postmodern continuation of T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Slothrop views all of these remnant objects as pieces of human history, reflections of the people who have used them. Slothrop is not personifying the objects but demonstrating their cosmological connection to those who used them. In recognizing the objects as a part of the history of those who used them, Slothrop not only recognizes the history and humanity of those whose trash he is picking up, but "his own" history and his own humanity. This is not a step by step template to salvation but a thematic example which leads the reader toward recognizing the interconnections between the many narratives within *Gravity's Rainbow* and the reader's own narrative and own history within reality.

In his essay, "RocketMen and Wastelands: The Destruction of the Individual and the Redemption of the Artist in Pynchon's First Three Novels," Marshall Shord equates Slothrop's transcendence as Pynchon's "use of destruction" that becomes "the last hope of the real individual, the artist. It lies not in changing the world though, but in creating his own world separate from the real world. The idea of destruction as a way of creating a subliminal pattern plays out significantly in *Gravity's Rainbow's* relation to the world in which Pynchon wrote it" (Shord 92). McClure disagrees with Shord stating that Slothrop's transcendence indicates some "sort of redemptive path that might open before a soul as ignorant of spiritual matters as many people in the modern West and wanting to suggest that some sort of redemption is still available to such beings" (McClure 47). Because of the repetition and emphasis on the term "preterite," in

Pynchon's description of Slothrop's transcendence, I think McClure's view is closer to the truth. At the end of the passage the narrator states that Slothrop even "became a crossroad, after a heavy rain" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 638). Pynchon uses the verb "became" rather than using some sort of a simile, representing an emphasis on the act of "becoming" which is an act transformation and self-actualization. In this instance, Slothrop is attuning himself and becoming a human medium for the mysterious power of the cosmos. Through this transformation, Slothrop also rejects the dehumanizing and destructive pathologies of postmodern society. Matthew Fox in his article, "A Mystical Cosmology: Toward a Postmodern Spirituality," calls mediums, "mystics." These are not the same mystics who deny the world as discussed by Max Weber but instead Fox argues that "the mystic has somehow managed to imbibe the powers of the universe, the powers of the cosmos. The power that the spiritual person imbibes is not human-made power, the mystic contributes to the redefinition of power in a culture" and that these powers are the "powers of creativity, justice, and compassion in all persons" (Fox 17). Fox argues that this experience "is about grounding persons and communities in the powers that will enable them to survive and even flourish in the midst of adversity" (Fox 17). Therefore, while in one respect this image of the crossroad seems to dehumanize and objectify Slothrop, only four pages beforehand, the narrator comments that Slothrop was the closest he has ever come to being a "spiritual medium" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 634) and only a page before, the narrator explains that a "crossroads" is "where you can sit and listen in to traffic from the Other Side" (*Gravity's Rainbow* 637). Based on this evidence, it becomes clear that Slothrop is not literally becoming a physical road but a spiritual medium through which a cosmological message is being communicated. I also argue that this implicates the text of *Gravity's Rainbow* as acting as a spiritual medium of reflection from which Pynchon is communicating the message of a holistic,

sacred view of a mysterious but fertile and creative cosmos. This in turn demonstrates the third aspect of cosmology as perceived by Fox, the mystic and psychic response to the power of the cosmos. This response is further demonstrated as the narrator continues “Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural....” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 638). From this example one can see how Slothrop is literally transformed and that in doing so he begins to see the interconnectedness of the cosmos and to appreciate it and to lament its destruction at the hands of the systems of power and control. First, rather than being the sterile, plastic and metallic phallic imagery of the Rocket, the phallic imagery of the rainbow is accompanied by clouds over “Earth” not an Earth covered by heaps of trash but a “green, wet valleyed Earth.” A valley is a hollow in the Earth. The “stout rainbow cock” is being coupled with this hollow to suggest sexual, procreative intercourse. The “heavy rain,” and the words “green” and “wet” suggest fertility and new life. Slothrop feels “natural” because he has recognized his own humanness and his connection to his fellow human beings. Further, from this experience Slothrop has recognized the mystery of the cosmos and has learned his place within it.

This mystical power to redefine a culture and the way we interact with it also shines through in the final chapters of *Ender’s Game*. When Ender realizes that it was all “Real. Not a game” (Card 297), he at first shuts down. However, as he has time to reflect, Ender, hurt and feeling ashamed yells at Graff and Rackham: “I didn’t want to kill them all. I didn’t want to kill anybody! I am not a killer!” (Card 297). Graff explains that they tricked Ender because “[w]e had to have a commander with so much empathy that he would think like the buggers” (Card 298). This is where Card’s narrative is extremely revealing. Even in our destruction, we as

humans have the capability to use our empathetic abilities which Levinas described as the understanding of the Not I as somehow connected to the I. The only way for this understanding to occur is for the Not I, here the Formics, and the I, the humans in *Ender's Game*, to have come from the same source: cosmological creation. The issue was not that we did not understand them but that the forces of manipulation and control surrounding the International Fleet needed someone who could understand them so perfectly that they could use that understanding to destroy them. Graff and Rackham explain to Ender that they had to trick him because anyone with that level of empathy “could never be the killer we needed” (Card 298) and that “[y]ou had to be a weapon, Ender. Like a gun, like the Little Doctor, functioning perfectly... We aimed you. We're responsible” (Card 298). Ender is being told that he was specifically objectified and othered for the purpose of turning him into a weapon against the buggers. This is not a form of predetermination though. Others had figured out what was happening as Mazer Rackham tell Ender about the pilots he sent to die that “[t]hey knew it, Ender, and they went anyway. They knew what it was for” (Card 298). Ender could have put the pieces together at any time but his desire to win at all costs and the direction of his empathy toward the buggers and not others caused him to close himself off to these realizations. Card reveals how we conduct this othering and weaponization of people all of the time in our militaries, our factories and corporations, and yes, even in our schools and sports teams, setting our children and students against each other. However, this is where Ender becomes the greatest counterforce against this process. Ender does not rise up with his fellow army, turning against the International Fleet or their “Polemarch” (Card 299) as is feared by some. Instead, he “grieved for a billion, billion murders” (Card 300) and becomes upset that as Graff goes on trial for war crimes, he “killed ten billion buggers, whose queens, at least, were as alive and wise as any man, who had not even launched a third

attack against us, and no one thinks to call it a crime” (Card 309) . Card here reveals the guilt and shame which Ender feels but Ender does not just hide from the wrongs he has committed.

Though Ender is forced to be in charge of the colonization efforts of the Formics, he comes to a place which one of his soldiers, Abra says “it’s like a giant died here” and that “the Earth grew up to cover its carcass” (Card 317). Not only is this reference to the appearance of the landscape but it is also referring to the spot that Ender now realizes the Formics had “built” (Card 317) for him from the landscape of the Giant’s Drink game. Inside Ender finds “[t]he pupa of a queen bugger, already fertilized by the larval males, ready, out of her own body, to hatch a hundred thousand buggers, including a few queens and males” (Card 319). This also reveals that the Formics were not just physically building a spot on a distant planet but were tapped into the computer simulation of the Giant’s Drink and were building the game within the computer simulation just as much as Ender’s mind was. It was a shared world in virtual space that mimicked the shared world they could create in reality. In his essay “Why Ender Can’t Go Home: Philotic Connections and Moral Responsibility” in the collection *Ender’s Game and Philosophy: The Logic Gate is Down*, Brett Chandler Patterson comments on the relationship between Levinas and the idea of a shared cosmology. Patterson writes that “Levinas focuses on how difference or ‘alterity’ challenges our perceptions of ourselves and the worlds in which we live. An ethical relationship already exists between us and others before we are able to reflect upon it” (Patterson 119). Patterson explains that science fiction has a special role in that “through exaggerated difference” it exposes what happens in all encounters with other life forms, human or not” (Patterson 120). In this particular instance, the encounters that Ender has with the Formics is predicated on the landscape, on the juncture of the living and the non-living. Patterson states that “Art and written language record what’s ‘said’; they are fossils that give testimony to

the living moments of communication,” explaining further that “the landscape that the buggers have shaped for Ender is just such a testament, and Ender has to work to discover the meaning of it” (Patterson 120). That meaning at first seems melancholic due to the death of the Giant and the Formics at Ender’s hands. However, the landscape also reveals that despite the Giant having died at Ender’s hands, new life formed. Just as the carcass acts as a memorial telling the story of the Giant’s death, this spot tells the story of the Formic’s death. Just as new life and vegetation arose from the decomposing flesh of the Giant, so too can new life spring from the remnants of the Formic colonies but it can’t happen alone. In her last moments, the Formic queen imparts into Ender using her phlotic connection, images of how he could help her, keeping her moist, “splitting open the cocoon, and “helping her walk from her birthwater to a nesting place” (Card 320). Together, Ender and the queen Formic share a moment of despair in which they realize “How were we to know? We could live with you in peace. Believe us, believe us, believe us” (Card 321). From that moment Ender swears to help the new, baby queen and “tell your story to my people, so that perhaps in time, they can forgive you, too. The way that you have forgiven me” (Card 321). Ender and the new queen come to embody the ending chapter title, “Speaker of the Dead.” Card here reveals how when we create and perceive differences so disparate that they seem not to be able to be reconciled, it only leads to destruction. Using a cosmological interpretive strategy reveals that the ending of *Ender’s Game* emphasizes the role of literature as the story which “Speaker of the Dead” shares with the cosmos. This story depicts an event in which different entities from the cosmos, despite competing for resources, can work together, work in concert with each other, in order to create, not objectification and destruction, but a shared life of mutual, ethical, and moral responsibility.

At the end of *Underworld*, Nick comes to appreciate history, his history in particular, because he has come to understand that every experience is priceless because it occurs to a living, conscious being. Nick's value of life and history has allowed him to become a very careful and conscientious father to his son and daughter because he has experienced the loss and metaphorical death of a father and has brought about by his own hands the physical death of a father-like figure. At the end of the novel Nick states that he has helped to build a new waste management and recycling facility that brings "in the unsorted slop, the squalor of our lives" and turns out "product blocks, pristine" into "the world again" and that "we all feel better when we leave" (*Underworld* 810). From this the reader can see that Nick has confronted his anxiety crisis about the discarded personal experiences of his adolescence purpose in his life to making sense of the material waste, the deaths in our lives, and bringing forth from them a new product, a new life. There is always waste, always death and therefore always the potential for new products and new life. Nick has intentionally and purposefully acted to involve himself in a continuous cycle that mimics the eternal moment and the balance of life and death which is at stake in every moment. By bringing readers to this moment of awareness about our link between matter and energy, death and life, our actions and our ethical responsibilities, DeLillo's *Underworld*, just as *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ender's Game*, acts as a form of rechantment by underscoring our connections to other people and to the cosmos.

This sense of community and of belonging which Card finishes with in *Ender's Game*, can also be seen in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Slothrop experiences as de-centered self leads the reader to the senses of community and of belonging because there is an extra-textual interaction with the reader in *Gravity's Rainbow* that occurs during the scenes of "Ascent" and "Descent" of the Rocket. The use of the second person "you," the sing-a-long using the hymn by William

Pynchon, and the use of the phrase “Now everybody –” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* 776) demonstrate how *Gravity’s Rainbow* adopts these techniques to foreground the apocalyptic event of the Rocket landing and exploding upon the reader. This ending is more than just a cataclysmic image within the reader’s mind: it is also a call to action. The phrase “Now everybody” is a call for the reader to sing along with the audience in the text and presumably with other readers. This helps create a collective consciousness. In addition, however, Pynchon ends the novel with a dash. This particular dash is called an “em dash” because it is supposed to be the same length as the capital letter “M.” Using the “em dash” to interrupt a sentence, especially without finishing the sentence as in Pynchon’s use of “Now everybody –” is called aposiopesis which has a very specific rhetorical connection to preterition. Silvia Montiglio explains in her book *Silence in the Land of Logos* that rhetorical preterition, usually embodied by the use of a dash or set of dashes, is “the announcement of one’s intention to pass over certain things in silence” (Montiglio 132). The intentional use of the term “pass over” is the religious definition of the word preterition as being passed over by God. However, as a rhetorical device, preterition is related more to humility because it “allows the speaker to put emphasis on his active integration into the civic body without insisting immodestly on his generosity” (Montiglio 126). Aposiopesis is a specific type of “silent suspension that leaves the sentence unfinished” (Montiglio 133). Montiglio argues that this suspension represents “*euphemia*” which is “the utterance of well-omened words and the silencing of ill-omened ones” (Montiglio 134). This would explain why Pynchon’s use of “everybody,” which is the collective experience of all human beings, is the result of the Rocket’s landing is left unsaid, because it is an unwanted, frightening, and destructive occurrence. Montiglio goes on to state that this type of *euphemia* and aposiopesis had not only a “religious usage” but was also used in the context of “the assembly” (Montiglio 134). Pynchon’s uses of

the em dash is concerned not only “the herald’s prayer” in “addressing the gods” but also “the orators addressing the assembly” (Montiglio 134). In this case the herald’s use of aposiopesis not only “demands the ill sounding words in order to be auspicious” but also “inaugurates political deliberation” (Montiglio 134). Based on Montiglio’s distinctions, I argue Pynchon ends *Gravity’s Rainbow* with an “em dash” that leads to the effect of this type of aposiopesis. The reader is led to a cinematic cliff-hanger in the middle of a cataclysmic event that ushers in a moment of reverent pause and thinking that simultaneously acts as a moment of political deliberation and choice. This is a moment of reenchancement that recognizes that we do not have just an effect on our own society, we are not just being self-destructive but, like Ender in *Ender’s Game* and *Underworld*, destroying future iterations of society and the cosmos.

To get to this moment of political deliberation and choice, it can be seen using a cosmological interpretive strategy and perspective that the reader is led in both novels through a dizzying, disorienting set of interwoven narratives within the text of *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Ender’s Game*. These narratives conclude at the end of *Gravity’s Rainbow* with a potential cataclysm, the crashing of the V-2 rocket, which as the ur-model for nuclear missiles, is emblematic of nuclear war and human annihilation. This conclusion then acts as a reorienting moment from which the reader must now enter into a period of spiritual and ethical reflection about his or her role and place within the systems of power and control that could end in nuclear annihilation of the human race. *Ender’s Game* ends with the genocide of billions of intelligent creatures at the hands of humans due to the arrogance of both entities to assume the other had no inherent value and was simply something to be conquered. The reader must then make a political, spiritual, sincere, and meaningful decision of whether to choose to continue to take part in these systems or to opt out of them, possibly opting out by utilizing or adapting the nonviolent

subversive activities described within the narrative of *Gravity's Rainbow* or acting in unison with the voices of those who have been harmed by such systems, acting as "Speakers of the Dead" as Ender and the Formic Queen become. Through Nick Shay's journey to encounter death as a way of confronting the event of his father seemingly walking out on his family, DeLillo's *Underworld* reveals our quantum entanglement is not just caught up in matter and energy but in consciousness, actions, and our ethical responsibility to others and the cosmos. The reader is also led to understand that these decisions have spiritual and cosmological implications because the systems of power and control depicted in these novels can lead to sterility, stagnation, dehumanization, and the possible annihilation of the human race or other entities. *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Ender's Game*, and *Underworld*, then, act as tools of reenchancement that lead toward a deeper, more holistic, view of the cosmos as being mysterious, creative, fertile, and of course sacred.

4 ACTING, ACTIONS, AND ACTING OUT: PROBLEMS OF IDENTITY, THE BODY, AND THE MIND/PSYCHE/SOUL/SPIRIT IN CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

Sarah Ruhl's play *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)* portrays the relationship between Dr. Givings, whose specialty is releasing his patients' anxieties with a vibrator, and Mrs. Catherine Givings and their social circle, mostly Dr. Givings' patients. Through a series of intimate encounters, including some involving the vibrator, the secret anxieties and desires of the characters are revealed. These intimate encounters reveal emotional responses of the characters which contrast with the mechanical responses Dr. Givings describes regarding a body's reaction to the vibrator. Through the rejection of the mechanical descriptions of human responses to stimuli, Ruhl critiques the mechanistic worldview of much of classical science that led to scientism: where only the materially observable reality is of use or importance. Ruhl does not write in a vacuum however and her work is closely related to her literary mentor, Paula Vogel. Paula Vogel's play *The Long Christmas Ride Home* traces the story of Rebecca, Claire, and Stephen as they live out their experiences on Christmas over several years. Through the dysfunction of their family lives and love lives, these characters experience a sense of otherness but ultimately come to recognize the beauty of themselves and our contemporary world. The play acts not simply as an homage to Vogel's respect for theatre, Thornton Wilder, and Japanese culture but much like Wilder's *Our Town*, it also acts as an exploration of breaking down the boundaries between the binaries of the self and the other, the imagined and the real, the finite and the infinite. Using a cosmological interpretive strategy as well as Judith Butler's ideas of gender and sexual identity and Nancy Howell's work regarding a feminist cosmology, I will argue that this contrast between the anxieties and desires of the characters and the representation of the

physical world reveals a critique classical scientific essentialism and dualism, as will be seen below, often referenced with regard to Plato's essential forms in which the material reality is only an imperfect copy of the perfection of ideas floating in the ether, Christian theology and philosophy in which the body is an empty vessel for the soul, and Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* conception based on the idea that the mind's ability to think, analyze, and question forms the basis of our ability to determine whether our existence and all of our experience is materially real. Scientific essentialism is the idea that that there is an internal part of the self, the mind/psyche/soul/spirit that is separate from the body and is the basic definition of selfhood. This view is dualistic because it is the idea that the mind/psyche/soul/spirit is the main aspect of personhood, seeing the body as simply the container or shell for this mind/psyche//spirit/soul. This scientific dualism and essentialism simultaneously upholds the supremacy of the intellect and reason and reduces the complexity of the mind/psyche/soul/spirit to a mechanical view of the body. This dualism is critiqued by those like Judith Butler, Ervin Laszlo, and Nancy Howells. Laszlo unveils how much of our quantum understanding of the cosmos does not support a dualistic notion of material, energy, and consciousness. Both Butler and Howells argue that such dualism is patriarchal because women are often associated in science with bodily matters and bodily secretions which are considered abject. Both Butler and Howells also argue that this dualistic view when taken to its logical conclusion rejects the self, the natural world, and the infinitude of the cosmos and cosmological creation. Butler and Howells attempt to refashion the self as not divided into the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit but a holistic assemblage. When combining Butler and Howells with the theories of Ervin Laszlo, this holistic assemblage is seen to derive its consciousness not from an immaterial mind/psyche/soul/spirit but from the pervading cosmic energy which is contained within every molecule of reality. This energy

connects every molecule of reality to one another, helping form what is termed our quantum entanglement. Both Paula Vogel and Sara Ruhl's works help to highlight the problems with scientific essentialism and dualism as well as leading the reader to begin to recognize this new interconnected cosmology.

