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The Wh-eye of the Storm:
How Zora Neale Hurston, Virginia Woolf, and Arif Anwar
Fictionalize Extreme Weather in Their Works

Elena Vedovello

Submitted to the Department of English of Pomona College in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Senior Exercise

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Faculty Readers:

Sarah Raff

Cherene Sherrard-Johnson

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To my friends,

Meli, Aditi, Elisabeth, Avi, and Nelia.

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Introduction: Extreme Weather Events and Ecological Imaginations in Literature

Literary criticism has long been interested in the metaphorical portrayal of literary weather in fiction, be it in the form of rain, snow, clouds, or sunny skies. In its most extreme manifestations, however, weather has not come under the radar of literary scholars and critics to the same extent, despite the increasing number of appearances extreme weather events now make in science fiction books dealing with the dystopic futures shaped by climate change. As author Amitav Ghosh claims in his book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*,

When the subject of climate change occurs in [literary journals], it is almost always in relation to nonfiction; novels and short stories are very rarely to be glimpsed within this horizon. Indeed, it could even be said that fiction that deals with climate change is almost by definition not of the kind that is taken seriously by serious literary journals: the mere mention of the subject is often enough to relegate a novel or a short story to the genre of science fiction. It is as though in the literary imagination climate change were somehow akin to extraterrestrials or interplanetary travel. (7)

The tangibility of extreme weather events, however, does not simply belong to hypotheticals and imagined futures. Even as the scientific community was not yet concerned with the growing frequency of extreme weather, in fact, human and nonhuman communities alike have lived through – and written about – hurricanes, floods, frosts and droughts for hundreds of years. Beginning with Biblical and Quranic narrations of the Great Flood, works such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), D'Arcy McNickle's *Runner in the Sun* (1954), Jesmyn

Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011), and Arif Anwar's *The Storm* (2019) are all fictional accounts of historical extreme weather events.

Fictional accounts of historical extreme weather events, though fundamental to our understanding of human experiences and nonhuman natural processes, do not yet occupy a relevant role in literary studies. Before adventuring, as Ghosh suggests, into the imagined worlds of science fiction authors such as Octavia Butler, Frank Herbert, or Kim Stanley Robinson, thus, literary scholarship should study the novels that have written about historical extreme weather events. From novels like Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, and Arif Anwar's *The Storm*, literary studies can gain an understanding of various authors' ideas of the relationship between humans and nonhuman nature, and the ways in which extreme weather events have challenged, consolidated, or overturned such ideas.

All depictions of nonhuman nature, as botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer tells us in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, are embedded in a particular individual or cultural understanding of the relationships between us humans and other beings. Kimmerer explains how various understandings exist among different communities in the first chapter of her book. After telling the myth of Skywoman – the origin story of the Haudenosaunee peoples – who is helped upon her arrival on earth by older animals, Kimmerer contrasts it with the story of Adam and Eve, the Judeo-Christian origin myth which sets the arrival of human beings on earth when the planet was still very young, and which places humans as God-like creatures in nature. The culture informed by the myth of Adam and Eve, with its history of environmental exploitation and pollution, Kimmerer claims, can no longer conceive of beneficial relationships between humans and the earth, as she observes in her

undergraduate classroom when, in a survey, “nearly every one of the two hundred students said confidently that humans and nature are a bad mix” (6).

The understandings of the relationships between humans and nonhuman nature derived from the Eve and Skywoman origin myths are an example of what historian James D. Rice, in his 2009 book *Nature and History in the Potomac Country: From Hunter-Gatherers to the Age of Jefferson*, calls “ecological imagination” (6). Using it to distinguish Algonquian environmental practices from English ones, Rice defines “ecological imagination” as a culture’s understanding of the roles of human beings within nonhuman nature and the subsequent relationships which that can shape. According to both Kimmerer and Rice ecological imaginations are essential parts of cultures and communities, deriving from cosmologies and histories, and shaping economies, languages, as well as social and ecological practices. Ecological imaginations, thus, also pervade novels that feature extreme weather events, whether historical or fictional.

In this thesis, I will use Kimmerer’s and Rice’s ideas of “ecological imagination” to analyze three twentieth and twenty-first century works that feature historical extreme weather events. American Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston introduces her fictional characters to the historical force of the 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane in her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; British Modernist writer Virginia Woolf writes about the 1609 Great Frost in *Orlando*; and Bangladeshi author Arif Anwar sets his novel *The Storm* during and around the infamous Bhola Cyclone of 1970.

Although these authors and their novels stem from various literary traditions and tackle events that span almost five hundred years, the choice of including a historical weather event in their works brings them together. In all three novels, the authors not only explore the connections

between the extreme weather events they include in their plots and historical forces that shape the places and communities affected by them, but also use these weather events as symbols of these same forces. Hurston's hurricane, thus, becomes imbued with both the trauma of colonial slavery for Black communities in Florida and the possibility of spiritual liberation through West African and Haitian spirituality. The combined forces of Woolf's frost and thaw ask her protagonist, Orlando, to melt binary thinking as a cultural era flows into another, but ultimately fail to unfreeze binaries as English ecological imagination remains frozen within them. Finally, Anwar centers his novel around a cyclone that was historically tied to the political consequences of centuries of history in the Bay of Bengal, making the extreme weather a symbol of that same geopolitical history.

Their different literary traditions and relations to the extreme weather event will be instructive, for this senior thesis explores how authors' ecological imaginations inform the depiction of hurricanes, frosts, and cyclones across continents and cultures. Each of the three chapters focuses on one of the novels, with the first one centered on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the second one on *Orlando*, and the third one on *The Storm*.

Chapter One: The Okeechobee Hurricane as Colonial Trauma and the Externalization of Janie's
Decolonial Ecological Imagination in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* follows Janie Crawford's life journey through various communities and ecosystems in Florida. The journey is narrated by Janie herself as she returns to Eatonville, the town where she had lived with her second husband, Joe Starks, before his death. Back in her house, Janie sits down with her friend Phoeby to recount the story of her entire life, from early childhood to the death of her third husband, Tea Cake Woods. Before Janie's return to Eatonville, in fact, the Everglades, where Janie and Tea Cake had settled, had been affected by the Okeechobee Hurricane. During the hurricane, Tea Cake had been bitten by a rabid dog, which caused him sickness and, eventually, death. Tea Cake's death prompted Janie to leave the Everglades community, where she had lived and worked with her late husband, leading her back to her house in Eatonville, where her narration can begin.

The hurricane which strikes the Everglades and causes Tea Cake's death in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is not simply a plot device for the novel, but a historical event that affected Hurston's community so deeply that it sparked her writing of the novel. In 1928, as the hurricane hit Florida, Hurston lived elsewhere, but in the years following the disaster, she interviewed and worked closely with the survivors (Boyd 8). The hurricane, which according to author Eliot Kleinberg reached a death toll of 2,500 to 3,000 people in Florida, primarily affected Black communities, and "may have also accounted for the most deaths of Black people in a single day in U.S. history" (Kleinberg xiv). The disproportionate environmental impact that the Okeechobee Hurricane had on Black workers is a symptom of the systemic environmental racism which segregated Black farm workers in the most dangerous living quarters, while further exposing

them to natural threats in the agricultural fields for the economic benefit of the surrounding white communities.

The history of the Lake Okeechobee area, where the 1928 hurricane inflicted the harshest damage, is one of racialized environments. In the seventh chapter of his book *Reconciling Nature: Literary Representations of the Natural, 1876-1945*, Robert M. Myers analyzes the environmental history of Florida at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the early 1900s, the Everglades, which by 1928 had become an agricultural site worked primarily by Black and Bahamian migrant workers (Alexander), were covered by “a slow-moving river that flowed from Lake Okeechobee to Florida Bay” (Myers 106). After the government drained the area to uncover its agricultural potential, the Everglades experienced an agricultural boom thanks to the Black workers employed in sugarcane production.

The development of the agricultural potential of the area around Lake Okeechobee was informed by a particular ecological imagination which looks at nonhuman nature as a resource to exploit for people’s benefit. Botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer, in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, assigns the term “Windigo thinking” to this ecological imagination (309). The Windigo is a monster from the Anishinaabe people’s mythology, and its influence on the history of the Everglades as an economically viable area can be seen in Kimmerer’s words:

Windigo footprints all, they are the tracks of insatiable consumption. So many have been bitten. You can see them walking the malls, eying your farm for a housing development, running for Congress. We are all complicit. We’ve allowed the “market” to define what we value so that the redefined common good seems to depend on profligate lifestyles that enrich the sellers while impoverishing the soul and the earth (307).

Kimmerer thus defines Windigo thinking as “insatiable consumption,” as constant exploitation of land and resources to “enrich the sellers while impoverishing the soul and the earth.” According to her, it has been allowed to continue undisturbed by our own complacency and belief that this wasteful, exploitative market is the desirable “common good.” With its greed for land and profit, not only did “Windigo thinking” damage the earth of the Lake Okeechobee area, but it also put the communities that benefitted the least from the economic expansion of the agricultural sector at high risk of environmental disaster.

To transform the area into agricultural land, the local authorities built dikes and levees around Lake Okeechobee, and to systemically maintain Palm Beach County as a white enclave, they concentrated housing for Black workers in the Everglades at the feet of “a 5-foot mud dike constructed to hold back the Lake Okeechobee during summer rains” (Bullard 759), which made these workers, fundamental to the agricultural success of the region, highly vulnerable to changing water levels in the lake. In 1928, in fact, after the “Category 5 hurricane ... passed ashore in Palm Beach County with 140 mph winds,” it hit Lake Okeechobee, causing its waters to rise and one of its dikes “to overflow, resulting in 6m-high floods [that] swept houses off their foundations and subsequently destroyed them” (Mann).

While the state and national white authorities neglected the Black victims of the hurricane (Alexander), several Black writers and musicians maintained the memory of the storm alive through their works. As Luigi Monge writes in his paper “Their Eyes Were Watching God: African-American Tropical Songs on the 1928 Florida Hurricanes and Floods,” at least five songs were written in the aftermath of the storm. The only commercially available of these is Ruby Gowdy’s “Florida Flood Blues,” the lyrics of which read “Water all around me, I ain’t got no place to stay ... Hurricane has been here, killed all the crops on my land ... Blew down my

log cabin, there's no shelter left for me ... Shows the gods are angry. Got the blues so bad today" (Monge 131). As Blues singers had done before her, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston gives the Okeechobee disaster a central role, highlighting not only its devastating effects on the Black population but also denouncing the white community's racist response.

As Hurston's depiction of the hurricane is not only the insertion of a deeply impactful historical event into a fictional work, but also a significant point of a complex plot, "the text invites us to speculate on the meaning of the storm in some ways" (Cassidy 261). Several questions come to mind: Why did Hurston choose to include a historical extreme weather event in a "transcendent tale of a Black women's journey to self-discovery" (Boyd 8)? What is the role of the hurricane in the plot? What meaning is Hurston assigning to the Okeechobee Hurricane in her novel? Does placing a historical event in a fictional plot automatically assign it a meaning?

Literary scholars have offered various interpretations of the hurricane in Hurston's novel. Thomas Cassidy, for example, claims that the hurricane "can be seen as an eruption of Janie's unconscious turmoil and rage" (Cassidy 261), while Sarah Ford strongly disagrees with Cassidy's interpretation and argues instead for an understanding of the hurricane as a necessary deconstruction of the concepts of gender, race, hierarchical power, as well as of the dichotomy between human and non-human nature. Ford's interpretation is further expanded by Mawuena Logan, who sees in the destruction brought by the hurricane the presence of Legba, a trickster divinity from Haitian and West African cosmology.

While I will be pursuing a slightly different argument from theirs, Ford and Logan are both recognizing that, as mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, fictional depictions of extreme weather events are always born out of a certain ecological imagination. In order to understand the role of the Okeechobee Hurricane in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, thus, it is

important to analyze the ecological imaginations represented in the communities and ecosystems throughout the novel. What are the envisioned relations between humans and nonhuman nature in Janie's communities before the Okeechobee Lake overflows? How does the hurricane affect these relations? And what happens once the storm has passed?