Since its debut, Paula Vogel's *Long Christmas Ride Home* has received much mixed criticism. In the original *New York Times* review, Ben Brantley admits about the relationships between Rebecca, Claire, and Stephen, the three siblings and main characters of the play, that the "emphasized connection between the siblings' disastrous love lives and those of their parents feels pretty stale" (Brantley). Brantley, though, goes on to praise the mechanics of Vogel's play, stating that "in daring to interject the traditions of classic Japanese theater, including bunraku puppetry, into a classically American tale, Ms. Vogel has found a form that transcends and enriches her play's formulaic content" (Brantley). Despite finding the substance of each act formulaic, Brantley acknowledges Vogel's innovation and ultimately her cosmological theme, even mentioning Vogel's inspiration, Thornton Wilder. Brantley observes that like "[Thornton] Wilder, Ms. Vogel has written a cosmic domestic drama showing typical American folk caught in the eternal patterns of life and death" (Brantley). Brantley, however, does not seem to truly understand the import of the cosmic drama he witnesses, instead focusing more on the mechanical dramaturgical issues such as the history of Japanese infusions in theatre, the lighting, and the costuming. Unfortunately, not as impressed as Brantley, Charles Isherwood exclaimed in his *Variety* review about the puppetry and use of the ghost of Stephen within *The Long Christmas Ride Home* that "[t]he technique Vogel uses to suggest the distance of her narrator observing life from his perspective in another world (he's referred to as a ghost in the text) give the play the quality of an exquisite but lifeless artifact" (Isherwood). Isherwood seems to agree

with Brantley concerning the staleness of the play. Isherwood does not seem to give any significance to the innovation of the puppetry or what it signifies regarding our perceptions of life, to perform our identities, or to take meaningful action within our lives. Simi Horowitz, though, in his article “Puppets Abound on Local Stages: A New Aesthetic?,” does seem to understand the larger implications regarding agency when using Bunraku puppets. Horowitz interviews Basil Twist who designed and choreographed the puppetry for *The Long Christmas Ride Home*. Twist explains that the use of puppets creates confusion as to who is actually performing the actions. Twist explains to Horowitz that “it is hard to tell who is manipulating whom. Is the puppeteer manipulating the puppet or is the puppet manipulating the puppeteer?” (as quoted in Horowitz 3) to which Horowitz exclaims “Talk about metaphorical resonance! Is the child-self manipulating the adult? Or is the adult recreating the child and his experience through the veil of memory — real and imagined? Or, are all of the above, occurring simultaneously and informing each other?” Twist and Horowitz remind the reader that as much as it appears we as humans are in control of our actions, on a metaphysical and cosmic scale, our situation is a little more symbiotic. Twist and Horowitz inch the reader towards an understanding of the play as representing the quantum and relational entanglement found in each of our lives but stop short of explaining what those entanglements truly signify. A cosmological interpretive strategy is able to fully explain the signification of these entanglements, that we as living humans are interdependent upon other living entities and also other non-living entities, that even our very flesh and blood are amalgamations of non-living molecules and tissues, actants that somehow assemble together and somehow gain a wider consciousness and ability to act with a larger degree of agency in the cosmos.

Another issue within the line of criticism of Paula Vogel's plays, is their classification as postmodern due to the years in which they have been written, *The Oldest Profession* debuting in 1981. Many further argue for such a classification because of the techniques which she uses that tear at the boundaries concerning gender and power, and once in a while a mention about time and place. However, this classification comes off as too narrow in its scope, limiting itself only to the focus of human interactions. Instead, Vogel, as admittedly inspired by Wilder, pushes us toward an awareness of the infinite possibilities of varying experiences within cosmic creation. This awareness itself seems to aim toward breaking the boundaries of such postmodernist classifications. Kerstin Schmidt analyzes the ability of postmodern drama to expand such limits in her book, *The Theater of Transformation: Postmodernism in American Drama*. While Schmidt's characterization of Vogel as a postmodern dramatist may be debatable, it is how Schmidt describes postmodernism which is intriguing. Schmidt goes on to describe these changes in what was perceived as possible by saying that postmodern drama is concerned with "a transformative process" (Schmidt 18) that draws upon "the reflection of concepts of reality and on its own status in reality" (Schmidt 19). Schmidt makes a further distinction that postmodern drama is interested in "how realities are constructed, shaped, or collide" (Schmidt 19). Here we see that like Wilder and Miller before them, postmodern dramatists do attempt to question the reality in which they find themselves and how that reality has developed their sense of identity. This can both show how postmodernism can be seen as an extension of modernism as McClure, Griffin, and Fox have argued in the previous chapter but also how postmodernism's break from previous traditions is not complete. A cosmological interpretive strategy can help to trace the continuities and discrepancies of how writers, artists, and even theorists have constructed, shaped, and collided our sense of reality versus how that reality manifests within a

broader ecological, theological, and cosmological perspective. Paula Vogel's *A Long Christmas Ride Home* does indeed question the nature of reality. Similar to Wilder, bolstering this questioning of the nature of reality, is the attempt within *The Long Christmas Ride Home* to break through the boundaries of gender and the connection between the body and what will be termed here as the mind/psyche/soul/spirit. Within Dwight Eisenhower's *Intertextuality of American Drama*, Kristin Bennett analyzes Wilder's *Our Town* and *The Long Christmas Dinner* in her essay "The Tragic Heroine: An Intertextual Study of Thornton Wilder's Women." Bennett explains how Wilder presented "individuals who unconsciously perform behaviors that have been rehearsed or abided by, over time" lending his works "to analysis through the lens of Judith Butler's theories of gender as performance" revealing how "the socialized repetition that inhibits humans from existing as unfettered agents within their own lives" (Bennett 1175). As will be shown using a cosmological interpretive strategy, Vogel's work, inspired in part by Wilder's (and Ruhl's work as inspired by Vogel), shows its audience the repetitive trap an individual can become caught within, acting based upon society's expectations without ever really examining such expectations. The individual then becomes caught not only within society's expectations of that individual's performance of gender but also in society's expectations of that individual's actions in general. By revealing this repetitive trap, the individual becomes more aware of society's expectations and how their actions are informed by those expectations, allowing that individual to reevaluate their relationships to others and reevaluate their actions. By being able to reevaluate their relationships and their actions, the individual then gains back their agency by now being able to choose whether to act in conformity with society's expectations. Vogel demonstrates these processes within *The Long Christmas Ride Home*.

As Ben Brantley and Kristin Bennett explain, Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home* is inspired by two of Thornton Wilder's plays: *The Long Christmas Dinner* and *Our Town*. As has been seen in the chapter on Wilder and Miller, Wilder uses his plays to push the audience past their limits of understanding the cosmos by exploring the infinitude of time and possibilities in order to show how our agency is derived from our interactions with the other entities in the cosmos. Vogel, inspired by Wilder, pushes us toward an awareness of the infinite possibilities of varying experiences within cosmic creation and across time. Paul Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home* begins with two narrators who act out the play with bunraku puppets and who have allegorical names, man and woman. These are not just narrators but playing puppeteers whose puppets play the characters. The main character is the puppet who plays the character of Stephen but the puppet begins as the ghost of Stephen narrating our story through the voice of sometimes the male narrator, sometimes the female narrator. The use of the bunraku puppets adds an interesting cosmological layer to Vogel's play. The puppets, usually made of wood, papier-mache, or plastic depending on the individual production company, are non-living beings but are moving and interacting within the play essentially as living beings. The puppets are also being moved about by a living being. In the beginning stage notes, Vogel tells us that "Stephen enters" and "[t]he two narrators enter and sit beside the musician" (Vogel 13). At the beginning, living and nonliving, fiction posing as reality and reality posing as fiction are being juxtaposed in the same place at the same moment. Together, "[t]hey share a common breath" (Vogel 13). This action foreshadows the importance of breath later on in the story. Similar in style to Wilder's geological discussions, this breath merges all three of these entities' realities in one moment: nonliving puppet, woman, and man. Within the fiction of the play, they are all existing empathetically together, recognizing each other's pain, limits, and infinite potential in one life

giving breath. The puppet, however, as a non-living entity, does not need to breathe as a human breathes but does appear on stage as if it is alive. This brings attention to the fictionality of the play as a performance and performance as a way of making things come into being and form assemblages that come alive on stage. These performances then make the audience recognize how to more fully engage with other people and other entities in order to become active participants within the cosmos.

To understand how these performances come together and allow for humans to act out their life, identity and agency, it is helpful to understand the issue of duality regarding what I term the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit problem. Judith Butler explains this problem in her 1990 work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler states that the “‘body’ often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body” (*Gender Trouble* 175) but that the body itself in Platonic, Cartesian, and Christian thought is seen as “signifying a profane void, the fallen state: deception, sin, the premonitional metaphors of hell and the eternal feminine” (*Gender Trouble* 176). Butler reveals the dualistic view which classical science, philosophy, and religion held about the body. Because the body was seen as “profane,” the body was often vilified as a weakness, an empty shell, as the mark of sinfulness. These views are destructive because they literally create a tension in which some individuals hate to be in his or her own skin. This line of thought instead privileges the mind, the psyche, the spirit, or the soul over the body. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the mind is defined as “[m]ental or psychic faculty” (“Mind, n19a”) and described as “[t]he seat of awareness, thought, volition, feeling, and memory; cognitive and emotional phenomena and powers considered as constituting a presiding influence; the mental faculty of a human being (esp. as regarded as being separate from the physical)”

(Mind, n19a). The mind here is being linked to psychic ability and regarded as separate from our physical faculties. The psyche is defined as “[t]he animating principle of the universe” (“Psyche, n1a) as well as “[t]he mind, soul, or spirit, as distinguished from the body” (“Psyche, n1b”). The definition of psyche here, specifically links the word to the other terms: mind, soul, and spirit. Soul is defined as “The principle of intelligence, thought, or action in a person (or occasionally an animal), typically regarded as an entity distinct from the body; the essential, immaterial, or spiritual part of a person or animal, as opposed to the physical” (“Soul, 2a”). Soul is further described as being “understood to refer to consciousness as a whole, including emotions” (Soul, 2a). The definition of soul also references back to the spiritual and to consciousness and emotional awareness as the mind and psyche often are. Spirit is then defined as “[t]he animating or vital principle in man (and animals); that which gives life to the physical organism, in contrast to its purely material elements; the breath of life” (“Spirit, n1a). The OED’s definition of spirit references that characteristic which gives the physical, material elements life even referencing the breath of life which Paula Vogel incorporates into *The Long Christmas Ride Home*. Because these terms reference each other and the similar immaterial characteristics which differentiate them from the body and from matter, these terms will be shown combined together as the mind/psyche/soul/spirit as representative of what is classically considered the essence of consciousness.

This view of categorically separating the mind/psyche/soul/spirit from the body is sometimes called scientific essentialism and sometimes called dualism because it views the mind/psyche/soul/spirit as hierarchically above the physical nature of the body. I argue that this view causes a true cosmological crisis with regard to human identity because, first not only does this view dehumanize the feminine equating women with the void, sinfulness, and hell but also

this view creates a conflicted self in every person that is unable to reconcile the materiality of the body with the immaterial mind/psyche/soul/spirit. With this binary in place, how does one live in the materiality of the world when the immaterial is so highly praised? Are we all to forsake the fallen state of this world and commit suicide to achieve the greatness of the psychic/spiritual world? While some philosophies and theologies have called suicide the ultimate decision of human agency, no one but a few minor cults come to mind calling for an outright suicide of every individual because flesh is so terrible that we must release the mind/psyche/soul/spirit as the only ethical or moral imperative in the cosmos. I argue, that when following this designation of the body as abject to its ultimate conclusion reveals that the body cannot be so terribly bad if it is allowing us to live, especially since no one seems to be arguing that living is such a terrible state of being. So then, how does one reconcile the issue of the seemingly incompatible binary of the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit? Not surprising at all that feminist theorists, like Judith Butler, in their critiques of gender, gender norms, gender roles, and gender identities have led the way in revealing new perspectives that may help reconcile the mind/psyche/soul/spirit and body problem. As Butler puts it, even if there were some distinction, the body and mind/psyche/soul/spirit are really “acting in concert” (*Undoing Gender* 1) with one another just as the puppet, man, and woman act in concert in taking a breath as well as in their other actions throughout *A Long Christmas Ride Home*. Both Vogel and Butler’s critiques upend the traditional binary of body and mind/psyche/soul/spirit in favor of a depiction of a fluid, intertwined body and mind/psyche/soul/spirit. I argue that these depictions reveal the interdependence of the material and immaterial forces at work in the cosmos.

Sarah Ruhl also disrupts the traditional binaries of the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit which is not surprising considering her relationship with her mentor, Paula Vogel.

Jeffrey Peterson comments on this relationship in his analysis of Ruhl and Vogel in *Playful Conversations: A Study of Shared Dynamics Between the Plays of Paula Vogel and Sarah Ruhl*, “[t]he sensibility Vogel brings to the stage is unconventional, nonlinear, and uses defamiliarization strategies to explore controversial issues, and what is truly interesting about these descriptions of Vogel is that the same language is used to describe the work of Ruhl” (Peterson 8). Peterson then concludes based on these similarities and the fact that Vogel was Ruhl’s playwrighting instructor, that “[a]lthough it is impossible to understand the exact mechanisms that made a successful career blossom, if it were not for the work of Paula Vogel there likely would be no Sarah Ruhl” (Peterson 8). Another shared quality that will be able to be added to these similarities is how both explore the relationship between the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit. Although, Ruhl herself is mostly known for her dramaturgical explorations of gender in her plays, as strange as it sounds, this is not necessarily the first time Sarah Ruhl’s cosmological perspectives have been commented upon. In “Cleaning House Together,” Richard Ouzounian from the *Toronto Star*, interviews Canadian actresses Fiona Reid and Seana McKenna about their roles as sisters Lane and Virginia in Ruhl’s play, *The Clean House*. The title of the play and the central focus with the characters’ struggle to cope with the limits society has placed on them, is an obvious reference to women’s subjugation to the role of mere housewives and domestic caretakers. Reid and McKenna agree on the ability of the play to empower women as they comment “the play is asking its characters to stretch beyond what they perceive themselves to be capable of in their lives, to exceed their limitations and expectations and ultimately to act with compassion” (Ouzounian E06). Reid goes on to say, “*The Clean House* challenges the assumptions we make about ourselves and others” (Ouzounian E06). This commentary displays that Sarah Ruhl’s plays do not shy away from feminist commentary on the

patriarchal history of our society or the pockets within society where this patriarchy might still exist.

Charles McNulty adds to the comparison of *In the Next Room* and *The Clean House*, stating in his review for the *Los Angeles Times* about Ruhl's California debut that "Blending quiescent naturalism with her customary eccentric farce, Ruhl conjures into existence a dramatic world that's at once unique and universal. Less surreal than the playwright's "The Clean House" and "Dead Man's Cell Phone" but no less quirky" (McNulty). McNulty hints at one of the largest changes which Ruhl has integrated into *In the Next Room* compared to her other plays: the role of what we consider the natural within our lives. Theodore Mahne also comments about Ruhl's interrogation of the role of the nature in his *New Orleans Arts and Stage* review from *The Times-Picayune*. Mahne states that *In the Next Room* "is a vibrant commentary on our own age, as Ruhl's ultimate message is one that still buzzes today in the ever-changing, technological cyber-world in which we live – that for some things nothing will replace the human touch" (Mahne). These reviews reveal how, like Wilder and Vogel, Ruhl is focused on pushing past biological, social, and economic determinism but they only begin to brush up against the true cosmological significance of the play. A cosmological interpretive strategy can help to tease out how both Ruhl and Vogel use their drama to not only dismantle the binaries created by such determinisms but also how they move the audience to understand the interconnected agency of human individuals and the rest of the living and non-living entities which surround us in the cosmos.

In Ruhl's play, *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)*, the main characters are Dr. Givings and his wife, Mrs. Givings, later called by her first name, Catherine. Dr. Givings is an allegorical character who represents the mechanical and dualistic views of the body and the cosmos held by many in the medical and scientific community. Dr. Givings is described in the

stage directions as medical doctor who is a “specialist in gynecological and hysterical disorders” (Ruhl 5). Dr. Givings runs his medical practice out of his home in which he keeps his “operating theater” private from his wife and non-patients and his “private study” entirely private from everyone, so much so that the room remains “unseen” (Ruhl 5). Dr. Givings sees certain fears and anxieties as a type of “hysteria” (Ruhl13) caused by a build-up of bodily “juices” that create “congestion in the womb” which Dr. Givings tries to “invite downward” (Ruhl19). Dr. Givings uses what he terms “therapeutic electrical massage” from a vibrator in order to create “paroxysm” (Ruhl19). Basically Dr. Givings stimulates the woman or man’s sexual organs with the vibrator until “paroxysm,” which is another term for orgasm. However, Dr. Givings does not see anything sexual in what he does. He is completely clinical, removed and detached from the effects of his work upon the individual, even when it is his wife who is asking him to treat her. Dr. Givings tells Catherine that she is “without a hint of neurosis and in no need” (Ruhl 55) of the experiments. Catherine replies by exclaiming twice, “[e]xperiment on me!” (Ruhl 56). Catherine here is attempting, not just to direct her husband’s attention but direct it in a very sexual and intimate manner. For the 1880s, the setting of the play, these actions would have seemed to the audience outside the bounds of acceptable womanly and wifely behavior. Further, Dr. Givings would have seemed to act within both his husbandly and scientific duties by rejecting Mrs. Giving’s pleadings and telling her there is “no need” for his attention to be directed toward her. This episode reflects the essentialist, dualistic mindset often found in the medical and scientific communities as well as in society in general in which the body reacts mechanically to prompts from the vibrator and so is divorced from any emotional investment.

This episode is a prime example of the way in which Cartesian philosophy has constructed a conflict between the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit. Rene Descartes in “Part

III” of his treatise, *A Discourse of a Method for the Well Guiding of Reason and the Discovery of Truth in the Sciences*, first proposes within the strands of scientific reasoning that the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit are separate from each other. Descartes states, “I knew then that I was a substance, whose whole essence or nature is, but to think, and who to be, hath need of no place, nor depends on any material thing. So that this Me, to wit, my Soul, by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the Body” (Descartes). Not only does Descartes help to create the basis for what we call scientific essentialism, explaining that the ability to think is not dependent upon the body or any material existence, but Descartes also bases such essentialism on the foundation of Christian dualism. Descartes explains that reason, the ability to use our mind to think, comes from the seat of the soul and that such a soul also does not depend on material substance.

This essentialist and dualistic mindset is the historical basis for the creation of the vibrator in which the mechanical reaction that the patient on whom the vibrator is applied will not receive any sexual satisfaction or attraction from the treatment because that patient’s body is separate from and simply the container for the mind/psyche/soul/spirit. By having Catherine exclaim her desire to be experimented on by Dr. Givings and by Dr. Givings refusing, the play reveals how these dualistic, essentialist views neglect both the emotional and physical needs of the individual, especially women, causing Catherine to feel unwanted and undesired. Within his *Theatre Bay Area* article, “Good Vibrations: Sarah Ruhl and director Les Waters Reunite at Berkeley Rep,” Sam Hurwitt explores Ruhl’s views on the dichotomies and binaries which we have adopted to explain the phenomena which we see in our relationships to nature and each other. Hurwitt interviews Ruhl, asking what the play is about, in response, Ruhl states “it’s about marriage and intimacy and race and the schism between people’s bodies and their emotional

lives” (Hurwitt 20). When asked about the inspiration for the play, Ruhl reiterates that, as written in the “Playwright Notes” of *In the Next Room* (Ruhl 6) that it was the book *The Technology of Orgasm* by Rachel P. Maines. Hurwitt goes on to explain for the reader that the book is about “the invention of the vibrator in the late 19th century as an early electrical device for female hysteria, a catch-all diagnosis for everything from nervousness to faintness and particularly loss of sexual desire” (Hurwitt 21). Ruhl’s comment about the device and the doctors’ works with it, that “It just seems extraordinary to me that it wasn’t seen as being sexual in the way that we would” and that the doctors truly believe “the seat of hysteria was in the womb” (Hurwitt 21). Ruhl goes on to reveal that her inspiration came from her interest “in both medicine as a discipline that tries to heal people in that profound sense and also as this compartmentalized phenomenon in the Western world where people are split between their minds and their bodies” (Hurwitt 21). This compartmentalization between the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit is also one of the splits, one of the boundaries, which Judith Butler hoped to bridge with her feminist critiques of gender and sexual identities and their expression through bodily and psychic behaviors.

Ruhl, however, goes a step further than just a feminist critique. By adding a cosmological interpretive analysis of the play, it can be seen Ruhl demonstrates how these essentialist and dualist viewpoints not only perceive the body as mechanistic and divorced from any integral relationship to the mind/psyche/soul/spirit but also that these viewpoints lead to incredibly destructive behaviors. Towards the end of his argument with Catherine, Dr. Givings tells Catherine that he cannot continue the conversation because he has to go ‘to the club’ because “Mr. Edison’s man is electrocuting dogs this evening. He is out to prove the deadliness of the alternating current” (Ruhl 56). Dr. Givings states this event in a matter of fact tone revealing no

hint of empathy or moral pause about experimenting on and potentially killing a dog. Dr. Givings, however, did have an issue with using the vibrator on his own wife. This episode reveals the misguided priorities of not only Dr. Givings but of medicine and science when they take these essentialist and mechanistic views. Dr. Givings mentions Mr. Edison. This name is an allusion to Thomas Edison who also experimented with electric current and for whom society has to thank for household electricity. Ruhl connects Dr. Givings to Edison to emphasize the allegorical nature of Dr. Givings' character as representing the mechanistic and essentialist viewpoints which the medical field and science have held through the past centuries. Through Dr. Givings and Mr. Edison, Ruhl shows how these mechanistic and essentialist views lead to destructive viewpoints in which other entities, in this case, the dog, are used, abused, and ultimately killed in the name of medicine and science. Using a cosmological interpretive strategy, it can be seen that through its depictions of the relationship between bodily joys and pains, private sufferings and intimate ecstasies that *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)* reveals not a rigid binary but a fluid working of gender and sexual identity that reflects the fluid, intertwining of the material body and the immaterial mind/psyche/soul/spirit. Ruhl's play further reveals how when these two concepts are divorced from each other, the result becomes views that lead to not only our neglect of the emotions and desires of other people but also to destructive behaviors.

This commingling of the immaterial and material continues on in *A Long Ride Home* with the depictions of the characters themselves. Vogel structures the play as a type of Bunraku puppet play in which the actors are seen on stage moving the puppets and narrating the story. This immediately brings to mind the idea that this play is fiction and is being performed. In addition, the narrative is told through memory, especially the memory of the ghost of the

character Stephen. Using a ghost and the idea of memory leads the audience to a questioning of the real, particularly if memory is something we see in our mind but it is not physically there. The Ghost of Stephen and the Man and Woman go on to act out their narrations and actions of Rebecca, Claire, Stephen, and their parents. Each of these narrations give us a hint at something which drives the character. Rebecca thinks of “the red faced boy she would not see until school began...the wisp of hair that hung in his eyes... the bulge in his trousers she should not think of” (Vogel 16). Claire thought of “the turkey” (Vogel 16) and “the sliver of breast and thigh” (Vogel 16). Stephen thinks of “the boys from school racing on the field.... a blur of shorts and flesh” (Vogel 17). The father thinks of “Sheila.... The cream of her breasts marking the brown of her skin” (Vogel 18). The mother thinks of “the man from the grocery...To lead him up the stairs, put his hands on her breasts, plunge her hands down his trousers” (Vogel 19). All of these narrations and descriptions involve the element of desire. Desire is often discussed, as Butler will also do, in terms of Eros and the erotic. The erotic is often depicted as sexualized. Even Claire’s turkey is described in a sexualized manner using the imagery of thighs and breast. Vogel’s descriptions here reveal how our immaterial erotic impulses, our deepest desires which are supposed to come from our mind, our emotional psyche, the lust felt in our spirit or soul drives our actions and interactions with the material world. Claire, with the turkey menu, and the mother, with the grocery man, both exhibit desires that involve food. Food is the material sustenance that we get from the natural world around us. Despite needing material sustenance to survive, in our interactions with society, there is often a distaste for following our erotic impulses. Rebecca states that she “should not think of” (Vogel 16) her attraction to the red faced boy and the bulge in his trousers. Stephen questions “Was he bad? For watching boys?” (Vogel 17). Even the father says he “tried not to think of Sheila” (Vogel 18). This is not just Vogel

revealing Freudian repression but Vogel commenting on an inherent contradiction between our desire for material sustenance and gratification and desire itself that leads to what will be discussed below as an othering or ‘queering’ when these boundaries and so-called taboos are transgressed.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler states that “the naturalized notion of “the” body is itself a consequence of taboos that render that body discrete by virtue of its stable boundaries” but that these boundaries are usually “heterosexual constructions of gendered exchange” (*Gender Trouble* 181). As has been displayed above by Vogel’s association of the body with immaterial desire and with food, which we consume within our bodies in a material way, the boundary between the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit has already been called into question. I further argue that if through a cosmological interpretation, these feminist perspectives are combined with Jane Bennet’s concept of humans as an assemblage, then it can be seen that the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit do not reside in separate spaces but instead are intertwined within all bodily and psychic/spiritual space. Bennett explains that “Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory” (Bennett 24). Instead, Bennett describes how the assemblage is a moving, acting, in this case, thinking being, explaining that “Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force. but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage” (Bennett 24). This intertwining reveals the body instead working as an assemblage in which each component part cells, molecules, the food we eat, etc. has its own agency and cosmic energy that interacts with each other component allowing for the agency of the full assemblage, in this case, a human being. These component parts of the human body combine and work in conjunction with each other, not as separate entities divorced from

each other. Furthermore, this work generates the correct mixture of material, energy, and stimulus that creates the atmosphere in which consciousness and agency can function.

This assemblage and what it signifies about our agency is revealed when the stability of our conceptions about the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit are disrupted. Judith Butler goes on to describe that these conceptions are reinforced when we use our bodies to perform our gendered roles for the audience of society but that these conceptions can still be disrupted. Nancy Howells in her book *A Feminist Cosmology: Ecology, Solidarity, and Metaphysics* reminds us that “Alienation of men and women and nature is based on the dualism of culture and nature and on the dualism of spirit and matter” and are often “the source of human and environmental injustice” (Howell 584). Howell goes on to explain that “[t]his delusion includes alienation of our sexuality into male and female poles” because of a spiritual and religious view throughout the ages based on “the appeal to the separation of pure spirit and corrupt matter” (Howell 594). This designation of matter as corrupt alienates our bodies, nature, and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit. This designation is challenged in Vogel’s scene with the minister explaining the concept of Edo and the Floating World from Japanese art and theology. In this section, three different characters the minister, the grandfather, and the dancer are played by the same actor. Depending on the scene, the actor, who during the staging does not usually change any clothing, becomes the identity of each of these three characters. Vogel’s choice to use one actor to play each of the three roles before both the other characters and the general audience reveals how our identity is performative as Judith Butler points out. Butler explains that our bodies become like a marketplace or exchange in which the conceptions are bought and sold, stating that “deregulation of these exchanges accordingly disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all” (*Gender Trouble* 181). This leads Butler to conclude that

gender and sexual identity is “corporeal style, an ‘act,’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “*performative*” suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” that is merely an interpretation of a “stylized repetition of acts” (*Gender Trouble* 190 - 191). By swapping character identities within the middle of the play, the actor on Vogel’s stage reveal to the audience how identity is not static but performative because our identity is always dependent on the circumstances of the audience, often society, family, or friends and the expectations which those audience members have for us. The performance is also based upon which role the individual is choosing to act out and how well the individual acts that performance out compared to those expectations set by the audience. When the performance is not to the expectation of the audience, or surprises the audience, this often results in a feeling of alienation or difference, this is often called the “queering” effect. Claire Colebrook in her essay “How Queer Can You Go? Theory, Normality, and Normativity” from the collection *Queering the Non/Human*, that queer in this sense “would be primarily critical and would concern a difference or distinction from a constituted norm or centre” (Colebrook 23). This sense of queerness can be harmful if the individual is treated or made to feel inferior in some way based on this difference or distinction. This can lead to the individual feeling othered and outcast. However, this sense of queerness can also be used as a way to bring attention to the performative nature of our identities and can even be used to push the bounds of what is an acceptable performance. This constitutes the effect of the queering effect defined by Colebrook as “a critique of substance and subjectivism” (Colebrook 23). By surprising the audience using the mid-performance switch of identities, *The Long Christmas Ride Home* initiates this queering effect in order to expand our notions of the material binaries human, nature, body, and

mind/psyche/soul/spirit as well as to interrogate how our subjective agency works within society and the wider cosmos.

In the scene above from *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, we see the actor switch from playing the grandfather to playing a minister giving a sermon on “the art of the Edo period Japan” (Vogel 25). The minister is expounding on how this world is of the flesh and neither the flesh nor the spirit can be forgotten in our lives but must be balanced. The actor as minister states “Buddha taught us that this world and all its joys are fleeting” but “rather than renounce the joys of this world” a select group of “artists and courtesans, merchants and actors” were “[d]etermined to enjoy the flesh because it was ephemeral” and thereby [p]utting aside Western notions of guilt and shame about the body” (Vogel 25). These ideas were then put into art, a task which is termed the “Ukiyo-e” or “The Floating World” (Vogel 25). This is important to understand because not only were these groups of people and artists concerned with depicting our relationship to the body and “the relationship of man and nature” (Vogel 25) but they were concerned with reshaping how we view that relationship. Vogel’s minister is not supporting the tenets of Buddhism which includes, as the minister explains, to “renounce the joys of this world.” For instance, in the *Dhammapada*, a collection of the sayings of the Buddha, verse 170 from “Chapter XIII: The World” as translated by Max Fausboll and Max Muller, states “[l]ook upon the world as a bubble, look upon it as a mirage: the king of death does not see him who thus looks down upon the world” (*Dhammapada* 170). Buddhism believes that the world is a mirage, an illusion to be looked down upon and ignored rather than to be valued and enjoyed. Buddhism, then, holds a dualistic view of flesh and body, designating flesh and bodily matter as impure, or to use Howell’s words, “corrupt.”

These concepts about the flesh and the body are further complicated by the idea that the minister is a Christian minister of the “Unitarian Universalist Church” (Vogel 22). Within Christianity, the body is also seen as corrupt, often described as a vessel, an empty shell. For instance, Saint Paul in his “Letter to the Galatians” states about a man having an incestuous affair that the people of the church are to excommunicate the man “to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord” (*NRSV*, 1 Cor 5.5). Paul’s description reveals the Christian view in which the body is merely a shell which only contains the soul until the time when the soul sheds the shell during divine judgment. To add to this mixture of Buddhist and Christian concepts, the term “Unitarian Universalist” translates roughly to one in all things which is the Buddhist concept of all things in the world melting away into a divine oneness of pure divine energy. This concept too sheds the material world in search of a better divine world. Vogel is combining Buddhism and Christianity in this instance because of their belief in these dualistic ideas. Vogel has the Christian Minister explaining the art of Ukiyo-e to challenge these dualistic views. Ukiyo-e rebels against Buddhist and Christian binaries of the body and the body’s corruptive influence on the mind/psyche/soul/spirit. Vogel here leads the reader and the audience to reject the dualism of both Christianity and Buddhism. At first, the actor queers his own performance by switching roles mid-performance, now, the minister, as minister, is queering his own performance here by advocating against the two systems he has been serving under and advocating instead for a redefinition of the flesh as not impure but to be valued and enjoyed as both vital and beautiful. This queering causes the audience to pause and reexamine the roles and values which we impose upon the ideas of flesh/body and mind/psyche/soul/spirit, human and nature, heterosexual and homosexual, masculine and feminine, etc. These roles and values are further interrogated

through the construct of the floating world concept of Ukiyo-e further challenges this designation of the flesh as corrupt. When a being or object floats it is not just statically separate but is engulfed all around by elements of nature, say water or air. In addition, that being or object is pushed upon by and is also pushing upon the water or air: it is this displacement caused by an equal force upon each other that causes the being or object to float. This floating world idea, requiring all parties to be agents, acting upon each other in order to exist in that moment is the type of agential assemblage that Janet Bennett describes from her work above. Furthermore, the existence of both sets of entities, the water or air and the being or the object, in the same reality acting upon each other and modifying each other's existence is also the state of the universe on the quantum level which we call the quantum entanglement. This quantum entanglement reveals that our physical, material reality, in this example our body, is influencing and being influenced by the immaterial mind/psyche/soul/spirit. To use Butler's phraseology, the two are acting in concert together.

Butler hints at the rejection of this dualism as well when she describes how the body and mind/psyche/soul/spirit work in concert together. Butler, again, critiques the Platonic, Christian, and Cartesian views of the mind/psyche/soul/spirit and the body by quoting Foucault. Foucault states that the soul is not "an illusion" but "it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within, the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those that are punished" (as quoted in *Gender Trouble* 184). Butler interprets this to mean that "[t]he soul is a surface signification that contests and displaces the inner/outer distinction itself, a figure of interior psychic space inscribed on the body as a social signification that perpetually renounces itself as such" (*Gender Troubles* 184). Butler goes on to assert that "[t]he redescription of the intrapsychic processes in terms of the surface politics of the body implies a corollary

redescription of the surface politics of gender as the disciplinary production of the figures of fantasy through the play of presence and absence on the body's surface" (Gender Trouble 184). Butler reveals that identity, cannot even be divided into spiritual or psychic, let alone the split of the body and of the mind, psyche, spirit, or soul. Butler is basically stating that we do not have an inherent fixed soul or psyche within us but that it something that is intertwined with our body which is made up of cells and molecules. This is where Butler's feminist critique opens up many cosmological questions which are also being discussed with regard to quantum physics and our quantum entanglement.

If the mind/psyche/soul/spirit is inscribed upon/within our body and our body is made up of cells and molecules and those cells and molecules are shed and swapped in various biological, chemical, and physical processes, then does a chunk of our mind/psyche/soul/spirit remain on that cell or molecule? When that cell or molecule is absorbed into another entity through breathing it in from the air or absorbing it from the soil, does that entity have a chunk of our mind/psyche/soul/spirit? Do we have chunks of that entity's mind/psyche/soul/spirit? If we reconceptualize and reconsider the mind/psyche/soul/spirit as a form energy, some might argue divine energy, I will say cosmic energy, that is infused within and then continuously generated from within creation itself, then the answer is yes. This is the theo-poetical idea of immanence which Karl Rahner discusses in the chapter above which is supported by the quantum idea of particles as a state of being of energy. Within our quantum entanglement, material atoms are not only attracted to each other by their nuclear, gravitational, and electromagnetic forces but that they forever remain connected to each other. Ervin Laszlo in his work *What is Reality: The New Map of Cosmos, Consciousness, and Existence* explains that "[t]he new paradigm at the dawn of the twenty-first century" has been completely revolutionized by quantum physics and

astrophysics because we now can see “the world as a whole system where all things interact and together constitute an entangled, quantum-like system in which all things are intrinsic elements in an integral whole” (Laszlo 575). Laszlo is describing the new observations that science itself has made that undercut scientific essentialism and dualism because of the interrelated state of existence of the world, which is being called our quantum entanglement.

In this quantum entanglement, the material and immaterial are not separate but intertwined to the point that they cannot be separated, they instead are a working assemblage of living components that are always connected to each other. Laszlo explains that Thanks to the Einstein-Podolski-Rosen thought experiment and the Hensen, Bernien, Dreau, et al “loophole free” experiment, it has become provable that particles and other things “may be at any finite distance in space and time but remain nonetheless connected” (Laszlo 580). Laszlo explains that, in 1935, Einstein, Podolski, and Rosen theorized that any particle that came into contact with another particle would be forever connected to that particle because of the swapping of various energies during contact (Laszlo 585). This theory remained unproven until 2015 when Hensen, Bernien, Dreau, and their colleagues revealed observable evidence that an electron who had come into contact with another but then had been separated would change the rotation of its spin to match the other even at great distances (Laszlo 3983). The reason for this interconnection is the coordination of the electromagnetic, gravitational, and electromagnetic forces that reveal “[p]articles are not corpuscular entities, and they do not exist independently” because “the fundamental reality is not matter but energy, and the laws of nature are not rules of mechanistic interaction” but simply “algorithms” and “coding patterns” (Laszlo 597) that allow for an infinite number of interactions at any given moment. Laszlo, Butler, Howell, and Vogel reveal that like particles, material forces, such as the body and nature, are encoded by the immaterial forces,

desire, sexuality, the mind/psyche/soul/spirit, that are at work in our lives. These immaterial forces are not separate or housed in some container we call our body but instead, as Bennett describes, they are generated by the assembled action and combined cosmic energies of our material components. Using this cosmological interpretive framework, we can see that through her depictions of performance, religion, and desire Vogel, “disrupts” the binaries between humans and nature, the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit. Eros/desire is immaterial. If the body which needs material sustenance was not entwined and interacting with the immaterial mind/psyche/soul/spirit, then how could even science, psychology and religion claim that immaterial eros/desire push our material bodies to interact and act with the material world? If the immaterial and material were not linked, then the immaterial mind/psyche/soul/spirit would simply desire to flee the material for the immaterial, making us all into old world ascetics and mystics as Max Weber described in the previous chapter about Wilder and Miller. Instead, Vogel is reminding us of the inextricable theo-poetic link between the material body and the immaterial mind/psyche/soul/spirit. That it is the actions of our material being and all of its components and the cosmic energies generated that courses through them that allows for such material sustenance to be needed and such desires to be felt.

This cosmological interrogation of our material body and the immaterial forces entwined and at work within it and the otherness felt when this reality is denied continues on in Ruhl’s *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)*. Unable to do much on her own, Mrs. Givings stays home with the couple’s newborn, whom she is unable to nurse, as she states to her baby, Lotty, “My milk is not filling you up, is it?” causing her to be, as the stage directions indicates, “*Near tears*” but she “*recovers*” (Ruhl 7). Mrs. Givings is unable to nurse her baby and seeks comfort from her husband but finds he, like his machines, is too mechanical and cold. Mrs. Givings confesses

to Dr. Givings her apprehension at having the wet nurse, Elizabeth, care for her baby, that “Lotty took to Elizabeth right away...it made me feel very strange... For once it wasn’t the baby who was crying. But I feel very queer, I do” (Ruhl 41-42). This “queerness” is the first type of queerness which Claire Colebrook mentions in which Mrs. Givings’ compares her perceptions of her own outer bodily performance to society’s expectations for that bodily performance and when the two do not match, her psychic perception changes to feeling “queer” or othered, like an invalid who cannot take part within society.