Scholar Rachel Stein, in a chapter from La Vinia Delois Jennings's book *Zora Neale Hurston, Haiti, and Their Eyes Were Watching God* titled "Remembering the Sacred Tree: Black Women, Nature, and Voodoo in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," analyzes Hurston's Voodoo spirituality in her 1938 ethnographical work as well as her 1937 novel. "Voodoo," Stein explains, is "the Caribbean transposition of the African religion Vodun which was brought to the islands by enslaved blacks, [and] is, at the time of Hurston's research the unofficial national religion on Haiti" (33). Stein's analysis is central to the study of ecological imaginations in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, for it helps show that Voodoo spirituality and envisioned relationships between humans and nonhuman nature are essentially intertwined, not only for Janie Crawford, but for Hurston herself. Stein's central claim is that Voodoo spirituality offers Black Caribbean women liberation from the usurpations of white colonial binaries and hierarchies – a liberation which implicitly permeates Janie's journey in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as she frees herself from the dichotomies between genders, races, and natures that white society would impose on her. Following Stein's account of Voodoo spirituality as a deconstructive force opposing colonial ideologies, her interpretation of the hurricane is that "if the tree and the muck exemplify a beneficent Voodoo disruption of the false oppositions enforced by white culture, the hurricane enacts the devastatingly chaotic face of divine power, wreaking havoc upon the bounds of colonialism ... Colonial ideology is driven away by the hurricane" (Stein 42). For Stein, thus, the hurricane in Hurston's novel represents a

Voodoo-informed disruption of binaries between human beings and nonhuman nature, capable to fight against colonially derived dichotomous hierarchies.

In my interpretation of the hurricane in Hurston's novel, I am engaging with Stein's, Cassidy's, Ford's, and Logan's arguments to offer an analysis of the storm derived from Hurston's text itself. The following chapter begins by analyzing Janie's family's ecological imaginations to provide a background of the envisioned relationships between humans and nonhuman beings that are available to Janie in her childhood. An account of Janie's initial ecological imagination at the crossroads of girlhood and womanhood follows in the second section, while the third section is interested in how the different marriages and communities that Janie lives in throughout her adulthood impact her premarital ecological imagination. The fourth section follows Janie's move to Lake Okeechobee with Tea Cake, and the fifth section collects all the studied ecological imaginations into the hurricane scene, analyzing how the storm enters in conversation with them.

As Janie journeys through communities and ecosystems, she inherits, challenges, and forms ecological imaginations that will guide her understanding and her choices from Nanny's garden all the way to the Everglades, through the high waters of the hurricane, and back. The ecological imagination Janie forms for herself, I claim, is externalized by the Okeechobee Hurricane which, as Ford, Logan, and Stein have successfully argued, is a deconstructive force guided by anticolonial ideals and Voodoo spirituality. While agreeing with Ford, Logan, and Stein, however, I propose that the Hurricane carries two faces towards the muck: one which brings Voodoo-inspired disruptions of binaries, and one which holds the trauma of colonization. While externalizing Janie's Voodoo-informed decolonial ecological imagination, whereby human beings and nonhuman nature are entangled in the absence of binaries and hierarchies, the

Hurricane also brings the legacy of colonial trauma with its strong winds, giving Hurston's characters a choice in which aspect of the storm to embrace.

1. NANNY'S AND LEAFY'S ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATIONS: NATURE AS SAFETY FROM RACISM, NATURE AS RACISM

Janie Crawford is born in the late nineteenth century in West Florida, abandoned by her parents and raised by her grandmother, Nanny. Nanny's "house out in de back-yard" (Hurston 8) near the Washburns' property, where Janie was born, is the end of the "highway through de wilderness" (16) that the woman built for her daughter, Janie's mother. Raised under slavery, "freedom found [Nanny] wid a baby daughter in [her] arms" (16), so she "wrapped [her] baby de best [she] knowed how and made it to de swamp by de river" (18). For Nanny, like many women and men escaping enslavement, the swamp is the first setting of freedom. As Cherene Sherrard-Johnson explains in her chapter "High Water and the Limits of Humanity in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*" in John Cullen Gruesser's *Animals in the American Classics: How Natural History Inspired Great Fiction*, swamps played a fundamental role in the ecological and ideological landscape of the antebellum South. Sherrard-Johnson writes:

For settler-colonialists, swamps were uncharted frontiers full of unfamiliar wildlife and radically unstable ground. A source of fear and fascination, the animals were often viewed as inseparable from the humans that sought refuge in swamps, like fugitive slaves and Maroons, or indigenous peoples with the knowledge of how to navigate liquid landscapes (183).

For Nanny, the swamp is "full uh mocassins and other bitin' snakes," but she is "more skeered uh whut was behind [her]" (Hurston 18). The nonhuman wildlife, the "mocassins" and "snakes"

of the swamp, does represent “a source of fear” (Sherrard-Johnson 183) for Nanny, but the life she is running away from, one of human racism and enslavement, is scarier. In the American South, swamps and wilderness gain different meanings for different social groups. While for white settlers the wilderness represented the limit of ‘humanity,’ for Nanny, escaping enslavement with a daughter in her arms, the swamp is a pathway away from inhumane danger, and the ecosystem provides her with materials to protect her daughter. “Ah wrapped Leafy up in moss and fixed her good in a tree and picked mah way on down to de landin’” (Hurston 18), says Nanny. As Kimberly N. Ruffin highlights in the first chapter of her book *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions*,

Living in the woods required people to feed and medicate themselves and ... possibly aid family members with knowledge of the natural world around them. In addition, slaves who remained on plantations lived during a time when herbal remedies were popular in many cultural groups. Survival within and outside the institution of enslavement involved the work of keeping the human body alive. Hence, the need to learn and use herbal remedies played a particularly significant role in the enslaved’s expression of ecological belonging (35).

As a formerly enslaved Black woman, Nanny navigates the natural world of the swamp by successfully making use of moss and trees to safeguard her child, whose name is, significantly, “Leafy.” While her character is chronically overlooked by scholars, Leafy and her name deserve critical attention. Nanny’s ecological knowledge is instrumental to her path away from inhumane slavery, and her naming her daughter “Leafy” further establishes the loving, human-like, caring relationship between Nanny and vegetation.

As Leafy grows up, however, her name and her mother's legacy do not grant her protection in nature. For Leafy, the wilderness no longer represents a refuge from inhumane society but instead becomes a theater for racialized sexual violence. When Leafy is seventeen, in fact, "a school teacher had done hid her in de woods all night long, and he had done raped [her] and run on off just before day" (19). It is through this rape in the woods that Janie is conceived, and after Janie is born, Leafy "took to drinkin' likker and sayin' out nights" (19). For Leafy, the woods that had cradled her as a newborn, offering kind protection against an inhumane social world, turn into the same space Nanny had run away from, where a white man can freely commit sexual crimes against a Black woman.

In her ethnographical work *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, Hurston explains that at least up until the 1930s, the Black woman in colonial societies was seen as "sexual beast and beast of burden" (Stein 31). Stein writes:

In this defining racist image of black women as sexual beasts, both race and gender were naturalized simultaneously and were based on the belief in fixedly ranked categories: man was defined over and against woman, white over and against black, human over and against nature, with the "animality" of black women serving to affirm the higher "humanity" of white men (31).

In nature, Leafy is forced to endure racial and sexual violence that interrupts her future which, although 'free,' is still subdued by racialized misogyny. In fact, Leafy is encouraged by her mother to pursue education after the abolition of slavery. However, somewhat ironically, it is through this search for self that she encounters the white teacher who rapes her in the woods. A free woman, Leafy is still subjected to the same racialized sexual violence that Nanny had had to endure, as the woods become a witness. Far from being a safe, nurturing place, the wilderness at

the turn of the century has become for Leafy, and for Black women in colonial societies, intertwined with symbols and metaphors of racialized misogyny. As Stein writes, in fact, the wilderness, which for Nanny had been a refuge, has become a weapon of dehumanization against Black women by the time Leafy is in school.

As the wilderness turns sour for Leafy and she runs away from her newborn daughter, Nanny raises Janie, hoping that her own daughter is “at rest” (Hurston 19) while sharing with her granddaughter her ecological imagination. Nanny’s imagination comes through in the sentences she utters to Janie. For her, for example, “colored folks is branches without roots” (16) and Black women are “de mule uh de world” (14). These two ecological metaphors highlight Nanny’s specific vision of the role of human beings in relation to nonhuman nature. Both derived from the fact that for Nanny, raised under slavery, “de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as [she’d] been able tuh find out” (14), the metaphors draw a parallel between the conditions of Black people in the post-civil war United States and natural elements of different sorts. On one hand, the “branches without roots” represent an ecologically impossible tree, one that is able to grow branches without having its roots to anchor it to the ground or supply nutrients to the plant. For the Black community around Nanny, therefore, the mirror structure of trees is interrupted by an absence of roots: though branches are present, the lack of roots renders the tree prone to falling during, for example, a storm. The roots that ground trees to the soil and enable them to fetch nutrients and water are not present in the trees that “colored folks” are.

In “Lying Up a Nation: Zora Neale Hurston and the Local Uses of Diaspora,” scholar Adam Ewing says: “in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, roots are everything: they offer a foundation for participation, a measure of freedom, a template upon which to negotiate the terms of the living” (130). The lack of rootedness in the trees that “colored folks” are dates back to the

slave trade and the forced uprooting of African communities from their land and people to be sold as slaves across the British, Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish Empires. Within this context, Black women are for Nanny not only rootless trees but also parallel figures to mules. A draft animal forced to carry heavy loads and perceived as “mean,” “poor,” and “spiteful” by people (52), mules encapsulate the exploitation and humiliation Black women had to endure in the postbellum United States because of the intersection of racial violence and misogyny.

From this context, Nanny’s wish for Janie, imagined through an ecological metaphor, is “to school out and pick from a higher bush and a sweeter berry” (13). It is for this reason that when she sees “Johnny Taylor lacerating her Janie with a kiss ... Nanny’s head and face looked like the standing roots of some old tree that had been torn away by storm” (12). Her wish for an improvement of Janie’s opportunities compared to her own and Leafy’s comes crumbling down when a boy kisses her granddaughter, rendering it more improbable, according to Nanny, that Janie should live a better life than her foremothers. Born out of a brutal rape in the woods, and raised to the sound of Nanny’s ecological metaphors, Janie grows up in West Florida.

2. YOUNG JANIE CRAWFORD AND THE PEAR TREE: A VODOO-INSPIRED MARRIAGE OF BINARIES AS JANIE’S YOUNG ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

As she begins to narrate her story to Phoeby, Janie immediately appears to have a strong ecological imagination, one that permeates all aspects of her life. Chapter Two, marking the beginning of Janie’s narration, starts by delineating how ecological thinking shapes her understanding of the course of one’s life: “Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches” (8). Contrasting with her grandmother’s view of Black people as rootless trees, Janie’s ecological

imagination already establishes itself as separate from Nanny's: her own life is "like a great tree in leaf" (8), compared to Nanny's idea of Black people as (probably bare) "branches without roots" (16). In Janie's tree the branches are covered in leaves, which in their aliveness must require roots. In between these leaves and branches, not only is "doom" to be spotted (the Black woman "is de mule uh de world" (14)), but "dawn" also lives in the branches of Janie's tree of life (8). For Janie, life is like a tree holding various binaries in its structure: suffering and enjoyment, doing and undoing, beginnings and endings. Herself, her life, and the tree image can hold both ends of a spectrum, showing Janie's ability to hold complexity.