Mrs. Givings at this point is not trying to use this queerness to critique society’s expectations but rather desires to meet and live up to those expectations. Dr. Givings’ reaction is to tell his wife, “be practical” and to “have a nice lie-down” (Ruhl 42). In one sense, Dr. Givings’ is correct that Mrs. Givings is placing too much emphasis on this issue because she is giving in to social expectations, as he states “the body is blameless. Milk is without intention” (Ruhl 30). Dr. Givings, though, is unable to truly empathize with Catherine because he is unable to experience Catherine’s observations and feelings. Mrs. Givings states “A good mother has a fat child. And everyone knows it” (Ruhl 32), which reveals how she imagines all of the other mothers breastfeeding their own babies when she cannot breastfeed her own baby. This physical difference makes her mind/psyche/soul/spirit feel out of place and out of sync to the point that she feels alienated. Mrs. Givings’ physical circumstance is having a direct effect on what would be her mind/psyche/soul/spirit. However, this also seems to be a part of a cycle. If the binaries are continued, this would mean that Dr. Givings says that the body is blameless which would then only leave the mind/psyche/soul/spirit, Mrs. Givings’ mind/psyche/soul/spirit, to be blamed. Mrs. Givings constantly has to deal with such patronizing comments from Dr. Givings such that the stress and frustration she feels is being felt both in her body and in her

mind/psyche/soul/spirit. Dr. Givings does not even realize the effect he has on Catherine because his investment in scientific essentialism will not let him fathom that the body could be intertwined or even truly linked to her body. It is exactly because Dr. Givings has compartmentalized into two distinct regions, the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit, that he cannot empathize with Catherine. This scientific dualism espoused by Dr. Givings has caused Catherine's sense of self to be displaced. Catherine attempts to recover this sense of self but must find others with whom she can confide. Because of her struggle with the gender expectations of breastfeeding and the queerness she feels from it, Catherine now begins to seek out "undo" the normative perceptions of gender and sexual identity of the body and the conception of the mind/psyche/soul/spirit as something separate from the body. This "undoing" occurs as Catherine, unable to find solace from her husband, seeks out his patients who linger about the house as they wait for or wind down from their sessions.

Butler states in the introduction to her 2004 book, *Undoing Gender*, that her essays and chapters are trying to imagine "what it might mean to undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" and about exploring "the experience of *becoming undone* in both good and bad ways" (Butler 1; author's italics). The verb usage of "undo" and "becoming." These are not instinctive reactions but words of agency, of a self-conscious willfulness to act in response to the "restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" which have been "done" to the subject, as in the Butlerian and Foucaultian idea of being "subjectivated" (*Undoing Gender* 41) as the receiver of society's regulations. It is this feeling of being "subjectivated" that makes Catherine Givings feel so "queer." These regulations include but are not limited to shoring up "the notion of a primary sexual difference that forms the core of an individual's psychic life...through assuming that sperm and egg imply heterosexual parental

coitus, and then a number of other psychic realities, including the primal scene and oedipal scenario” (*Undoing Gender* 14). These activities involve both the body and the mind as sites of social interaction and regulation. The body functions as the anatomical site of social interaction and regulation and the mind as psychic reality and “psychic topography” (*Undoing Gender* 14) functions as the non-material, psychic/spiritual site of social interaction. However, Butler, by her term “psychic realities” as the perceived notions of both one’s material surroundings and mental state and her term “psychic topography” as the space where aspects of the mind/spirit and body interact, argues that any force enacted on either the body or the mind/psyche/soul/spirit also has an effect upon the other. In this sense, it is not just Catherine Givings’ actions that can upset the binaries and heteronormative hierarchy within the play but also, as will be seen below, her social activities as well. Mrs. Daldry and Annie are brought together by Catherine through her active search for a sense of self and belonging that is not just defined as a mother who cannot breastfeed her baby. This effect is highlighted in two scenes: the scene when Mrs. Daldry and Mrs. Givings “experiment” with the vibrator and when Mrs. Daldry and Annie share a kiss.

After discussing the experience of the vibrator over tea, Catherine convinces the reluctant Mrs. Daldry to sneak into the operating theatre with her. Mrs. Daldry explains that she began her sessions with Dr. Givings because her husband brought her there. After her confession that her anxiety keeps her fingers from working on the piano, Mr. Daldry makes an off-hand comment earlier in the play that “[n]o, her fingers do not work. In the living room. Or in any other room, if you take my meaning, Dr. Givings” (Ruhl 12). This reveals that in Mr. Daldry’s mind, Mrs. Daldry is unable to perform her sexual duties as a wife in the bedroom. This is the cause of their marital tension and why Mr. Daldry brought Mrs. Daldry to Dr. Givings. However, as Mrs. Daldry and Catherine begin to discuss how the vibrator works, Mrs. Daldry offers, “I will hold it

in place for you” (Ruhl 62). Mrs. Daldry and Catherine purposefully sneak into the operating theater and purposefully engage in an intimate experience because of the othering which they have felt due to the tensions in their marriages caused in part due to the mechanistic and essentialist views of their husbands and society. Catherine in particular had just been desperately asking Dr. Givings to experiment on her in order that she may feel desired and gain some sense of self rather than feeling othered. When Dr. Givings would not comply, Catherine now has set out to find some way of gaining that sense of self. Catherine’s performance with Mrs. Daldry queers her performance altogether, working against the patriarchal normative of heterosexual marriage in which her feelings and desires, as Dr. Givings implies, are seen as impractical. Furthermore, toward the end of the play, Mrs. Givings and Mrs. Daldry discuss marriage, which inspires Mrs. Daldry who asks, “Do you mind I play your piano?” (Ruhl 129). As the stage directions read, Mrs. Givings goes to check on the baby but as Mrs. Daldry “*plays the piano, full of longing*” (Ruhl 129; author’s italics). Annie comes in to “*sit beside Mrs. Daldry on the piano bench*” and as the song finishes, “*Annie claps./They kiss*” (Ruhl 129; author’s italics). Mrs. Daldry for the second time queers her performance in order to find her own sense of self apart from just the wife of Mr. Daldry. Mrs. Daldry’s performances reveal that her ability to be intimate is not being caused by some pent-up juices in her womb but by the anxiety caused by the expectations of Mr. Daldry regarding Mrs. Daldry’s performance of her wifely duties. Here are two scenes where the heteronormative performances of the marriages of Mrs. Givings and Mrs. Daldry are suspended, and they are both able to give in to other performances, queer performances of lesbian experimentation. Just as the body and mind/psyche/soul/spirit boundary is shown to collapse in on itself, the play shows how heteronormative binaries of sexual identity collapse as well, that gender and sexual identity is really fluid based upon the audience, their

expectations, the actant, and the performance the actant gives. If identity is essential, is found within the seat of the mind/psyche/soul/spirit then these performances could not be acted out because they would not be within the ability of that person's mind/psyche/soul/spirit to act out of their nature. These performances show that such essentialism cannot exist and that instead our desires and material needs stem from the assemblage of our material being, its component parts, and the cosmic energy which they generate that courses through them.

Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home* continues to interrogate the binaries between ourselves and the world around us and also to begin to develop an even deeper cosmological message. This cosmological message comes to a culmination during the dance scene when the physical form of the actor as dancer which is the same as the minister and grandfather breathes into the puppet of the ethereal ghost of the character Stephen. The stage notes describe that as the dancer finishes his dance and "before slipping away again into shadow" he "takes Stephen in his arms and pours his breath into Stephen's mouth" (Vogel 52). We are told that at this moment "let the ghost become flesh" (Vogel 52). Before getting into the cosmological import, the sexualized and queer imagery being used. The dancer and Stephen are both male, and the act of giving one a breath simulates the act of kissing. Stephen, even as a ghost, is only a young man. The dancer, though described as beautiful is also the minister and the grandfather. Stephen is also at this moment a non-living puppet. When the dancer/minister/grandfather's breath is blown into Stephen's mouth during simulated kiss, Stephen gains life again but only for one night. This moment represents the breath of life of cosmic creation and our quantum entanglement. A nonliving entity is given life for a short, mortal, period from a living entity at which it then becomes nonliving again. This mirrors the process of life within our own bodies in which the

living and non-living work together as an assemblage allowing life and the conditions for our agency to occur.

Joana Mansbridge comments about this moment in her essay “Memory’s Dramas, Modernity’s Ghosts: Thornton Wilder, Japanese Theater, and Paula Vogel’s *The Long Christmas Ride Home*.” Mansbridge discusses Vogel’s use of the puppets to disrupt our notions of binary existence, reminding us of the play’s subtitle. Mansbridge states “The subtitle—*A Puppet Play with Actors*—suggests the puppets’ central role in *LCRH*, a centrality that visually complicates some of the fundamental dualisms structuring Western theater and culture: body/voice; interiority/exteriority; active/passive; past self/present self; private/public; individual memory/collective memory; performativity/ theatricality” (Mansbridge 222) This scene develops into something of a Platonian pederastic queering of the holy trinity that tears apart at our binary understanding of our existence in the cosmos. On stage, there appears in one character the erotic father/teacher, the biological grandfather, and the minister representing the cosmological father who kisses/breathes into Stephen bringing his inanimate molecules to life. Stephen is then able to go on living out his past life and interact with the current life of his sisters and their children. Similar to the geologic time in Wilder, Vogel here is creating a multiplicity of dimensions, times, and actions. Stephen obtains the breath of life during the current time of his sisters’ existence. However, Stephen, with the breath of life of the current time, then goes on to also live out the past as well as the present. In addition, the play is being performed at the audience’s current time of existence. Furthermore, the dancer is not just the dancer but the grandfather and the minister, all of which have their own separate time lines. Then, all of these times are contrasted with the idea that Stephen will be a ghost once more in the next 24 hours. Finally, there is the fact that Stephen is a ghost which means that Stephen’s ghost will live on for a very long time, All of

these timelines are playing out at once on stage, leading the reader to examine this multiplicity of dimensions and times in the play.

Mansbridge further comments about these multiplicity of dimensions and timelines in her book, *Paula Vogel*. Mansbridge states that “Vogel presents a model of theatrical time understood as both propelling forward and pulling back, a complex temporal movement in which the past is encountered as part of the present and the body operates as the site and means of that encounter” (*Paula Vogel* 145). As Mansbridge points out, these scenes represent the intersection of time, space, and matter with the body acting as the nexus. These representations help point toward our quantum entanglement because it mirrors the interconnections between our material being, its component parts, and their place in time and space. For instance, the molecules which make up our bodies once made up plants and animals which we then either consumed or whose particles were shed during decomposition. Those plants and animals had their own time but because their particles became in contact with each other they would still be connected, interacting, changing spins and other properties based upon what each other particle was doing. Each of those particles having their own time line. Those particles themselves a part of a longer history, once composing the bodies dinosaurs that lived millions of years ago in their own timeline. Those molecules interacted with even more disparate molecules in those many millions of years ago each molecule now attuned to the others and the many millions of molecules they have interacted with since. But those molecules have an even longer history having helped form so many long dead stars and planets that had been infused with such cosmic energy back so many eons ago at the formation of this particular iteration of the universe within the cosmos. Our material being, then, whose assemblage gives us life and agency from its component molecules and the cosmic energy infused within them is connected to the life and death of those many previous generations of

entities and the cosmic energy that has coursed through their material being and the being of those molecules since the dawn of the cosmos. So that the breath of cosmic life which Stephen receives as a non-living material to be able to live out life again, if only for a short time, allows him to still be connected to the dancer, the grandfather, the minister, his sisters, his parents, and his former lovers. This scene of the performance reminds the audience of our sacred interconnections not just to our immediate friends and family but to all entities within cosmic creation and to cosmic creation itself.

Nancy Howells discusses these interconnections and the multiplicity of dimensions, times, and actions in her book *A Feminist Cosmology: Ecology, Solidarity, and Metaphysics* when discussing the works of Alfred North Whitehead. Howells explains that Whitehead developed an idea about “the doctrine of the immanence of the past energizing in the present” (Howell 52). The theo-poetical idea of immanence is drawn from Whitehead’s conclusions here. Howell explains that there is a “linear, one dimensional character of personal inheritance in conjunction with a contribution from the multiplicity of the actual world” which is called the “vector-structure of nature” (Howell 52). Howell here is explaining that biology tends to be a one-way street, we inherit certain traits and genes from those who came before us, in our past, but that we cannot send our traits and genes back in time. Those traits and genes are then given an innumerable amount of opportunities to interact in the world, this is the multiplicity Howells speaks of. When we act, Howells and Whitehead asserts there is “a multidimensional, geometrical order and transference” (Howell 52). What this means is that the biological and molecular traits which one inherits from one’s ancestors is a transfer of energy and life. That energy and life allow that person to interact in the future world which that person does at the very moment they act. This interaction creates a multilayered continuity of molecular and

biological life. This informs further what Howell and Whitehead describe as the “continuity of nature” in which “[a]ll entities are subjects and objects” because of our molecular structure. Therefore “both organic and inorganic entities are experiencing creatures” (52) but that experience is intrinsically different. When we join the ideas of Whitehead, Howell, and Laszlo, then, when these entities interact, those interactions constitute the geometric whole of reality as an entanglement of living and nonliving matter acting upon and in accordance with each other but each experiencing the phenomenon in that entity’s own distinct way, a type of consciousness which is drawn from and made possible by the cosmic creative energy flowing through it. With regard to Vogel, we see this theopoetical quantum entanglement of an experiencing nonliving entity when Stephen becomes the nonliving but living puppet and then goes on to act out the scenes of the memories of the living Stephen. This scene comes to reveal the fiction as narrative which is dependent upon the performance of the non-living puppets, particularly the ghost of Stephen who is dependent upon the living actors. These participants merge to become an entanglement of living non-living beings whose identities are so intertwined that they cannot be sorted or separated. Using a cosmological interpretive strategy helps to remind us that our existence is bound up with other beings and modes of existence, living and non-living, material and immaterial, a reality which is even further explored in the garden scene in Ruhl’s *In the Next Room (Or the Vibrator Play)*.

Ruhl is able to also show that while one cannot redo life, it is possible to “undo” the effects of a particular performance. This occurs in the final scene of *In the Next Room*, when Catherine brings Dr. Givings out into the garden to consummate their love for each other. Catherine asks Dr. Givings “what is it then, this very particular way in which you love me?” while Dr. Givings tries to refuse but Catherine urges him, “Please try” and “try” (Ruhl 140). At

this point Dr. Givings recites “I bless thee” to several different parts of Catherine’s body, “*Kissing tenderly each place as he names it,*” ending with “I bless thee Catherine” (Ruhl 141). While on initial appearance, Dr. Givings is conceding to the arrogance of patriarchal science in believing he has the power to bless her, it must be remembered he is doing this at the behest of Catherine and it is she who prompted him for such an expression. This becomes important because Catherine here is acting out of the bounds of the expectation of her gender. Darla Linville traces the various changes in acceptable sexual behavior of men and women from the 1800s onward. Linville cites evidence from previous sociological studies, finally concluding about women in the late 1800s that “Sexuality was not considered to be an issue among women because, for the most part, sexual energy and drive was presumed to reside in men in the sexology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (Linville 18). Catherine’s initiation of this sexual encounter is not just another heterosexual coupling, then. Catherine is in effect, queering her performance, taking on the masculine role in the relationship while at the same time, not feminizing Dr. Givings, but allowing him his own performance as well. Christopher Bigsby discusses this section in his play in his book *Twenty First Century American Playwrights*. Bigsby states “Until that moment, a hand on the cheek was no more than a matter of muscles and skin. [Dr. Givings] inhabited a world of facts, an observer of life rather than a participant in it” (Bigsby 187). Bigsby acknowledges here that Catherine has led, not only herself but also Dr. Givings to become an active participant within both their marriage and the cosmos. This scene becomes a mutual, cosmological union because both Catherine and Dr. Givings, as active participants, will the union into being. That union, as expressed between the two, becomes an “undoing” of the dominance of the patriarchal essentialism and duality expressed by Western science and medicine.

To understand these moments between Dr. Givings and Catherine it is important to recognize that the nature of the universe (cosmology), includes questions about the after-life and/or the connection we have to the immaterial components of the cosmos (mind/psyche/soul/spirit). In fact, within the article “Sarah Ruhl’s Whimsical Hauntings” Julia Klein makes a comparison of Ruhl’s plays *Eurydice* and *Dead Man’s Cell Phone* about this very subject of how we perceive reality and its ties to the spirit and cosmology. Klein writes “Ruhl conceives of the boundary between life and death as highly permeable. Love is, for her, the passport between these two realms” (Klein). We see how the love between Dr. Givings and Catherine can act as a passport to allow us to begin to see the immaterial forces at work within the cosmos. For Klein this shows that there is an intertwining of the ideas of life and death within Sarah Ruhl’s *Eurydice* and *Dead Man’s Cell Phone* in which there is not much of a boundary and the physical and material world intersect with the immaterial and the spiritual after-life. Klein notes that the boundary is more of a concept of “language and communication” in that the dead, as in *Dead Man’s Cell Phone*, cannot read “the urgent letters” written by the living and are themselves “incomprehensible to the living” because as she notes in the stage directions of *Eurydice*, the dead speak “the language of stones,” a play on the stones that wept for the death of Orpheus (Klein). Klein further goes on to note that the blurring of the boundaries between the physical and material world of the living and the immaterial, spirit world of the afterlife in these two plays “rejects despair, choosing instead the possibility of communion” (Klein). Klein’s use of “communion” here is interesting in that it is loaded with cosmological connotations. Communion is seen as two or more bodies coming together literally in a harmonious manner, but also a cosmological concept of transformation in which two or more things, through their own agency, “become” one being. I use quotations around “become” in order to recognize it, as the

analysis of Judith Butler reveals, as a verb of agency, in which the transformation requires the will of the individual or individuals involved. I argue that Ruhl's *In the Next Room* is the next iteration of this type of cosmological union that Klein discusses. However, rather than dealing specifically with an afterlife, *In the Next Room*, deals with the way we live life and how we create artificial boundaries between what we feel and what we do with our bodies.

At the end of *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)*, it is Catherine who leads Dr. Givings, "Away from the machine./ In the Garden." telling him, "do not call me impractical. Our whole future happiness depends upon it" (Ruhl 141). Here, Dr. Givings acquiesces. However, as he begins to undress Dr. Givings, he hesitates, stating "The street lamps are coming on. Someone will see us" (Ruhl 142). Here we see Dr. Givings again afraid to perform in contrast to the social norms. However, Catherine, in her new empowerment presses him on, "No one will see. They are not electric yet. Thank God something still flickers" (Ruhl 142). Catherine is again being the initiator, transgressing her feminine sexual role "becoming" a subjective agent able to act out her life rather than passively letting it happen. The couple undresses and marvels at the nakedness of their bodies, Dr. Givings still feeling "Embarrassed" (Ruhl 141). However, still eager to please his wife, they lay down together but with her "*on top of him.*" In this scene, Catherine has now "undone" the patriarchy present within the rest of the play. However, she is not acting as some usurper of power. Instead, as the stage directions note "*They make an angel./ They make their wings go back and forth./ It snows on them.*" (Ruhl 143). Catherine and Dr. Givings have become from two, one being, flapping its wings in the snow. Going back to Al-Shama, he states about this scene that "Not only do they act *within*, they act *on* their environment. Catherine's experiments in selfhood release the flow of her sexuality and activate the alternating current of reciprocity in her marriage" (Al-Shama 143). So then in reciprocity, as they act upon the snow,

the snow too falls on them and becomes like a third-party blessing of the union so that husband, wife, human and nature coalesce in communion together with fluid, indiscriminate boundaries of the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit, a working assemblage of cosmic life. This represents the cosmological world view of the play, presented by Sarah Ruhl, leading toward displaying a cosmological framework that does not put either humans and nature or the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit in opposition but portrays it working in conjunction with each other, entangled within and around each other.