An example of one of the tree's branches is the beginning of "her conscious life" (10), also deeply drenched in ecological experiences. "It was a spring afternoon in West Florida. Janie had spent most of the day under a blossoming pear tree in the back-yard. She had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under that tree for the last three days. That was to say, ever since the first tiny bloom had opened" (10). Janie's connection to the pear tree is one of timing: the moment of "the first tiny bloom" marks the beginning of her time under the pear tree. This connection is further emphasized by the ambiguity of the starting event. The sentence "ever since the first tiny bloom had opened" (10) does not clearly define whose blooms had opened, whether Janie's or the tree's. The possibility of the blooms to be referring's to Janie's timing within womanhood is encouraged by the description of Janie's "bursting buds" (11) and by Nanny's exclamation: "Janie, youse uh 'oman, now, so –" (12). Both Janie and the pear tree could be blossoming that spring.

What Janie enjoys about the blooming tree is the spectacle of ecological life surrounding and encompassing it:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. (11)

The revelation Janie receives from the concert of bees, blooms, sun, and breeze is the idea of ecological marriage. In the sinking of the bee into a flower and the arching of the latter to meet it is a union, and from this union comes “the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch” (11). Analyzing the image of the tree in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Rachel Stein explains that “the tree, as Hurston would have known, is a central Voodoo symbol and often signifies the sexual and spiritual union of the primary male and female deities” (36). As Stein argues, the symbolism of trees in Voodoo religion directly “counters the Judeo-Christian images of the tree of knowledge and the crucifix-tree that represent the dangers of bodily knowledge and the painful renunciation of physical existence” (36). While in the Judeo-Christian tradition, trees are symbols of sin and bodily death, Voodoo tradition sees trees as unifying beings, much like Janie herself does. In this differing view of trees, we can find a reminder of Kimmerer’s argument about origin myths and their impact on ecological imaginations.

Upon observing the pear tree and the marriage of bees with buds that permit life to continue under a Voodoo lens, Jane wishes “to be a pear tree – *any tree in bloom!* With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds” (Hurston 11). In accepting the idea of marriage learned from the pear tree, young Janie is rejecting “standard Christian asceticism which abhors women’s sexual pleasure,” to accept “the

ritual of the tree [which] embraces female sexuality as a natural manifestation of spirit” (Stein 36). In so doing, she is able to wish to be a tree, or even to be a tree herself. Like a tree, “she had glossy leaves and bursting buds” (Hurston 11) and is thus ready for the beauty of the marriage between the bees and the flowers to strike her.

So strong is her desire for a marriage like the one nature had taught her that “shiftless Johnny Taylor, tall and lean,” as he walks down the street from where Janie sees him, becomes “beglamed” by “the golden dust of pollen” (11-12). However, it is because of a kiss between Janie and Johnny Taylor that the dance of bees and pollen and sunlight is interrupted, as “Nanny’s head and face looked like the standing roots of some old tree that had been torn away by storm” (12). From a blossoming tree in the back-yard, Nanny’s reaction transforms Janie’s experience with Johnny Taylor into an uprooted tree. The two women’s ecological imaginations meet and clash, and in their disagreement, Nanny decides to marry Janie off to Logan Killicks, an older man whose “often-mentioned sixty acres” (21) promise Nanny some sort of ecologically-driven economic protection for her granddaughter. To Janie, however, “the vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree” (14). The two women’s clashing visions of life are seen through the trees themselves, on one hand Janie’s pear tree and its visions of love and unity, and on the other hand Nanny’s “old tree that had been torn away by storm” (12). Nanny, for whom nonhuman nature had offered protection against enslavement, sees in Janie’s actions a loss of security in a better life. Her disillusionment and fear upon seeing Janie’s path deviating from the one she had intended for her look like a tree uprooted by storm. To root her granddaughter, Nanny decides to marry her off to a man whose lands can promise her some financial stability. Janie, however, who has learned about marriage from the pear tree, is not concerned about the

rootedness of Logan Killicks's land, and instead wants the freedom to love like nonhuman nature has taught her.

According to Nanny's ecological imagination, informed by her experience as a Black woman in the slave-holding South, land ownership represents the liberation and dignity needed for a better life. It was, after all, her legacy to Janie, as she tells her at the end of the recollection of her life story: "Maybe it wasn't much, but Ah done de best Ah kin by you. Ah raked and scraped and bought dis lil piece uh lang so you wouldn't have to stay in de white folks' yard and tuck yo' head befo' other chillum at school" (19). Not living by white people's rules and being able to maintain dignity before peers is for Nanny the greatest gift of freedom to Janie. In accepting Logan Killick's marriage offer, Janie respects and honors Nanny's ecological imagination without, however, inheriting it. As Rachel Stein explains, thus,

Janie ... is inspired to resist society's conception of black women as "mules of the world" through her Voodoo-informed vision of the blossoming pear tree fertilized by golden bees as a fecund "marriage" of polarities. This vision of nature as the site of fertile possibility and egalitarian exchange inspires Janie to re-create herself as a self-posessed, erotically fulfilled woman" (30).

Even after marrying Logan Killicks, in fact, Janie refuses to see land ownership as a deciding factor in a marriage. Once "the new moon had been up and down three times" after her wedding, Janie tells Nanny: "Ah ain't takin' dat ole land tuh heart neither. Ah could throw ten acres of it over de fence every day and never look back to see where it fell" (Hurstun 23-24). Instead, she says, "Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (24). Janie's ecological imagination is fundamentally different from Nanny's, "so [she] waited a bloom time, and a green time and an orange time. But when the pollen again gilded the sun and

sifted down on the world she began to stand around the gate and expect things” (25). The unhappy marriage with Logan Killicks fails to affect Janie’s ecological imagination, who “often spoke to falling seeds and said, “Ah hope you fall on soft ground,” because she had heard seeds saying that to each other as they passed” (25). She saw the world as “a stallion rolling in the blue pasture of ether” (25) and with her understanding of the world “she knew now that marriage did not make love. Janie’s first dream was dead, so she became a woman” (25).

3. EATONVILLE, JOE STARKS, AND THE MULE: JANIE MEETS THE FLORIDA DREAM ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

After one year of her marriage with Logan Killicks, Janie meets Joe Starks, an elegant man “from in and through Georgy” (28). She and Joe Starks begin to “meet in the scrub oaks across the road and talk about when he would be a big ruler of things with her reaping the benefits” (29). Despite the promises of such an ecological meeting “in the scrub oaks,” “Janie pulled back a long time because he did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees” (29), her Voodoo-inspired understanding of love and marriage. In fact, after eloping with him towards Eatonville, the oldest Black incorporated town, and promising herself that “from now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom” (32), Janie begins to feel that “the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another ... took the bloom off of things” (43).

Joe Starks, in fact, after becoming the mayor of the town, begins to act as the “big ruler of things” her had promised her he would be (29). One of the mayoral actions he takes, in fact, is to bring “de first street lamp in uh colored town” (45). In the speech he gives to the community, he says, “De Sun-maker brings [the sun] up in de mornin’, and de Sun-maker sends it tuh bed at

night. Us poor weak humans can't do nothin' tuh hurry it up nor to slow it down. All we can do, if we want any light after de settin' or befo' the risin', is tuh make some light ourselves" (45).

Making the light, Joe Starks equates himself to the Sun-maker while simultaneously substituting the Sun with an artificial lamplight. Seen as a vanguard of technological progress, the conquering of nonhuman natural forces by human technologies, be it lamplight or dikes, is what the white authorities of Florida, from the end of the nineteenth century, began to proudly call "the Florida dream" (McCally 142-43). In his chapter "The Everglades and the Florida Dream," included in Davis and Arsenault's *Paradise Lost? The Environmental History of Florida*, History professor David McCally explains how

The definition of the Florida dream ... remains elusive, even while observers readily recognize its physical manifestation. In the case of the Florida dream, these physical manifestations assume three major forms: the idyllic days of beachside ease, the promise of subtropical agriculture, and the vision of a verdant suburbia. If these expressions of the Florida dream seem too eclectic to characterize any single idea, then the extreme environmental restructuring that so many of these beaches, farms, and suburbs underwent will provide the analytic insight required to understand at least the nature of the dream (142).

It is the belief in the technological domestication of nonhuman natural forces through anthropogenic technology that guides Joe Starks's and the Florida government's ecological imagination. In the case of the latter, the pursuit of technocentric beliefs led the State to the agriculturalization of the Everglades at the cost of the vulnerability of Black workers to natural forces beyond the control of dikes and levees. As McCally continues to narrate, "in Florida, the attraction of an exotic world excited dreams that led to the destruction of the very stuff upon

which the dream rested, and the Everglades, the most exotic feature of south Florida, endured the most thoroughgoing restructuring of all” (142). As to Joe Starks’s technocentric and anthropocentric ecological imagination, guided by terms such as “ruler” (32), it begins to clash with Janie’s Voodoo-informed ecological thoughts.

An instance in which the two ecological imaginations clash is the scene that centers around “Matt Bonner’s yellow mule” (51). In Eatonville, “everybody indulged in mule talk. He was next to the Mayor in prominence, and made better talking. Janie loved the conversation and sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge” (53). While for Janie the mule is associated with ‘love’ and “good stories,” she “noted that while he didn’t talk about the mule himself, [Joe] sat and laughed at it” (54). Mule talk continued for a while, until one afternoon the “brute,” as the town called it (56), found itself in front of the store, ready for people “to ketch [him] and have some fun” (56). “Everybody was having fun at the mule-baiting. All but Janie” (56). As the town finds such sneering entertaining, Janie thinks that “They oughta be shamed uh theyselves! Teasin’ dat poor brute lak they is! Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin’ ‘im tuh death...” (56). While the rest of the town sees the mule as a helpless animal to make fun of, Janie recognizes “his” dignity. Certainly, one can note in Janie’s muttering a similarity between the mule’s condition and the enslaved person’s life: “done been worked tuh death,” and “done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment” (56). Janie’s use of the personal pronoun ‘he’ when talking about the mule further draws the similitude between the two conditions, bringing back Nanny’s metaphor of the Black woman as “de mule uh de world” (14). Cherene Sherrard-Johnson begins her analysis of Matt Bonner’s mule in Hurston’s novel with the mule’s function as “a representative of [Janie’s] position in the town” (182).

Thus, the response of Janie to the mule is dissimilar to Joe's and the townsfolk's. While the others take advantage of the mule's defenselessness to make fun of it, Janie manifests a Voodoo-inspired defense of Matt Bonner's mule. Like Voodoo, which "counter[s] the denigration of Caribbean black women, in particular by revising the terms of their negative Western association with nature," Janie's revision of Nanny's view of Black women and mules highlights the "revisionary potential of Voodoo spirituality" (Stein 39). Where Nanny says that the Black woman "is de mule uh de world" (Hurston 14), Janie responds with "people ought to have some regard for helpless things" (57). The identification is thus inverted. Nanny's understanding likens Black women with mules, bringing both down by "the denigration of Caribbean black women" through "their negative Western association with nature" (Stein 39). Janie's Voodoo-informed ecological imagination, on the other hand, brings the mule up towards human dignity, defying the "racist theories such as so-called scientific racism, social Darwinism, environmental determinism, and eugenicism [which] inform the pernicious images and language (Ruffin 11). "Language," Ruffin claims, "is a key tool in how people relate to nature. Since language also carries the conceptual legacy of racist ideology, it is a key tool in the creation and maintenance of human hierarchies that often put people of African descent among those at the bottom" (12). It is through language, and metaphor specifically, that Nanny inherits and transmits the racist hierarchy which sees Black women as "de mule uh de world" (Hurston 14). And through language, too, Janie asserts her Voodoo-informed ecological imagination free of hierarchies: for her, Matt Bonner's mule is a "he" too.

Janie is not the only one assigning humanity to Matt Bonner's mule, as the animal's death introduces another fundamental scene of nonhuman nature presence in Hurston's novel. After the mule's death, the townspeople "drag[ged] him out to the edge of the hammock which was far

enough off to satisfy sanitary conditions in the town. The rest was up to the buzzards” (59). Despite the efforts of the town to draw a “sanitary” separation between themselves and the animal, the buzzards, like Janie, assign final humanity to Matt Bonner’s mule, blurring the boundary between human beings and nonhuman nature which had been drawn by the “sanitary conditions in the town” (59) and the use of the pronoun “it” when referring to the mule. As the buzzards gather above the townspeople, they “were holding a great flying-meet way up over the heads of the mourners ... They wanted to begin, but the Parson wasn’t there, so a messenger was sent to the ruler in a tree where he sat” (61). The social structures in the buzzard community personify the birds, and the birds themselves assign personhood to the dead mule, as the leader asks, “What killed this man?” (62).