Paula Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home* and Sara Ruhl's *In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)* reminds us that our agency is bound up with other beings and modes of existence, living and non-living, material and immaterial. Through this cosmological interpretive strategy one can see how the plays come to act as forms of cosmic reenchantment through their prompting the reader/viewer toward a moral and ethical reflection of ideas about our roles and relationships between each other as humans and between us and nature, all of which resemble Judith Butler, Nancy Howell, and Ervin Laszlo's ideas of our attempts to work out our roles and interactions within the quantum entanglement of the cosmos.

5 AGENTS OF AGENCY: MAXINE HONG KINGSTON, OCTAVIA BUTLER, THEOPOETICS, AND THE SHAPING OF REALITY

Our age has seen no shortage of obtuse laws impeding upon our freedom and basic human dignity from segregation to apartheid, from forced labor camps to forced institutionalization of people with disabilities and homosexuals into asylums and given electroshock therapy or even killing them, in effect regulating who and who is not guaranteed life. These are the topics which helped inform Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*. Sometimes these topics take place as discussions of the codes of segregation on the roads or the forced agricultural labor like in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. Sometimes, like in Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*, these topics appear as discussions of the protests against the Vietnam War and the gender norms that the Singh family attend and help organize. In other places, these topics may appear as the therapeutic writing workshops for Veterans' and displaced peoples that Maxine Hong Kingston helped facilitate in real life but then writes about in *The Fifth Book of Peace*. These topics have influenced and seeped into both authors' narratives. The seemingly arbitrary treatment of the human person by society and institutions is not new so Butler and Kingston point out in their respective works the myriad possible manifestations of how different groups, especially women, racial and ethnic minorities, and homosexuals are persecuted. These persecutions often also manifest themselves as the attempts to define identity through the embodiment of gender and behavioral norms. This persecution is a sign of how the power structure of collective society participates in a struggle with the individual for control over the governance of the body and the direction of societal ethics. Along with the mind/psyche/soul/spirit and body problem as

discussed in the previous chapter, there also comes the other problem of the individual and society feeling alienated and separate from nature and the cosmos within which they both must live and act. Theorists and artists over the years have attempted to find some way through this alienation and separation. I argue one such process is reenchantment which is a recognition that we have ultimately come from somewhere larger than ourselves and so we must then become aware that we cannot match the power of cosmic creation but that we work within and act upon the larger cosmos and the other entities contained within it. If understood in this way, then those other entities, while possibly a source of food or rivalry for resources, are a part of the larger cosmic reality and deserve to be valued for their place within that larger cosmos. Therefore, in developing a cosmological interpretive strategy to interpret literature and art, as humans, we cannot consider ourselves entirely separate from nature/the cosmos or as simply grown away or out of it but as individuals acting in it, through it, and upon it. Through our desire and attempts to create, interpret, and find meaning in our artistic creations, including language, these creations become discursive reminders, not of some transcendental force that is separate from our material reality, but of a theo-poetical conception of an imminent cosmological force acting upon us and through us just as we are acting upon it and through it.

In the world of *Parable of the Sower*, there has occurred some sort of economic and ecological disaster that makes the weather unpredictable, water scarce, and food outrageously priced. This has led to the collapse of civilization. Throughout the novel crazed drug addict “pyros” who see fire “as better than sex” (*Parable* 47), unite with the desperately poor and homeless to slowly move from block to block overtaking the middle and upper-class neighborhoods, stealing, and setting fire to anything that is not useful, including people and animals. The main character of *Parable*, Lauren Olamina, is a “sharer” which means she has

“hyperempathy” which is “what the doctors call an ‘organic delusional syndrome’” (*Parable* 10). As Lauren describes it, “I’m crazy. I get a lot of grief that doesn’t belong to me. But it hurts.” Lauren believes that she is “supposed to share pleasure *and* pain, but there isn’t much pleasure around these days” (*Parable* 11). Lauren’s mention of the lack of pleasure hints at the risks which Lauren takes when out in public. Due to the collapse of the world’s governments, most people live in impoverished areas where there is much suffering as well as much danger. In order to protect themselves, various groups of people have banded together, forming small gated communities which set their own rules and regulate their own behaviors and customs. The novel, which takes the form of entries from Lauren’s journal, first reveals Lauren’s community and the effect it has on her in the second chapter through a journal entry that is dated Sunday, July 21, 2024, in which Lauren writes about being persuaded to be initiated into her father’s Christian religion because of her love for him but also as a form of protection from the harsh dangers of the world outside their gated community. Lauren writes that “[a]t least three years ago, my father’s God stopped being my God. His church stopped being my church. And yet, because I’m a coward, I let myself be initiated into that church. I let my father baptize me in all three names of that God who isn’t mine any more” (*Parable* 6). Within this passage we see Lauren’s body as a site of contestation between Lauren, her father, and her father’s patriarchal, Baptist religion. Lauren links the religion and its patriarchy to the larger community when she explains that she and the other kids in the neighborhood were all being trucked across the town for a communal baptism. While traveling through town they see that “houses were trashed- burned, vandalized, infested with drunks or druggies or squatted in by homeless families with their filthy, gaunt, half naked children” (*Parable* 8). Lauren and the others see the dangers which surround them as they travel but are also reminded that these are the dangers which surround them when they are in

their subdivision as well. The group also sees “a little girl, naked, maybe seven years old with blood running down her bare thighs” (*Parable* 11), revealing that the dangers do not stop just because you are a child; the perpetrators will still rape and possibly kill you just the same. Because of these dangers, the group carries weapons out in the open because “if they couldn’t see your guns, they might try to pull us down and steal our bikes, our clothes, our shoes, whatever. Then what? Rape? Murder?” (*Parable* 9). With the risks and costs like the church rental and water fees so high, Lauren goes on to explain that “The other kids’ parents had helped with the costs. They thought a proper baptism was important enough to spend some money and take some risks” (*Parable* 11-12). This risk to the safety of the children is considered worth it because it is instilling in the children a tradition and ritual that makes the parents “never miss a chance to relive the good old days or tell the kids how great it’s going to be when the country gets back on its feet and good times come back” (*Parable* 7). From this episode, one can see how, for Lauren, the dangers which the outside world poses, such as bodily rape and murder, can only be fended off by the protection of the larger, patriarchal group by acquiescing to the bodily regulation of having her body dipped in water and verbally announcing that she accepts the God of her father and community.

Kate Schaefer comments about Lauren’s rejection of her father’s religion and the general use of religion in the novel within her essay, “On Re-reading *Parable of the Sower*.” Schaefer explains that Lauren’s commentary about religion serve as “a future religion or as a hardass rejection of any religion that depends on the invisible or irrational” (Schaefer 3499). Schaefer goes on to further comment that “*Parable of the Sower* is filled with Christian and Buddhist imagery, built on religious metaphor, parable, and story. It deconstructs the religion on which it is built and uses the basic elements to build a new religion without any gods, with change and

chance at its center, and human determination and hope shaping the whole” (Schaefer 3543). While Schaefer is correct that Lauren and Butler reject many of the other religious models, Lauren does not reject gods or God, per se. Lauren, and due to her roles as author, Octavia Butler, reconceives of how we envision the concept of God, not as a static being but as the pervasive, immanent catalyst for change. Octavia Butler’s conception of God is immanent because, as Schaefer points out, it does not rely on an invisible spirit. A cosmological interpretation argues that the spirit is bodily; it is not hidden in the body, but the body is spiritual because of its cosmological creation, given life from non-living material. Gregory Jerome Hampton comments about the use of the body in Octavia Butler’s works in his collection *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler*. Hampton states that “[r]eligion is ultimately a mechanism that polices the borders of social value and disvalue. In her narratives Butler employs the integration of postmodern slave narrative forms with feminist creation stories to question the political and spiritual value of marginalized bodies” (Hampton 85). Hampton recognizes how religion has often been used not just to offer cosmological interpretations of how and why life became as it is in the cosmos but has sometimes become a way to regulate social, political, and bodily power, often conforming to patriarchal structures as shown in the relationship between Lauren and watch she calls her father’s religion. Hampton explains how Octavia Butler uses her characters to at least question, if not outright co-opt that power through the use of their bodily performances. Rebecca Holden in her essay, “‘I Began Writing About Power Because I Had So Little’: The Impact of Octavia Butler’s Early Work on Feminist Science Fiction as a Whole” agrees. Using Judith Butler’s theories, Holden states that Octavia Butler’s characters become empowered to take control of their own politicized bodies. Holden states that “[t]hese characters, in the words of Judith Butler, “cite” the law that has defined them as black, female, and abnormal

“in order to reiterate and co-opt its power” (15). Such reiteration relies on knowledge of the past – a history written on their racialized, gendered bodies – that sets them apart from the dominant culture” (Holden 547). Holden here reminds the readers that Butler’s theories about the body do not just describe how outside forces regulate our bodies but also describe how our actions can either reinforce or transgress those regulations. These critics miss many of the important cosmological relationships which Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* reveals.

Robin Rockensu hints at these cosmological relationships in her book *The Role of Nature in the Works of Octavia Butler* when she examines *Parable of the Sower* from an ecocritical framework. Rockensu explains that the importance of the religious discussion is to contrast the binary of the spiritual otherworld in the various religions with the embodied physical world. Rockensu states that [t]he striking difference is that Earthseed is not a religion that believes in another world in the sense of an afterlife but in a possible ‘here and now’ on a different planet” (Rockensu 163). Rockensu asserts that the motive for colonization of another planet is not domination but simply to survive because the Earth’s ecology is failing due to human misuse and abuse of it. Rockensu suggests that “Butler does not disregard environmental concerns but broadens our understanding of ourselves in relation to nature from Earth as a microcosm towards the idea of the universe as part of our living space” (Rockensu173). Rockensu goes on to use her interpretations of Octavia Butler’s works as a defense of the development of ecofeminism and a new environmental ethics. A cosmological interpretation goes further than environmental ethics not just discussing our treatment and conception of nature but with the conception of God which these conceptions of nature and spirituality develop.

In *Parable of the Sower*, the body becomes the social site of a public and private struggle for power and control. Further, it will be shown how Lauren made to feel alienated and ‘queer’

about her body due to her hyperempathy in a struggle that is really about the struggle of Lauren's will against the will of society. Lauren describes about her hyperempathy that her "neurotransmitters are scrambled and they are going to stay scrambled" (*Parable* 11). However, Lauren also reminds the reader that her condition is not "some magic or ESP" (*Parable* 11) but that its effects are "delusional." Lauren's body does not actually receive the injuries of the person she sees. Instead, the injuries Lauren receives are psychosomatic, meaning that these events are not just bodily, they are mental. Her body is not receiving any information that her mind is not receiving and her mind is not doing anything that her body is not experiencing. Butler's concept of Lauren's hyperempathy breaks the binary of the body and the mind because it reveals that the two are not separate but intricately linked so that whatever the body experiences the mind experiences and whatever the mind experiences, the body experiences: mind and body are woven together. As explained in the previous chapter, the mind is also a stand-in term for what other groups call the psyche, the spirit, or the soul. So again, to use Judith Butler's terminology from the intro of her 2004 work *Undoing Gender*, the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit are "acting in concert" (*Undoing Gender* 1) with one another. Octavia Butler's depictions of Lauren's hyperempathy lead the reader to recognize this interwoven existence of the immaterial and the material.

This interwoven existence of the immaterial and the material is also in line with the thinking of quantum mechanics in which matter and human will coincide acting upon each other as what Jane Bennett describes as "vibrant matter" (Bennett 58) in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Bennett goes on to describe how matter can act, as Bruno Latour terms "'an actant'" that works as "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman" (Bennett 68) which is in line with quantum entanglement. Process theologian and physicist

Catherine Keller describes this occurrence in her book *The Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* stating that “the particle is read as event” which means it is really not a particle but a “wave” that “signifies its potentialities” in order so that it can begin “‘experiencing’ a particular actualization at a particular point in space-time” (Keller 2810). What Keller and Bennett are revealing is that our body is not mechanistic but is interpreting data just as we interpret language. The interpretive events of Lauren’s body are shown when Lauren’s brother Keith tricks her into thinking he is bleeding.

Lauren describes an episode of her hyperempathy when her brother Keith “used red ink as fake blood to make me bleed. I was eleven then, and I still bled through the skin when I saw someone else bleeding” (*Parable* 10). When Lauren’s body sees the fake blood, Lauren’s mind is reading the data of Keith’s body as her own. In order for this to occur, these two bodies which seem so different from each other would have to have some sort of identifying signal or code that the mind reads that would allow them to be able to allow Keith’s experiences to be reinterpreted as Lauren’s own experience. This factor reveals that Lauren and Keith’s bodies are inextricably linked. This also goes along with quantum entanglement due to the interconnection between particles as again described by Ervin Laszlo who describes particles as being able to “be at any finite distance in space and time but remain nonetheless connected” (Laszlo 580). The reason for this interconnection is the coordination of the electromagnetic, gravitational, and electromagnetic forces that reveal “[p]articles are not corpuscular entities, and they do not exist independently” because “the fundamental reality is not matter but energy, and the laws of nature are not rules of mechanistic interaction” but simply “algorithms” and “coding patterns” (Laszlo 597) Laszlo here confirms both Bennett and Keller’s interpretations of matter as acting as coded information

attempting to assemble itself into a particular actuality, a particular happening in reality. When this particular happening occurs, an individual must often react to the happening.

Lauren explains her own reactions to these types of happenings when she explains that “she hasn’t shared bleeding with anyone since I was 12 and got my first period” and that “Keith only tricked me into bleeding that once” (*Parable* 11). Lauren reveals that she has been able to avoid sharing someone else’s injury to the point of making her own body bleed. Lauren further explains that “[i]f I don’t look at old injuries, they don’t hurt me too much” (*Parable* 13). Lauren has to will away the reaction of her body or avert that reaction in some other fashion such as looking away. This demonstrates how Lauren has to exert her will, her agency, on her own interwoven body and mind in order to confront the condition of her hyperempathy in order to protect herself but she can never truly be separated from the ability to feel other people’s and entity’s pain. Using a cosmological interpretive strategy, we can see that Lauren’s hyperempathy reminds us of our interactions and interconnections with our surrounding reality, in particular the interactions between our will and the will of other entities, including the particulate matter which joins us together to the cosmos. Furthermore, Lauren’s hyperempathy acts as a reminder of the ethical obligations concerning our use of our agency as a result of the interconnections we as individuals have to each other and to the other entities within the cosmos. Lauren will always be able to feel the expressions of other entities, especially pain. This reminds the reader of our obligation to empathize with other entities, even when it is difficult and burdensome to do so.

Marlene Allen discusses these ethical obligations in her article “Octavia Butler’s *Parable* Novels and the ‘Boomerang’ of African American History.” Allen states that “Butler’s creation of the diverse group of individuals, also are sharers, that make up Earthseed reflect Butler’s emphasis upon communal sharing as a balm against the poverty, racism, and sexism so prevalent

in the larger world outside their sect” (Allen 1363). Allen further concludes that Lauren’s first-person narrative detailing her attempts to lead people to freedom connects “Lauren to the long line of black heroes and heroines in African American literature beginning with the earliest slave narrators” (Allen 1354-5). Allen reminds the reader that exhibiting empathy toward others is foundational to developing communal relationships and to acknowledging and solving the social, economic, and ecological problems of a society. Rachel Sears comments on Allen’s observations, in her essay, “Butler: To Take Root Among the Stars.” Sears adds to Allen’s commentary, stating that Lauren is not only connected to and descendant from African American history but to feminist and queer history as well. Sears states that, “Butler’s treatment of lesbianism is revolutionary. Although Lauren is the founder of an inclusive religion and community, even she can be taken off guard sometimes. Lauren, like Marcos, was raised in a more exclusive religion that declared homosexuality sinful, and yet, unlike Marcos, she is able to embrace the complicated intricacies of human sexuality” (Sears 27). Though when mentioning Marcos, Sears is referencing *Parable of the Talents*, Butler’s sequel to *Parable of the Sower*, as both Allen and Sears point out, Lauren’s acceptance of diverse individuals is very apparent in both books. These relationships are important because by revealing these interconnections and the interactions between our will and the will of other entities, Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* acts as an instrument of reenchantment leading us to acknowledge our own agency and the impact we have upon others.

Kingston’s novel *The Fifth Book of Peace* also highlights these interconnections and interactions as well. The first clue to Kingston’s attempt to disorient the reader from scientific binary relationships toward a view of cosmological reenchantment is the way in which she structures *The Fifth Book of Peace*. The novel is structured in 5 parts: “Fire,” “Paper,” “Water,”

“Earth,” and the “Epilogue.” There is no prologue to go along with the epilogue which disrupts western notions of binary symmetry. Second, Kingston structures the novel based on classical Greek and Buddhist concepts of the elements fire, water, earth, and air. The description of “Fire” on the contents page states *“The author tells about herself running through the Oakland-Berkeley hills, which are on fire. All her material goods, including her novel- in-progress, are burned. A true story”* (Kingston “Contents”; author’s italics). The focus in this quote is on material goods and how they are destroyed by the fire. The novel begins with the chapter “Fire” in which the materiality of our world and its fragility are explored. “Fire” begins with vast descriptions of the materiality of existence and its destruction in the fire such as the narrator’s book, house, personal things, her neighbors’ houses, the forest, etc. However, rather than continuing the binaries of the physical vs. non-physical or the mind/body problem, Kingston turns this experience into the meeting point of the two by acknowledging that peace of mind, though a mental state of being, is directly tied to one’s physical safety and wellbeing, that peace of mind cannot exist without peace of body first. In the opening lines of the book, she writes: “If a woman is going to write a Book of Peace, it is given her to know devastation.” (Kingston 3) Kingston goes on to then to describe the types of devastation she has experienced “I have lost my book -156 good pages” (Kingston 3). In addition to losing the book, Kingston states that the fire also “took my house, things, neighborhood, and other neighborhoods, and forests. And the lives of twenty-five people” (Kingston 3). In these opening lines Kingston discusses devastation, peace, as in peace from war and peace of mind, the materiality of her book, the loss of her house, of her neighborhood, and the people who lived in that neighborhood. For Kingston, peace from war is a physical state in which no one is attacking you, including yourself. This is the precondition for achieving peace of mind. The state of mind seems to be non-physical, but it is

directly tied to the materiality of not having someone physically attacking you, including yourself. This process repeats for the idea of losing one's house and losing one's home, of losing one's neighborhood and of the physical people in it, and therefore also for losing one's sense of community. Peace of mind comes with the precondition of needing physical wellbeing. One of the challenges seems to be that everything at times seems to be attacking us, in this case a fire raging through one's neighborhood. Kingston reveals the struggle an individual must undergo to reach a point of understanding at which one recognizes that those items were not valuable because of their material worth but because of the state of peace those items put that person in based on the mental or emotion worth we, as individuals place on those items. Because the value was ours to give, losing those items becomes simply an opportunity to channel that value and the peace that comes when recognizing we can give up those items.

This material consumerism which Kingston describes is often discussed regarding her other works, but Kingston's *Fifth Book of Peace* is often seen as a cultural and political critique of our time, especially with its emphasis on war, veterans, and the suburban, Asian-American Ah Sing family. Min Hyung Song reminds her readers that one often overlooked component of this material consumerism is Kingston's story of the lost manuscript. Song explains why this lost manuscript is so important to Kingston's novel, stating that "the book manuscript (a sequel to *Tripmaster Monkey*), which Kingston focuses on as she picks her way through the debris left in the fire's wake, draws together the sense of having lost a connection to the past and to a place" (Song 59). The manuscript becomes a material symbol of the speaker Kingston's physical belongings and her sense of belonging that having possession of and consuming provides her comfort. Song continues by explaining that while Kingston lost her own personal connection to her belongings, which represent her past history as well as her connection to her place of

belonging, her home, she has now gained a cultural connection, a lost manuscript which is a prevalent trope within Chinese culture. Song asserts the political importance of this is that the lost manuscript narrative invokes “all the narratives by Asian Americans that were not, or could not, be written and published, the many stories one is sure were there to be told but were not” (Song 60). Song recognizes the connections Kingston is making between history and culture and comments on the precariousness of the Asian American situation. Song writes that “They do not know, and may have no way of knowing, their place in history, or how this history shapes who they are or what kind of political action best reflects their interests” (Song 65). Song treats history as a totalizing force which seems to swallow the individual and neutralize his or her agency and ability to make meaningful choices. A cosmological interpretation reveals what Song’s analysis omits: the ability of Kingston’s characters to act upon their agency and forge new communities while still retaining their cultural heritage.

Miriam Brown discusses in her essay, “‘Fear of Women’: Eliding and Mythologizing Women in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Fifth book of Peace*,” the helplessness and lack of agency which many women felt about their role in society, politics, and war. Brown explains that “These experiences, including Kingston’s failures and regrets, suggest the ways in which she, too, has become a victim of war. It is important to recognize that she is not simply conducting writing workshops as an altruistic exercise: she, too, wants to be healed of the trauma that she experienced when she became helpless and voiceless during the Viet Nam War” (Brown 13-14). Brown denotes how women were not eligible for the draft, so some felt as if they were unable to refuse participation and therefore were unable to truly protest in any meaningful way. Brown continues, stating that “By intertwining her narrative with that of the veterans, Kingston is able to recover her own voice, making it a part of the narrative that once excluded her. With this

voice, she is finally able to have an effect on the War and its veterans, over whom she was once unable to exert any influence” (Brown 14). Brown suggests that Kingston begins the writing workshops and her own narratives to combat her own feelings of voicelessness and lack of agency during the war. Kingston may not have been able to bring peace during the Vietnam War, but she hopes to champion the cause of peace over any future wars. Brown’s interpretation is on the right track at this point, however, her interpretation quickly devolves into a psychoanalytical evaluation of Kingston’s relationship with her brothers and as well as her relationship with other women who participated in the war such as field nurses and their like. A cosmological interpretation would instead look at how these relationships either help bolster or detract from Kingston’s efforts to foster *sangha*, the Buddhist concept of community which offers peaceful compassion to all, including those one would consider enemies. Such efforts to further *sangha* help to restore the agency of individuals but also prevent any further othering of humans and any further destruction of our nature, the product of cosmological creation which we rely upon for shelter and sustenance.

Chris Echols also discusses the topic of agency in Kingston’s community of veterans in his article “Literature’s Role in Peace.” Echols explains that there is guilt among Vietnam war soldiers, and all soldiers in general about their actions in war, especially actions that led to the killing of another person. Echols discusses Kingston’s example of one veteran who “killed a potential enemy combatant who turned out to be a young teenaged girl, someone a reasonable person would not normally expect to be a soldier fighting in combat. Then, he was called a murderer for doing his duty as a soldier” (Echols). Echols reveals how the soldiers are vilified but in such a way that does not really achieve any progress toward peace. He explains how this leads one of the veterans, Karlin, to believe that no one really wants to hear the stories of the

soldiers. Karlin believes there is no literary market for the writings of veterans because humans do not really want peace. Echols believes that Kingston creates an interactive novel that tackles this issue, explaining that “Karlin states the reality that there are people, for whatever personal reason, who do not want to read about, listen to, or concern themselves with the topics of war or peace. All of this information leaves it up to the reader to decide what he or she believes is the right path to choose when it comes to war and peace” (Echols). A cosmological interpretation of *The Fifth Book of Peace* reveals how many of Kingston’s narrative techniques lead the reader to reconceptualize their ideas about peace, *sangha*, her concept of communal living, and material existence. Through these techniques, Kingston uses *The Fifth Book of Peace* to empower the reader to choose to practice *sangha*, the building of a peaceful, communal living with each other and any and all of the entities of cosmological creation that make up our material reality.

In his essay “Dialectics of Aesthetics in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Fifth Book of Peace*,” E. San Juan Jr. discusses how Kingston reconceives of our notion of material reality and the material items which it consists of. San Juan Jr. imagines that Kingston is playing the role of the trickster, especially in the section of “Fire.” San Juan Jr. states that “[i]n trying to gather the damaged fragments of her life after the loss of her house and writing, Kingston seems to repudiate the notion of the author having sacrificed her authority (as alleged by, among others, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida) in favor of a trickster persona, for she now strives to demonstrate self-mastery in continuing what was interrupted by chance and accident” (San Juan Jr. 183; author’s parentheses). This trickster persona is a subversive one which is attempting to undermine the alienation caused by the modern and postmodern world by focusing a rebuilding of a sense of home and community that then translates into a larger moral and spiritual transformation for the individual and for society. San Juan Jr. is on the right track. Unlike many

of the other critics above, San Juan Jr. explains that Kingston's efforts are not just political but also spiritual. A cosmological interpretation, however, goes a step further.

A cosmological interpretation does not see spirituality as upholding a spiritually divine otherworld that negates and others our physical reality but instead viewing such existing physical reality as a sacred embodiment of the cosmic energy that flows through every living and non-living entity. This is represented in the first fire scene when Kingston comments about our reliance upon our material reality. When Kingston states that "I have an instinct that left is right and vice versa. Too easily lost" (Kingston 3), Kingston uses the pronoun I throughout this first page to blur the lines between author and narrator, the line between the realms of fiction and reality. The realms of the nonphysical imagination and our physical reality are being merged. The experience of being too easily lost which Kingston is describing, is no longer the experience of an imaginative character but of the reader. The reader is also surrounded by material items and therefore is also vulnerable to "fire" as a symbol of devastation and destruction of the home, a sense of community, and now even a sense of coherent self. This lack of identity and lack of self can be explained from our chapter on Wilder and Miller as what Max Weber and Morris Berman identified as disenchantment and the process of breaking through it as reenchancement.

Remember that Max Weber holds that in our history as humans we took "magical presuppositions" that we then systematized "to direct a way of life to the pursuit of a sacred value. Thus understood, the prophecy or commandment means, at least relatively, to systematize and rationalize the way of life, either in particular points or totally" (Weber 327). This systematization then led to a rationalization of our world until we ended up with a system of conflicted binary oppositions. Morris Berman, building upon Weber's work above, refers to this immanent understanding of reality as reenchancement. The idea of breaking down the binaries

between the material and immaterial and the agency involved in our materiality and their influence on destructive and apocalyptic situations is also directly linked to reenchancement as described by Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter*. Bennett explains that “the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption” (Bennet 88). Bennett further explains that when we recognize the agency involved in the material as well as the immaterial we gain a new sense of respect and wonder creating “moments of sensuous enchantment with the everyday world” that might “augment the motivational energy needed to move selves” to “the actual practice of ethical behaviors” (Bennett 123). Judith Butler even joins the conversation to explain how this process of disenchantment is similar to Kierkegaard’s idea of despair. Butler explains in her chapter “Kierkegaard’s Speculative Despair” from her collection *Senses of the Subject* that “[i]nsofar as despair characterizes the failure of a self, fully to know or to become oneself, a failure to become self-identical, an interrupted relation, then despair is precisely what thwarts the possibility of a fully mediated subject” (*Senses of the Subject* 1876). This feeling of disenchantment and despair keeps the subject from being an ‘actant’ or having the ability to commit to and recognize both its own agency and its interdependence on the larger cosmos. As we can begin to see by Octavia Butler and Maxine Hong Kingston’s emphasis on materiality, immateriality, and collaboration, their actions as artists and cultural critics act to reconcile the divide sown by disenchantment by showing how things can work in tandem, not as opposites but as intricately linked and entwined agents acting upon each other. Butler and Kingston do this in their respective stories, Kingston with her elements and building of her community of veterans, and Butler with Lauren Olamina’s ‘Earthseed’ and community.

With so much suffering and chaos happening at the beginning of the novel, Lauren learns how to simply try to survive in the world. Lauren uses the problems that her hyperempathy poses to her survival in such a broken, suffering world as a prompt for reflection on her desire to shape the world in response to how it has shaped her. Lauren puts her ideas into writing, coming up with parables, poetry, and proverbs of her new philosophy and religion about “Godseed” which Lauren describes as the idea that “God/is Change” (*Parable 3*) and that the universe exists “to shape God” and God exists “to shape the universe” (*Parable 69*). This larger cosmological view mirrors the issue we saw regarding the intertwining depiction of Lauren’s mind and body. Rather than God being the immaterial Platonic perfection and the universe being the fallen world, God as immaterial and the universe as embodiment validate each other; like the body and the mind/psyche/soul/spirit, they are intertwined in every aspect of each other and equally have the ability to shape each other. Lauren believes that humans, whom she calls “Earthseed,” have as their destiny to “shape God/shape self” (*Parable 231*). For Lauren, this means that humans exhibit an instinctual survival to leave the wasted earth. Lauren’s ultimate goal then becomes to “take root among the stars” (*Parable 68*) in order to develop a new community to colonize space. Lauren wants to colonize space in order to harvest the untapped resources so that a new, more equitable, human community can be formed. Lauren believes that this new community is needed in order for society to learn to be better shapers and stewards of the universe and its resources. Before she learns to shape the universe, Lauren explores breaking through society’s perception of her identity in order to shape her own identity.

After their neighborhood is burned down, Lauren, who is black, Zahra, who is black, and Harry, who is white, scavenge for some clothes and other supplies to bring on the road. As they are discussing whether to travel as a group together they begin to sort and divide their

belongings, giving to each other what might be needed or useful. These actions by Lauren, Zahra, and Harry work as counter actions “undoing” the loss of trust and recreate the sense of belonging which the capitalistic state broke down. Lauren and her allies in their selfless giving to each other begin constructing the first “seeds” of Lauren’s “Earthseed” community, even as they are on the road. This demonstrates an ability of community to travel and be “performed” rather than being a stable, isolated, space. Kingston reveals the sense of community to be a physical and mental situation; Butler’s description here reveals a similar reality. A community is not just a material object that sits within a gated subdivision, a community results from the interactions of a group of entities and their shared concern for all of their wellbeing. This idea of performing a community is similar to the ideas of drag which occur from this point on. Lauren gives Zahra some clean clothes from her brother, Marcus, who died in the attack on the neighborhood. The narrator tells the reader that Zahra “fit not only into Marcus’s shirt and jeans – though she had to roll the jean legs up – but into his shoes” (*Parable* 152). However, even though she is in drag, Zahra still looks like a woman. This inspires Lauren to tell Zahra and Harry that she “was thinking of traveling as a man” and Harry, “repressing a smile” replies to her “That will be safer for you. You’re at least tall enough to fool people. You’ll have to cut your hair though” (*Parable* 153). Zahra, who partly grew up with her drug addicted mother surviving on the road, recognizes the harsh reality of the situation and begins to explain to Harry and Lauren some of the so-called rules of the road. Zahra informs Lauren and Harry that “[m]ixed couples catch hell whether people think they are gay or straight. Harry’ll piss off the blacks and you’ll piss off all the whites. Good luck” (*Parable* 153). Then, when Zahra is considering joining with Harry and Lauren on the road she exclaims “I won’t cut my hair!” to which Lauren replies that there is “No need” because Lauren and Zahra can be “a black couple with their white friend” (*Parable* 153).

This admission that it is safer for a man than a woman out on the road reveals the patriarchal, heteronormative nature of the road and of traditional road narratives. In order to travel on the road, the group must conform to society's expectations of their physical appearance and behavior. This scene reveals the blurring of boundaries of gendered and sexual identities as well as the boundaries of the self and society's conception of the self. The acts of drag and the effect it has on identity is discussed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses drag's blurring of these boundaries stating that "The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance" and that this "suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance" (*Gender Trouble* 187). This leads Butler to conclude that gender and sexual identity is "corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "*performative*" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" that is merely an interpretation of a "*stylized repetition of acts*" (*Gender Trouble* 190 -191) For Lauren, Zahra, and Harry then, this expression of drag on one level adheres to the patriarchal structure since it is conforming to a masculine form of dress. Even Octavia Butler comments on the genderbending in "'Radio Imagination': Octavia Butler on the Poetics of Narrative Embodiment," an interview with Marilyn Mehaffy and Ana Louise Keating from 2001, states that "The women who make it to the top have to pretend to be men" and that while not necessarily "physical" there is a tendency to "take on the characteristics of the people that they most try to imitate" (Mehaffy and Keating 56). However, this embodiment of drag subverts the idea of gender roles, gender norms, gender identity, and sexual identity because despite her outward appearance, Lauren is anatomically considered by society to be of the

weaker sex that is more easily preyed upon. However, with Lauren acting as a man but also acting as a couple with Zahra, it creates an appearance of a heteronormative coupling. This heteronormative coupling is really a disguised homosexual lesbian coupling that is also a façade in and of itself since they are not actually attracted to each other sexually and are not performing such sexual acts but are instead pretending to be non-normative so that they can have the outward appearance of normativity in order to be safer while traveling. In this instance, Lauren and her allies enact a concerted effort to perform differing gendered and sexual identity than what they perceived themselves to be initially in order to subvert and break out of the described patriarchal, capitalistic society. Once Lauren has broken out of the patriarchal, capitalistic society, she then is able to create a new “Earthseed” community that does not conform to these social and cultural practices which is what Lauren does at the end of the novel. However, as Lauren notes, this requires a radical reenchancement, a cosmological rethinking of how society, cultural, and human individuality works within the universe and across time.

Kingston develops a similar conception of our interdependence on our environment as well. Maxine Hong Kingston begins expounding on the idea of collaboration in her book *The Fifth Book of Peace* during the discussions concerning the other lost books of peace in the section called “Paper.” The narrator discovers that there is no one universally accepted book of peace but many books of peace that came to be lost over the course of centuries. This sets up her realization that every generation requires its own books of peace and the narrator sets out to write her own book of peace from the ashes of a burned manuscript. These events are based partially on real life events in Kingston’s life, thereby blurring the reality of fact and fiction. This blurring effect acts as a method of disorienting the reader away from the enlightenment and capitalist secular thinking and becomes a form of reenchancement by ontologically opening a place within

the readers' consciousness for reflecting on the ideas of moral/ethical responsibility and peace. Kingston continues to break down Western science and philosophy in the section entitled "Paper," particularly in her use of the elements of "Fire," "Paper," "Water," and "Earth" to structure her novel. Mark Siderits in his book *Buddhism as Philosophy: An introduction* discusses how some Buddhist philosophers held the belief that "ordinary physical objects like rocks and tables are made up of very large numbers of atoms of four different types: earth, air, water, and fire" and that "similar views are found in ancient Greek philosophy" (Siderits 12). Kingston does not include air in her structure but paper. Greek philosophy is one of the pinnacles of western society but over the course of the centuries it has slowly receded as Buddhist philosophy has also been adopted and even commercialized such as the popularity of mini Buddha statues. Western society is also obsessed with the idea of atoms to the point of culling them into atomic bombs that could destroy the planet. Kingston's swapping of the element of paper instead of air acts in line with E. San Juan Jr.'s idea of Kingston's persona of author and narrator as a manifestation of the trickster person because this swap disrupts these western notions of elements and disrupts the secular, capitalist adoption of Buddhism.

Kingston emphasizes this point when she is giving a lecture to the community of veterans about the link between breathing meditation and writing as a form of meditation but also a form of action. Kingston states that "[w]riting you change. And you change the world, even the past. You make history" (Kingston 266). Kingston is reminding the veterans that writing is not a passive activity but a way in which individuals can manipulate the elements of reality to both tell their story, their history, and through their experiences the story of everyone. By telling one individual's suffering from war, writing is then able to tell about the suffering of all victims of war. With that activism, though, comes a sense of community and a sense of peace. This sense of

community and peace is called *sangha*. This scene provides an evolution in the thought about peace which Kingston begins to discuss in “Fire.” Peace from war, then, only comes from acting against war in the interest of not just yourself, but others. Kingston goes on to explain that she learned this lesson from Thich Nhat Hanh, the famous Buddhist monk who leads the *Sangha* community at Plum Village in France. Kingston explains to the community of veterans that Thich Nhat Hanh had once explained the power of paper to her, stating that she remembers “Thich Nhat Hanh picking up a sheet of white paper, tearing it in half, and tearing it again, showing that there is no such thing as duality: the left cannot be rid of the right, and the right cannot be rid of the left” (Kingston 266). Though strains of Buddhism itself contains some dualistic thinking, such as the belief in the material world as the mirage that will melt away to reveal the spiritual world, Kingston uses Thich Nhat Hanh’s Zen Buddhism as a method to break down Western culture’s emphasis on binaries and binary thinking. The breaking of the binary of peace and war shows the evolution of the thoughts of Kingston, as narrator, toward peace revealing that peace can actually be crafted into being from its opposite: war. This peace, however, requires the individual to act, not in fear, not in anger, not in their own interest, but in a selfless desire to bring peace for that individual and for all fellow beings. This represents a theopoetical call to action for the reader; similar in nature to Keller’s and Butler’s visions of shaping the world, Kingston calls for the reader not to become divorced from the events of this world in search of the spiritual world, but instead, to become engaged participants in the world, shaping peace out of the chaos of war and violence.