Matt Bonner’s mule, however, is not the only man who dies in the Eatonville community. By the end of chapter eight, Joe Starks dies in his own bed as the community “began to gather in the big yard under the palm and china-berry trees” (84). And so Janie’s second husband, the man who had met her under the Scrub oaks, dies wishing that “thunder and lightnin’ would kill [her]” (86), an ominous foreshadowing of the hurricane that will strike her and her third husband, Vergible ‘Tea Cake’ Woods.

4. TEA CAKE WOODS, THE MUCK, LAKE OKEECHOBEE, AND A WORK-INFORMED ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Without mourning her second husband, for their marriage had been dead long before he was, Janie “sent her face to Joe’s funeral, and herself went rollicking with the springtime across the world” (88). She continues to work at the store her husband had built, and it is there that one afternoon “at five-thirty a tall man came into the place” (94). Tea Cake is a charming young

man, much younger than Janie, and as he takes her fishing, Janie thinks that “it was so crazy digging up worms by lamp light and setting out for Lake Sabelia after midnight that she felt like a child breaking rules” (102). Immediately, Tea Cake represents for Janie something she had been looking for, and something her previous two marriages had not provided her. With his ways around the natural environment (“he had a string of fresh-caught trout for a present” (103), “Ah picked some strawberries too, Ah figgered you might like” (107)) and his ecological figures of speech (“Good night, Mis’ Janie. Look lak we done run our conversation from grass roots tuh pine trees” (106)), “he could be a bee to a blossom – a pear tree blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him” (106).

With Tea Cake, Janie seems to find the sacred Voodoo union that the pear tree in Nanny’s garden had symbolized for her. While Joe Starks “did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees” (29), Tea Cake has the potential to be “a bee to a blossom” (106). Even his last name, “Woods,” promises to Janie some ecological essence. Upon marrying him, with the disapproval of the Eatonville community, Janie becomes Janie Mae Woods, reuniting, in her new last name, with the Voodoo symbol of the tree.

True to the promises of ecological closeness of the first impressions he makes on Janie, Tea Cake insists that the two of them should move to the muck “down in de Everglades round Clewiston and Belle Glade where dey raise all dat cane and string-beans and tomatuhs” (128). So Janie and Tea Cake move to the Everglades, where everything

was big and new. Big Lake Okechobee, big beans, big cane, big weeds, big everything.

Weeds that did well to grow waist high up the state were eight and often ten feet tall down there. Ground so rich that everything went wild. Volunteer cane just taking the

place. Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have fertilized a Kansas wheat field. Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world. People wild too (129).

Like the other Black workers in the Everglades, Janie and Tea Cake “rattled nine miles in a borrowed car to the quarters that squatted so close that only the dyke separated them from the great, sprawling Okeechobee” (130). In writing this, Hurston was certainly commenting on the conditions of the workers’ living quarters in the Everglades in the 1920s. A historical fact certainly not neglected by Hurston, the closeness of the Black workers’ cabins to the Okeechobee dike had much to do with the disproportionately high death toll of the 1928 hurricane in the Black community.

Months before Lake Okeechobee overflowed, however, life on the muck was “dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love. The rich black earth clinging to the bodies and biting the skin like ants” (131). In the Everglades, human bodies and nonhuman “rich black earth” form one single entity, as the soil attaches itself to the workers’ skin. In Ruffin’s chapter titled ““Toil and Soil:” Authorizing Work and Enslavement,” she compares the ecological imagination of African-American people under slavery to Euro-American dichotomous ecological imagination. While the latter have conceived of nature as temporary leisure, distant from work and everyday living, as visible in the institution of national parks, the former have had an understanding of nature as tied to work. For Ruffin, “identifying ourselves as natural workers can move us toward greater compatibility with the work that nonhuman nature is doing. In other words, seeing ourselves as one type of natural worker may encourage us to better appreciate the ecological consequences of all our actions, whether they are related to our jobs or our recreation” (27). It is thus that

Hurston's workers in the Everglades see "the rich black earth clinging to the bodies and biting the skin like ants" (Hurston 131).

But the rhythm of work and love in the Everglades is soon to change, as the time of narration approaches September 1928.

5. THE HURRICANE

Chapter Eighteen of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* entirely focuses on the arrival of the Okeechobee Hurricane. The storm is preceded by a plethora of changes in nonhuman nature that foretell its arrival. The first sign, however, is a human one. Janie, in fact, "was home by herself one afternoon when she saw a band of Seminoles passing by. The men walking in front and the laden, stolid women following them like burros. She had seen Indians several times in the 'Glades, in twos and threes, but this was a large party" (154). They tell Janie that they are "going to high ground. Saw-grass bloom. Hurricane coming" (154).

Although the Seminoles are moving away from the Everglades, nonhuman nature is still giving no intelligible signs to Janie and her community: "Still a blue sky and fair weather" (155). The economy, too, is encouraging the workers to remain on the muck: "Beans running fine and prices good, so the Indians could be, *must* be, wrong. You couldn't have a hurricane when you're making seven and eight dollars a day picking beans" (155). The logic of profit overrides that of the original inhabitants of the muck, to the point that Janie's community places more faith on economic variables than Seminoles' ecological knowledge. As Sarah Ford argues, the workers are using storytelling to ignore the incoming hurricane: "The first construction is an adoption of the white attitude of capitalism as superior to the naturalist view of Indians" (412). The story the workers are telling themselves is an ecological myth, and "through myth, we grope for

connection to place. Mythologies are there at the beginning of human-land relationships, and they can also block human-land relationships from evolving” (Ruffin 133).