When one thinks about the element of paper one thinks of writing and though writing often lasts centuries if not millennia, it does so through the process of rewriting and revision. This connects the element of paper not only to language but specifically storytelling, the act of

retelling stories, and even re-appropriating stories as Kingston does with these elements and as William Beardslee remarked regarding the ability of storytelling to validate suffering while acting in as a therapeutic behavior that ushers in healing. This idea of revising and re-appropriating stories then recalls the acts of the oral storytelling tradition which required not just a storyteller but an active and engaged audience. This swapping of the element of paper instead of air then comes to represent the swapping of the western notion of reading as a passive activity instead for the notion of reading as an active, engaged action, a communal act. Kingston states almost as much, saying: "Fiction cares for others; it is compassion and gives others voice. It time-travels the past and the future, and pulls the not-now, not-yet into existence" (Kingston 62). Kingston's comments here echo Wilder, Hauser, Pynchon, Rahner, Lonergan, and DeLillo's concepts of fiction, interpretation, and time. These concepts display how fiction and the interpretation, the reading of an artifact of time, including a work of fiction, can lead the reader to experience multiple layers of time, leading the reader out of their own frame of mind and into a larger cosmic awareness. Take for instance, when Mario is flying on the plane with Tana and Wittman, the narrator states that "All the journeying of travel is transition, places changing, time changing, Planet Earth and light moving. Place moves, time moves, we move" (Kingston 70). Transition is the time when one phase must end and another must begin. By framing time and place within the concept of transition, Kingston reminds the reader that nothing ever actually stays in the same spot because as time moves, people and things move around as well. Kingston brings this to a global level by reminding the reader that the planet Earth also moves. Even if an individual is standing absolutely still, the Earth is moving so that individual is also moving, no one is ever standing still. Kingston further mentions that light moves. This reminds the reader that life on Earth could not exist without the movement of light from the Sun to the Earth. All of

these examples seem to be merely places, but the movement of these places occurs in time. It takes time to move. Furthermore, Kingston's focus on Buddhism reminds the reader of the fact that within Buddhism, all material melts away into a divine state of existence. Kingston's depictions of movement, however, do not focus on giving up a material world in favor of a spiritual world. Instead, Kingston's narrative is most similar to theopoetics in which the cosmic world is continuously generative, transitioning from a state of matter to a state of energy to a state of matter, etc. Kingston reminds the reader that time must pass or else matter, materiality, would not be allowed to decompose to give nutrition to the soil or be digested to give other people and things energy to continue existing. It is this combined emphasis in the narrative on both the Buddhist concept and the theopoetical concept of the relationship of one existence to another that inspires the further emphasis on community that demonstrates a panhuman perspective on human existence.

After Kingston connects fiction to time and the combination of the two to move the reader into a new perspective, Kingston's narrator states "No more solitary. I need a community of like minds. The Book of Peace, to be reconstructed needs community" (Kingston 62). In order for peace to work, it requires not stable, immobile environments, as those just lead to stagnation, but instead it requires a new social formation of radical participation as James Buchanan mentioned in one of the previous chapters. When others participate, they begin both to care about the work and its mission and become cared for. Kingston here is subtly trying to build a new social relationship between the author and the reader, the artist and the audience in which both must participate and be conscientious of the world around them which fits the idea of a new social consciousness toward an interconnected working of both the cosmos and members of society. The revelation of these interconnections helps to develop *The Fifth Book of Peace*, like

Parable of the Sower before it, as an instrument leading the reader toward reenchantment, making the reader recognize both their interdependence and their own agency in the cosmos. E. San Juan Jr. links the blurring of these categories as subversive to the “Western categorical paradigm: Fire, death, birth, and community—these themes bind what to some appear as a pastiche of heterogeneous raw materials for imaginative alchemy. Instead of enforcing separations of domains, as entailed by the transcendentalist, universalist impulse of Western rationality, Kingston applies the correlative, analogical mode of Chinese philosophy to shift the boundaries of genre and fuse theater, epic, romance, and picaresque tale into a carnivalesque invention” (San Juan Jr.185). By focusing on the mythos of writing a Book of Peace and comparing it to dreams and science, Kingston brings attention to the physical as well as the psychic/spiritual damage done by the destructive forces of modern and postmodern existence.

In attempting to write a Book of Peace and in entitling her novel *The Fifth Book of Peace*, Kingston is constructing a narrative that both details this destruction and the brokenness of the world, Kingston can be seen as attempting to, if not outright heal the damage done, then at least bring comfort to those who have been harmed by the process. This idea of bringing comfort to those in pain is a central tenet in Buddhism. Buddhism, like a reenchanting perspective, views everything in the cosmos as sacred and worth giving comfort to in times of suffering. Hsu Shouan in the article, “Writing Event and Peace: The Art of Peace in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Fifth Book of Peace*” also notices this attempt to replace the enlightenment scientific mode of thinking with some way to connect with others and bring about a new holistic view of the cosmos. Shouan states that “Kingston next seeks to understand her event and to promote peace by getting connected to other people and by going beyond representation in her approach to reality because she has discovered her limitation in her pursuit of peace. Thus, the episode about

her dream, in which she looks for help from characters from her burned book, follows from her new understanding and foreshadows the peace book to be written after the fire, one in which she will have characters probe for the sense of peace that turns out to be fluid and beyond representation” (Shounan 108). By focusing on the opposition between the dream world and our rational, enlightenment, scientific world, Kingston undermines the materialist nature of science and Western society. By undermining this materialist nature, Kingston then carves out a space in which anything is possible, including inner peace and world peace. However, the narrator’s dream comes with its own limits. dreams, another physical sensory experience that also merges the material with the immaterial, stating “My recurring dream from smallkidtime is that bombers and missiles fill the sky, steadily moving, like words on a page; I can prevent the bombing by finding the Three Lost Books of Peace. Three Books of peace came into existence, it’s said, when Chinese civilization began, and were somehow lost. We must find. We need them. Now” (Kingston 38). Kingston here turns her dream about bringing ancient Chinese lore to America into a mythological framework. If we only had the objects outlining the path to peace, then we could achieve it. This absurdist reduction forces the reader and through the reader, society at large, to realize that just having the item is not going to put an end to war or suffering, it is only through action, through the Buddhist principles of resistance to war, acceptance of suffering, and acts of compassion towards others, that peace can be achieved. Kingston is also playing the role of trickster again due to the fact that her title refers to her novel as *The Fifth Book of Peace*. The title throws the concept of the item itself leading to peace by telling the reader that the item is right there in front of them and yet nothing will be accomplished without action. This instills within the reader, not just a call to action but a reminder of the ability of the reader to act. The dream and Kingston’s narrative leads the reader to be reminded of their own agency in the

cosmos. Kingston is engaging the reader in a process of reenchancement in which the reader understands their own agency and feels connected to the various phases and transitions within the cosmos. The cosmos becomes once again mysterious, sacred, and generative in which everything is possible due to the overwhelming creativity of both the cosmic and the human imagination.

These ideas of breaking the binaries between the material, immaterial, nature and culture, time and space, all culminate with Maxine Hong Kingston and Octavia Butler's theopoetical ruminations. First, in *Parable of the Sower*, while traveling as a man, Lauren begins discussing and spreading the word about her new philosophical and religious ideas regarding the "Godseed" and humans' roles as "Earthseed." Humans as "Earthseed" are acted upon as well as act on "God." Lauren, Zahra, and Harry help a couple who happen to also have a baby with them. The names of the couple are Travis and Natividad and after hearing Lauren, they begin debating Lauren on the merit of "Godseed" and the "God/is change" idea. Travis asks Lauren:

"Change?"

"Change, yes"

"But it's not a god. It's not a person or an intelligence or even a thing. It's just, I don't know.... An idea."

I smiled. Was that such a terrible criticism? "It's a truth," I said. "Change is ongoing. Everything changes in some way – size, position, composition, frequency, velocity, thinking, whatever. Every living thing, every bit of matter, all the energy in the universe changes in some way. I don't claim that everything changes in every way, but everything changes in some way." (*Parable* 195)

This explanation of “Godseed” from Lauren allows for the conception that “God” is the not just an agent of this change but can be a receiver of change, hence, at the end of her speech she tells Travis to “Shape God” (*Parable* 197). This exchange confirms again Judith Butler’s ideas from *Undoing Gender* concerning the ability of the individual to change or transform through self-will from the “subjectivated” in order to “become” a “subject” that acts at “undoing” the work done upon that individual by society and the universe. Lauren is calling her community and allies to “become” an embodiment of this process and to “undo” the harmful effects of patriarchal, dualistic, biological, and economic determinism. Once these societal strictures have been undone, Lauren begins to rebuild and reorient the reader through the development of her Earthseed community. So, too does Kingston attempt to reorient the reader through the building of a community based on the Lost Books of Peace

Kingston’s novel, through its representation of the panhuman experience of Western and Eastern philosophies and ideas is an example of this process of reorienting ourselves within our postmodern life through story making and storytelling. Kingston definitely exhibits this process in “Paper” in which she travels around the world, telling “Everybody I met who was traveling to China – tourists, students, and teachers on exchange programs, people on business- I asked to do me the favor of looking for the Three Lost Books of Peace” (Kingston 46) which leads to many interactions, discussions, and exchanges with many diverse peoples. In helping to create this new reorienting narrative, The Three Lost Books of Peace, though immaterial themselves, become a mythos that fuel collaboration, community, the exchange of ideas, and the taking of one’s fate and actions in one’s own hands while remaining ethically and morally responsible to others and to the cosmos. The Three Lost Books of Peace come to act as a myth that Kingston has set up about art in the form of *The Fifth Book of Peace*. Kingston focuses on this idea of Mythos in the

same section discussed above stating: “My own *Woman Warrior* is being used as a text at the united states Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. ‘It gives a mythos to the women military students’ says their instructor James Aubrey. I have to make up for that. The roots of ‘warrior’ are in ‘quarrel,’ ‘error,’ ‘worse.’ I’ve been pretending all this time that it means ‘one who wars against confusion’” (47). Kingston here is admitting both the role she herself and her art have played in advancing some of the physical suffering (from war) as well as psychic/spiritual suffering that has occurred in the postmodern world. Again, this confessional authorial and narrative persona blurs the boundaries between Kingston’s real-life events and the fictional events as described in the novel. This has a disorienting effect at first but through her taking responsibility for possible harm done to others, this process also disarms the reader and urges the reader to reflect upon their own part in the making of the world as it is, opening up channels of catharsis, empathy, and forgiveness. In opening these channels of catharsis, empathy, and forgiveness that *The Fifth Book of Peace* becomes a method of reorienting the reader in the chaos of the postmodern world. The novel helps the reader to forge a new sense of community amid the chaos and after effects of the Vietnam War and the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Further, the novel offers the reader a chance at moral and spiritual reflection upon these issues becoming an instrument that helps guide the reader toward the process of reenchancement and becoming a moral, ethical agent both acting within, through, and on the cosmos around us.

Kingston moves from seemingly nonfictional accounts of her own life in “Fire” and “Paper” to the fictional accounts of Wittman Ah Sing, his wife Tana, and their son Mario’s family in the next section called, “Water.” Nicole McDaniel in her essay “Remaking the World, One Story at a Time in *The Fifth Book of Peace* and *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*, states that “the structure of *The Fifth Book* reflects its communal origins; Kingston herself calls it a “nonfiction

fiction nonfiction sandwich” (McDaniel 61). This mixture of nonfiction and fiction further exemplifies Beardslee’s idea of the disorienting/reorienting story structure because when the page is flipped, the reader immediately has to become oriented with a brand-new time in history, a brand-new locale, and brand-new characters. “Water” acts as a story within a story structure to further disrupt Western notions of time, history, and place but to also further display the panhuman experience since it incorporates a host of new characters and experiences. In “Water,” Wittman, Tana, and Mario happen upon Tutu, one of the native Hawaiians, that invite them to dinner. While at dinner, Wittman begins to ponder about the nature of the Hawaiian culture and states that the Hawaiian people “were like ideal Chinese, but skin more sienna than yellow, non-slitty big eyes” and that they were also “like Pilipinos, but large and tall” (Kingston 106). Further Wittman thinks “And their hair is like Blacks’ but not nappy-kinky, their skin black, but not that black. They almost look Caucasian, but tan. They’re like Mexicans and any kind of Indians perfected. In fact, they are Native American too” (106). Here Kingston has Wittman unable to express exactly which ethnicity or race the Hawaiian people look like. Instead of being one category, they deny categorization. By recognizing the characteristics of each of the various cultures, Kingston reveals how these differences are what has been emphasized in society when these populations are coming under scrutiny or being oppressed. By focusing not on the mixture of races the Hawaiian people seem to come from, Kingston is emphasizing how all of our cultures are unique but that all of the cultures combine to form the human race. This approach is a step toward panhumanism that recognizes our differences while seeing through to those things that make us all human. This panhuman approach undermines the racial, ethnocentric views of enlightenment thought and capitalist markets. It also diffuses the idea of the Asian other as the

Vietnam war is raging on in Wittman's time. This panhuman approach continues on at the end of "Water" as well.

At the end of "Water," Wittman, Tana, and their son Mario, who are Chinese Americans except that Mario is called 'Ehukai, which is his Hawaiian name that he adopts, get pulled into the development of a Sanctuary at The Church of the Crossroads, a Christian church. At the Sanctuary at The Church of the Crossroads many AWOL GIs came to take part, many with "Southern and Midwestern voices" (Kingston 200). Further, there were "Revolutionary Communists" (Kingston 210) as well as other "Marxist women and Hippie women" (Kingston 211). In addition, the church "preached the history of Sanctuary, divine protection for those who broke society's laws. Sanctuaries had existed at times in Greece, India, China, New Guinea, Samoa, Tahiti, North America, Morocco, Arabia, Europe" (Kingston211). The church hosted Christian leader "Thomas Merton and the Dalai Lama" (Kingston 226). These people live in relative peace protesting the war for weeks until the government busts up the sanctuary, more for so-called health and fire violations than from any violent crime being committed by those in the Sanctuary. Though the Sanctuary ultimately fails and is busted up, the end of the chapter of "Water" sees Mario also known as 'Ehukai tell all of the pretty girls in school that call working for the military recruiters that "I'm not interested in joining the military. Please don't call me anymore" to which Wittman and Tana react by hugging "each other for joy" (Kingston 237). Mario's response here shows that while we may not be able to stop everything that happens, our actions still influence others and can make a difference within one life and that life can then influence all of those which it is interconnected with, so that one person's choice to not further war and stand up for peace can end up with thousands or hundreds of thousands making similar decisions. This panhuman view becomes an inclusive measure that leads the reader toward

developing a larger, more global sense of community that because of its global dimensions offers a more participatory social consciousness of society that will include everyone and not just a select few. All of these people and places represent a small sliver of the variety of human experiences and viewpoints from all over the globe. Kingston does not even discount the place of war stating: Linda wrote in her Ph.D. dissertation: ‘Vietnam duty provided the most unambiguous source of antiwar sentiment.’ War causes peace” (227). Kingston’s attempt to narrativize the happenings in our society, including the experience of war, incorporate not just a Western frame of reference but a panhuman one that combines the shared sufferings and joys of the collective human race but without reducing the stories to mere stereotypes. Kingston’s emphasis on our shared humanity reminds the reader of our shared space within our planet and our planet’s shared space with the elements, all of which are sharing space within the larger cosmos. Octavia Butler also focuses on this shared space, particularly as Lauren is forming her Earthseed community.

Philip H. Jos, in his essay “Fear and the Spiritual Realism of Octavia Butler’s Earthseed” elaborates on how Lauren emphasizes this shared space and responsibility through the theological doctrine Lauren creates. Jos describes the doctrine as similar to “panentheism” in which “we (and everything that is) are in God” and that “God (the sacred, the spirit) is a nonmaterial layer or level or dimension of reality all around us. God is more than the universe, yet the universe is in God” (Jos 418). Jos uses the terminology God, but it is important to note that Lauren rejects this term at first. However, Lauren only rejects this term as it is associated with her father’s patriarchal God. Lauren does go on to begin using the term once she has reconceptualized what the term God means to her, settling on the phrase “Shape God” (*Parable* 197). Jos goes on further to compliment *Parable* because “This conception of God as located

here and now upends the traditional idea of God existing in or at the end of chronological time as measured by human beings. God is present in all times and places, and so each moment is an opportunity to draw closer to God” (Jos 418). Jos is describing the theo-poetical notion of God that Rahner, Whitehead, Howells, and Keller all discuss. According to this conception, God is always present in the universe and we as individuals are able to interact and shape God just as God is acting upon and shaping us and other human beings. This also means from a moral perspective that to coerce, rape, murder, kill or otherwise incur bodily, mental, or any other type of harm on a person is also affecting and possibly harming God. Jos’s analysis of Lauren’s concept of God and reality demonstrates the complexity of our new understanding of cosmology and the possible ethical implications. However, cosmology is not just about empty nature, it is about living space, including the living space of human society and non-human society. Nancy Howell explains in her chapter “Constructing a Feminist Cosmology” from *A Feminist Cosmology: Ecology, Solidarity, and Metaphysics* that “The doctrine of internal relations in process thought suggests a philosophical interpretation of the importance of relationships for the becoming of an individual event” (Howell 25). Howell goes on to explain that “Internal relations are distinct from external relations in that they are essential for the creation and existence of events, although external relations are not essential to the character of events (or substances) to which they occur” (Howell 25). Howell goes on to say that “internal relations are instrumental in the creative process. Creativity is instantiated in each event when through internal relations the many become one and are increased by one” (Howell 25). Howell further states that “Each con-creating event is a subject that prehends or feels the past. The con-creating event creates itself in freedom by taking account of objective data from the past and a divine persuasive lure toward rich experience that influence the way in which an event constitutes itself” (Howell 25). What

Howell is describing is that the internal relation of each individual being, human and non-human to live out and act out its internal properties and desires according to the make up of its internal cosmic energy flow and its external molecular and biological composition. This means that in the cosmos, each individualized being is free to be its individualized being according to its creation. However, it must temper this in relation to how it wants to interact with the environment, ecology, and society which surrounds it. We are cosmically created with free agency and a desire to collaborate and work with others. This free agency and our ability to collaborate is called theopoetics. Catherine Keller describes theopoetics as “home amidst the bottomless, ground amidst the clouds-indeed, a constructive theology amidst the deconstruction. The theopoetics of the cloud is then the affirmation made possible by the negation” (Keller 6169 – 6174) in which “we have to make our world, but never alone. We are doing a deity who does not do for us or to us, but does make do with us. Us altogether.” (Keller 6262) Keller here is explaining how theopoetics is the acceptance that we are the finite, the material made out of the immaterial and the infinite. Our construction as the material manifestations of the infinite means we are not dependent on biological, economical, or divine determinisms but that like Lauren in *Parable of the Sower*, we shape God and the universe as much as those conceptions shape us. Like Kingston as author and narrator of *The Fifth Book of Peace*, we create *Sangha*, community and collaboration within the universe.

At the end of the novel Lauren has grown a diverse coalition of supporters of her community and they come to another character, Bankole’s farm, and though Bankole’s family has been murdered and the rubble plundered, the whole group settle on this land and begin their community, called Acorn. However, the roots of this community were sown very early, before they even knew where they were on a route to. This is the prehension which Howells explains.

The Acorn community which Lauren develops out on the road shows how a culture or community is defined not by its location in time or space but of the relationship between the individuals and the wholeness of experience of the individuals who claim to belong within it. Lauren's community began with Lauren, Zahra, and Harry on the road. One day while visiting a water station, Lauren sees a couple, Travis and Natividad, and their baby, Dominic being accosted by a couple of bandits which they call "coyotes" (*Parable* 202). As one of the attackers attempts to run away with the couple's stash of water, Lauren "tripped him" stating that "I think it was the baby who attracted my attention, my sympathy" (*Parable* 202). Lauren shows, not just hyperempathy, but real empathy, helping those in need. This becomes the tenet of the Earthseed community from that point forward. Lauren, Zahra, Harry, Travis, Natividad, and their son Dominic end up helping a man pick up his belongings after an earthquake spills everything. The man is named "Taylor Franklin Bankole" (*Parable* 230). Bankole's last name reveals that his family have Nigerian, Yoruban roots like Lauren's family to which Lauren states "Our last names were an instant bond between us" (*Parable* 230). This comment reveals that Lauren isn't just trying to gain some sort of power through building a cohort of followers, but that she is looking for a community to which she can feel like she belongs. With Natividad being Hispanic and Bankole African, these episodes also reveal the growing panhuman diversity of the Earthseed community. Shortly after Bankole joins the group, they all help out two white sisters, Jill and Allie, who were "running away from a life of prostitution. Their pimp was their father" (*Parable* 237). After being rescued, Jill asks who the group is to which, not Lauren, but Harry responds "Earthseed" (*Parable* 237). The fact that Harry and not Lauren responds shows that Lauren's ideas have begun to take hold and that other members are starting to believe in her ideas. When the Earthseed group finds a young toddler boy, Justin, whose mother had been

killed during a gang fight, Natividad “gave him one breast and Dominic the other” (Parable 252). Natividad comes to believe in the group’s values as well to the point that she shares one of her most precious resources, her breast milk. The group then picks up the Mexican-Japanese family Emery Tanaka Solis and her daughter Tori who tell of being forced to work for an agricultural and manufacturing company that paid them “in company scrip” and forced them to work even when the scrip was “never enough to pay the bills” (Parable 287). Once Emery joins the group and comes to believe in their communal values, Emery brings to them another runaway factory slave, the Mexican “Grayson Mora and his daughter, Doe” (Parable 290). After discussing the newly discovered forms of slavery cropping up, Lauren doesn’t just stand idly by, she says to Bankole that they will “become the crew of a modern underground railroad” (Parable 292).

Lauren and the Earthseed community have begun to form new rules of travel and living based on the new reality which is unfolding before them. While they are still on the road, Lauren explains to new members of the group the preliminary rules she, Harry, and Zahra agreed upon when they set out: “We don’t kill people unless someone threatens us,” I said. “We don’t hunt people. We don’t eat human flesh. We fight together against enemies. If one of us is in need, the others will help out. And we don’t steal from one another, ever” after which Lauren asks all of them: “Will you live as we do?” (Parable 271). Each member agrees. The fact that this occurs while the group is still traveling on the road within the larger context of a failed capitalist state whose citizens have resorted to anarchy, slavery, and destruction reveal that not only are gender and sexual identities performative, but cultural and communal identities are also performative, which means a new performance can replace an old one. Lauren’s Earthseed community is slowly attempting to counter the models of slavery, government corruption, and failed capitalism that are causing society to crumble. Kimberly Ruffin discusses these developments in her essay,

“Parable of a 21st Century Religion: Octavia Butler’s Afrofuturistic Bridge between Science and Religion.” Ruffin states “Lauren, in a bold, ‘fearless’ manner, uses religion to communicate “what [she] believes to be the truth,” and suggests that her religion of scientifically-inspired truths can help transform the strength of history into the promise of a future with ‘new social myths’ and places of ‘power’” (Ruffin 91). The key terms here is that Lauren’s teachings and leadership are helping the rest of her allies “transform” or “become” a place of “power” themselves, that is that they are self-willed agents that are not just shaped by their surroundings but can also act upon and shape the society and universe around them. Using this cosmological interpretive strategy, we see that Octavia Butler, through Lauren Olamina reveals that within real life, there exists within each individual a theopoetical self-willed agency that includes the body and the cosmos acting together, shaped by each other revealing a radical new agency in which each entity has the possibility of an unlimited potentiality of experiences.

Kingston shows a similar communal transformation in the “Earth” section of *The Fifth Book of Peace*. In “Earth” at the Community of Mindful Living, Kingston has set up writing workshops for soldiers and survivors of the Vietnam War but there are some from other wars like the first Gulf War as well. On one of the days that the veterans meet, Kingston explains the intention of these workshops. Kingston tells the reader that “I speak about listening. Listen to one another. Tune your ear... You breathe in and take the speaker into your lungs, and ears, and heart. Listening, we draw people’s stories out of them” (Kingston 274). Kingston’s focus is on the interconnected web of stories, real, human stories. There is Howard and Tom Currie from the Vietnam War, John Wike, “Dominican Republic vet” (Kingston 275), Joe Lamb, Ted Sexauer, and Howard Lapin, “the World War II vet” (Kingston 276). All of these people are not just characters in the story but real-life veterans. Their stories are sometimes true, sometimes

fictional. Kingston here again is calling our attention to reflect on what is the difference between reality and fiction, that within both there are many possibilities and that one of those possibilities is to choose peace. However, what is interesting is that Kingston always leaves the stories unfinished as in the case of John Wike's story "The Kidnapping of the American *Teniente*." When asked by the others what happens at the end, Wike states "You have to buy the book to find out" (Kingston 275). These exchanges again refuse to become just stereotyped stories about war and attempt to resist the glorification of war. It also forces the reader to "listen" and "tune your ear" as Kingston states above, using the story within a story structure to create an atmosphere of inclusivity built on the larger panhuman, global community in which every human is interconnected to one another.

Nicole McDaniels in her article "Remaking the World One Story at a Time in Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace* and *Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace*" agrees and states about both of Kingston's novels mentioned in her title that "These books are material manifestations of the potential for artistic creation from traumatic experience; both are narratives of trauma that, through a structure that foregrounds relationality and emphasis on writing in *sangha* (a Sanskrit word that loosely means community), illustrate and demonstrate how to transform witnessing into testimony in order to remake the world peacefully." (McDaniel 61). McDaniel mentions trauma and how trauma can lead to new creation. McDaniel is specifically talking about trauma from war such as the Vietnam war. These wars are often caused by the attempt to conquer others which stems from not valuing others and the variety which they add to the cosmos, often a side effect of the dualistic and scientific notions about reality discussed in this dissertation. The after effects of these wars can be seen as similar to the effects of disenchantment. McDaniel goes on to state that "These *sanghas* are founded on the impulse to create art amid geopolitical chaos"

(McDaniel 61). In bringing together a new sense of community through art, particularly storytelling, Kingston initiates a new mythos that reorients the reader with not just the brokenness and suffering of the postmodern world but with a new theopoetical liberation, the mystery of a new endless set of possibilities and interconnections that have opened up because of the breaking down of the old paradigms, leading the reader and allowing the reader to reflect and act on this new feeling of interconnectedness.

Kingston herself comments about this interconnected web of actions at the end of “Earth” and at the end of the “Epilogue.” Kingston states that “If the world, time, and space, and cause-and-effect accord with my mother’s teachings – her Tao – then we have stopped wars years hence. We made Myriads of non wars. We have ended wars a hundred years from now” (Kingston 397-98). Kingston continues stating that “[t]he war against Iraq, which began the same year as the Oakland-Berkeley fire, is still occurring. But the peace we make also continues, and fans, and lives on and on” (Kingston 398). Kingston goes on further in the “Epilogue” to state on International Women’s Day that “[t]he reasons for peace, the definitions of peace, the very idea of peace have to be invented, and invented again” (Kingston 402). Kingston ends by stating “Children, everybody, here’s what to do during war: In a time of destruction, create something. A poem. A parade. A friendship. A community. A place that is the commons. A school. A vow. A moral principle. One peaceful moment” (Kingston 402). Kingston here ends on a moment of engagement and reenchantment, a call to arms so to speak. This is a call to arms to act on our free agency, not to hold guns but hold hands, that hug, that reach out into the indeterminate, possibilities of the cosmos and appreciate the diverse differences within ourselves and every cosmic form of existence.

This community of veterans comes to represent the development of *sangha* in real life. Kingston discusses this real life *sangha* in an interview with Trevor Carolan in his article “Helping Veterans Turn War into Art.” Kingston states that it started with meeting the Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh and his desire to have a meeting with Vietnam War veterans since he himself is a veteran of that war. Kingston helped organize the event about which she states that “[t]here’s Vietnamese and Americans together, and Thich Nhat Hanh said when you hug one Vietnamese you hug them all. These soldiers who had been in the war were now embracing another person in their arms, and that leads to reconciliation” (as quoted in Carolan). Kingston then recounts how she had an epiphany, that these veterans were gaining a spiritual life but “needed an artistic life” (as quoted in Carolan). Because of her perception of the need of these veterans for an artistic life, Kingston holds these meetings from which the veterans begin making art. This coincides with her writing of *The Fifth Book of Peace* because that original manuscript was destroyed in the fire that Kingston mentions in the first pages of the novel.

Kingston describes the thought of rewriting the novel, stating that “Because I want to write a book of peace, the people I want in this community are veterans, people who’ve experienced war” (as quoted in Carolan). These events led to the creation of not only the community for veterans discussed in the novel but also in the development of the novel itself, again blurring the lines between fiction and reality and disorienting the reader. Catherine Keller in her work *The Cloud of the Impossible* discusses the way in which disorientation through the use of multiple layers of reality and perspectives helps lead to the recognition of the wider cosmos. Keller explains that “[t]he individual viewpoint, however, only takes place in its interdependence with the others: the “more eyes,” the more vision. All perspectives in the “free will” of their individuality...remain relative to each other and simultaneously to the

encompassing infinite” (Keller 1924). Keller explains that disorientation from having to process multiple perspectives and layers of reality requires the reader to pause and reflect about the infinite cosmos and their moral/ethical responsibilities to others. Kingston’s blurring of the lines of reality and fiction through her discussions of *sangha* help to emphasize these relations in order to facilitate peace, allowing her narrative to guide the reader toward the process of reenchantment.

Kingston explains how this is one of the central ideas of her development of the *sangha* community of veterans. Kingston wanted the *sangha* not to be about therapy but about creating peace, stating that “The difference between shouting out your experience in a group and writing it down is that you can perfect it in writing, reach a kind of end with it. You process it and then it becomes art. You turn war and chaos into art” (as quoted in Carolan). Kingston not only alters her path but the path of these veterans. Further, through the collaboration of the community to write the novel, the message of peace and turning war and chaos into art is now reaching a wider audience, namely the readers. In recognizing one has the power to alter the path of one’s self and community, one also recognizes, that like Lauren Olamina’s idea of “shaping god,” one has the power to alter the trajectory of reality and the cosmos. In this way of empowering the agency of the veterans and the readers through the blurring of the fiction and reality, Kingston’s *The Fifth Book of Peace* comes to lead the readers toward the process of reenchantment.

Utilizing a cosmological interpretive framework, this chapter has explored the ideas of Judith Butler, Janet Bennett and Catherine Keller in order to reveal the messages of cosmic reenchantment and agency in Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Fifth Book of Peace*. From Butler’s Lauren Olamina to Kingston’s *sangha*, together these pieces of literature and their cosmic messages remind us to make, not destroy, to

create, crafting the possibility of one peaceful but energetically flowing moment. Then that interconnected moment leads to another and another, on and on throughout time and space.

6 CONCLUSIONS

From a cosmological perspective, the meaning which we build within our lives is not only interdependent on our relationship to other humans but is also dependent upon our use of and transformation of other cosmological forces such as plants and animals for food, electricity for technology and industry, and gravity and sunlight for a stable planet and ecology. Following a cosmological interpretive strategy, how we interact with, use, and transform cosmological forces comes to be included in how we define our relationship with those forces as well as with other humans and therefore how we come to define our own identities. Just as important as recognizing our common cosmological creation, then, is recognizing our ability to create, not in an *ex nihilo* sense but through a transformative process by interacting with, acting upon, and influencing cosmological and human forces. Many of the theorists mentioned in this compilation such as Bennett, Butler, Gablik, Griffin, Howells, Keller, Laszlo, Levinas, Moraru, Nicolescu, and Žižek, have all argued that part of what makes our current era a new age is this recognition that, as having come from somewhere larger than ourselves, we must then become aware that we cannot match the power of cosmic creation but that we work within and act upon the larger cosmos. Because the messages of novels and plays like, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, Arthur Miller's *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, Paula Vogel's *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, Sarah Ruhl's *In the Next Room (Or the Vibrator Play)*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*, all of these novels and plays attempt to dispel the binaries and predetermined outcomes of the process of rationalization that has occurred not just in modernity and postmodernity, but throughout the ages, causing much objectification and destruction. By dispelling these binaries and predetermined outcomes, these novels and plays

become participants with the reader in the process of reenchancement in which we realize our place and ability to act within the cosmos.

Therefore, within a cosmological interpretive strategy, as humans, we cannot consider ourselves entirely separate from nature/the cosmos or as simply grown away or out of it but as individuals acting in it, through it, and upon it. Through our desire and attempts to create, interpret, and find meaning in our artistic creations, including language, these creations become discursive reminders. Like the geologic structures in Wilder's *Our Town*, these discursive reminders tell not of some transcendental force that is separate from our material reality but as Ervin Laszlo explains, a set of entities that we have been connected to spanning the farthest reaches of space and time to now where they currently provide us with a history, and as Beardslee also notes a cosmic story, and a space within which to live. From these reminders we can either choose to live, shut up in little boxes, as Emily comes to understand, simply wishing for another chance at our lives or we can live passionately, like George and Emily in their love, attempting to appreciate every moment of it despite the life's difficulties. We must also recognize, like David in *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, that our life is not predetermined for us. We do come up against challenges and difficulties in life, such as JB's inability to have kids or Shory's accident that left him in a wheelchair, but these are not economic predetermined outcomes as Jameson leads us to believe. Instead, like Dave checking the feed for his Mink farm, we have the opportunities right in front of us to make a meaningful life if we simply take the time to recognize our own role in our actions and in the outcome of our lives.

In recognizing our own role in our actions, a cosmological interpretive strategy interrogates how we have the choice to be manipulated by or mimic the current systems of power, control, death and destruction. This includes othering and objectifying entities separate

from us such as the Dodo birds and the Herero in *Gravity's Rainbow*. We can either waste away our days like Slothrop does at the beginning of *Gravity's Rainbow*, or as McClure explains, we can see through the ontological opening and realize our deeper connections to the cosmos and attempt to make others aware of it like Slothrop playing his harmonica at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Wastes is exactly how Don DeLillo describes these moments when we act without a sense of morality and ethics toward the other entities in the cosmos, such as when his character Nick Shay's father abandons his family or Nick, himself, shoots his best friend, George. The choice is ours whether to desire to win so badly that we other and objectify our opponents and the people and entities around us, like the humans do, and at times like Ender does, to the Formics. Or we can choose, as David Ray Griffin, Suzi Gablik, and Matthew Fox desire for us, to speak out on behalf of the oppressed and enslaved and speaking out against destruction, becoming "Speakers for the Dead" as Ender becomes in *Ender's Game*. In choosing to act not in fear of different entities but in concert with them, we learn that we are not just dependent on ourselves but that we are interdependent upon each other as humans and upon the larger cosmos within which we find we reside. This causes a check on the systems of power, control, and manipulation and allow for ethical and moral reflection but our relationship to other entities and to the cosmos itself.

Sometimes even more in proximity than the geopolitical othering of different species and cultures is the othering and objectification of different genders and sexualities. Paula Vogel's play *The Long Christmas Ride Home* traces the story of Rebecca, Claire, and Stephen as they live out their experiences on Christmas over several years. Through the dysfunction of their family lives and love lives, these characters experience the disparity of otherness as well as ultimately the beauty of our contemporary world. This otherness becomes embodied in multiple

ways around the story of Stephen. As Stephen is introduced to us as a ghost, and we see his life play out, the reader begins to understand how our perception of things and our focus on either their beauty or utility to us becomes an impetus for how we treat others. If we treat the material world as simply a way for our gratification then we come to use and abuse our lovers like the father and like Rebecca does to her boyfriend, and Stephen's boyfriend to him. Through the use of the Bunraku puppets and the breath which the spirit of Stephen is given to impart his remaining ghostly wishes on earth, Vogel brings in to focus how our material, living bodies have life given to them by non-living and immaterial entities, and these entities are, as Judith Butler describes, intertwined, and which those like Jane Bennett call vibrant matter since they have an existence all of their own. Sarah Ruhl in her play, *In the Next Room (Or the Vibrator Play)*, portrays the relationship between Dr. Givings, whose specialty is releasing his patients' anxieties with a vibrator, and Mrs. Catherine Givings and their social circle, mostly Dr. Givings' patients. Through a series of intimate encounters, including some involving the vibrator, the secret anxieties and desires of the characters are revealed but in complete contrast to the mechanical representation of the vibrator, Dr. Givings, and science. It is only at the end, when Catherine demands that her needs and desires are listened to and not dismissed by Dr. Givings, that they end up uniting truly for the first time in the garden, under the snow. Ruhl, like Vogel, shows that because Dr. Givings cannot see past his mechanistic view of the world to the inherent value in the non-living matter which he studies as a scientist, then Dr. Givings is unable to empathize and see the non-material thoughts and feelings of those around him. Ruhl and Vogel remind us that only by putting aside such a view and coming to understand the mutual interdependence between the material and the immaterial, the living and non-living can we come to a true understanding of each other and the cosmos around us.

Once the binaries between the living and non-living, material and immaterial, have been broken through, a cosmological interpretive strategy helps put into perspective that we not only act within the cosmos but that our actions have effect, have meaning. This comes to be shown through Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*. We are not just reacting to the impetus of the cosmos, but we are acting on it, through it, in order to construct the reality around us. In the world of *Parable of the Sower*, there has occurred some sort of economic and ecological disaster that makes the weather unpredictable, water scarce, and food outrageously priced. This has led to the collapse of civilization. With her family gone, and seemingly no one to depend on, Laura Olamina begins to create her own community and her own philosophy and theology. Laura comes to understand that she cannot control the ecological and economic collapse occurring around her, but she can control her reaction to it. This leads Lauren to develop the idea that we are not just thrown into the wilderness with nothing but that we have the ability to "shape God." That our life is not predetermined but that we can act, we have agency and can influence the events of the cosmos. Similarly, in her sections Fire, Paper, Water, and Earth of her novel, *The Fifth Book of Peace*, Kingston explores how peace requires a collaborative, communal effort that she calls, *sangha*, after the Buddhist term for community. These sections reveal how one cannot change society from the outside but must engage it and build a new, more conscientious, society from within. To build this new conscientious society Kingston's narrator forms a community of veterans writing about their experiences in order to not only find inner peace but to hopefully bring peace to a society ravaged by war. This community is based on Kingston's real-life efforts and comes to represent the development of *sangha* in real life. Both novels come to show the interdependence between us and the cosmos, or as Žižek mentions, the tension that can found even in the Void.

This interdependence is what Catherine Keller describes as the theo-poetical nature of the cosmos, that we do not just act within the cosmos but, because divine/cosmic energy is intertwined and woven throughout the fabric of our reality, just as it is acting upon us, we are acting upon it, acting through it, and so ultimately, acting in concert with it.

Hopefully this analysis has set the conversation moving toward developing a new cosmological interpretive framework. Such a framework should work toward, not oppositions between entities in the cosmos, human or non-human, but ways in which we can share resources and act in concert with each other. That to do this would require a cultural shift and that stories like the ones mentioned here should be excavated and preserved as well as the stories of all people, especially those who have been objectified, dispossessed, enslaved, or whose cultures and traditions have been wiped out. This cosmological interpretive framework would work toward showing not just sympathy but accountability for each entity's actions in order to show the ways in which cooperation could be furthered due to the moral and ethical bonds inherent in existing within the cosmos together as mutual cosmological creations. This, cosmological interpretive framework would finally show that our actions are not predetermined but that we have free agency and that when we exercise our agency, we are not simply acting within the cosmos but that our actions have actual effects (and therefore meaning) so that we are also acting on the cosmos, our will is flowing through it and its material body, just as the cosmos is acting upon us and its creative energy flowing through us.

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