The belief that if the beans’ prices on the muck are good there can be no hurricane is an example of a myth capable of this blockage. This story, too, like the streetlamps and the mistreatment of Matt Bonner’s mule, is part of the larger ecological imagination intertwined with the Frontier Myth, another myth through which “we grope for connection to place” (133). Because it “tells the story of the evolutionary inevitability of the triumph of civilization over savagery and the dominance of the white race over all other races” (69), it places economic productivity over ecological knowledge as proof or disproof of hurricane danger. Thus, the fact that “beans running fine and prices good” (Hurston 155) makes of the Seminoles’ understanding that “Saw-grass bloom. Hurricane coming” (154) a further proof, for Tea Cake and the workers’ community, that “Indians are dumb anyhow, always were” (155). This logic is another example of Kimmerer’s “Windigo thinking,” as the promise of profit overrides the safety of the human community in the face of the coming hurricane, bringing unnecessary deaths, which could have been avoided by listening to the Seminoles’ early warning.

In placing the discussion around economic certainty and ecological knowledge early in the chapter, Hurston is recognizing the flaws in the community’s logic. The Seminoles were right, she tells the reader, as by the morning, signs of the imminent arrival of the hurricane are visible in nonhuman nature. “Morning came without motion. The winds, to the tiniest, lispig baby breath had left the earth. Even before the sun gave light, dead day was creeping from bush to bush watching man” (155). Soon, the animals inhabiting the ground move away from Lake Okeechobee. “Some rabbits scurried through the quarters going east. Some possums slunk by and their route was definite. One or two at a time, then more. By the time the people left the

fields the procession was constant. Snakes, rattlesnakes began to cross the quarters” (155). Larger animals, too, move away: “Several times during the night Janie heard the snort of big animals like deer. Once the muted voice of a panther. Going east and east” (155). The trees also begin to give signs, as “that night the palm and banana trees began that long distance talk with rain” (155), and finally the buzzards, who had presided Matt Bonner’s mule’s funeral, leave the muck “A thousand buzzards held a flying meet and then went above the clouds and stayed” (155). The only beings left on the muck are human beings.

As the storm picks up and the signs of its imminent threat become clearer, Janie and Tea Cake’s community, in fact, continue to pursue a colonial view that informs their second storytelling “construction,” in Ford’s words. As the thunders

woke up old Okechobee and the monster began to roll in his bed ... the folks in the quarters and the people in the big houses further around the shore heard the big lake and wondered. The people felt uncomfortable but safe because there were the seawalls to chain the senseless monster in his bed. The folks let the people do the thinking. If the castles thought themselves secure, the cabins needn’t worry. Their decision was already made as always (Hurst 158).

Here, the Lake Okeechobee area is divided between “the people” and “the folks.” The people, who live “in the big houses further around the shore ... felt uncomfortable but safe,” while the folks had their decision “already made as always” (158). The transferring of safety from the stability of the people’s houses onto the cabins through the statement “if the castles thought themselves secure, the cabins needn’t worry,” is illogical and dangerous; “cabins” are much more vulnerable to water and wind than “castles” (158). Furthermore, the position of the folks’ cabins near the lake put them at higher risk. Environmental racism in the Everglades, which had

privileged white people at the expense of Black workers' safety, had confined the Black worker community in the most vulnerable position near Lake Okeechobee: the "hurricane warning ... not so bad [in Palm Beach], but man, dis muck is too low and dat big lake is liable tuh bust" (156). Another sign of the colonial ideology adopted by Tea Cake, the belief that the Black "folks" will be safe if the white "people" are, is a placement of white people's supposed knowledge on a pedestal, which highly endangers the Black community around Lake Okeechobee. The white people's certainty, moreover, is dependent upon the fact that "there were the seawalls to chain the senseless monster in his bed" (158), a belief in the power of anthropogenic technology over the forces of nonhuman nature. The seawalls are what the authorities of Florida had constructed in the early twentieth century to make the area suitable for agriculture and, as McCally explains, allow the Florida Dream to be dreamt. However, despite the people's certainty that the technology of the Florida Dream will keep them safe, "the hurricanes of 1926 and 1928 dealt the Florida dream a one-two punch" (McCally 150). The second construction the workers on the muck tell themselves, thus, is one of technocentric power over the forces of nature.

Despite the workers' initial belief systems, however, Hurston's hurricane scene is ready to throw colonially-derived ideologies into chaos. As Rachel Stein explains, in fact,

The hurricane enacts the devastatingly chaotic face of divine power, wreaking havoc upon the bounds of colonialism. ... While Tea Cake and his friends stubbornly imitate the white bosses' resistance to the hurricane, rather than the wise retreat of the Indians and Bahamians, the storm eventually forces them to look to God, rather than to false white authority, for guidance ... Colonial ideology is driven awry by the hurricane. (42)

Soon after Tea Cake doubts the Seminoles, the descriptions of the hurricane begin to blur lines between human and nonhuman nature which, as Stein says, is one of the “false oppositions enforced by white culture” (42). Whereas the novel so far had used similes to transfer nonhuman natural characteristics onto human beings, the storm inverts the structure of the similes to make nonhuman nature reflect human characteristics. The winds come back, for example, and “everything in the world had a strong rattle, sharp and short like Stew Beef vibrating the drum head near the edge with his fingers” (Hurst 158). The storm, thus, sounds like Stew Beef, a member of Janie’s community on the muck, as he plays the drum. Similarly, weather elements adopt human-like attributes and actions, like “the drifting mists [which] gathered in the west – that cloud field of the sky – to arm themselves with thunders and march forth against the world” (158). Like humans getting ready for battle, the winds “arm themselves” and “march forth” as soldiers do, suddenly anthropomorphic.

With similar personifications, the lake, the hurricane, the wind, and the night begin to alternate neutral and masculine pronouns, interchangeably. “Old Okechobee” rolls “in *his* bed,” “night was striding across nothingness with the whole world in *his* hands” (158, emphases mine), the lake “seized hold of *his* dikes and ran forward until *he* met the quarters: uprooted them like grass and rushed on after *his* supposed-to-be conquerors ... The sea was walking the earth with a heavy heel” (161-62, emphases mine). At the same time, “the lake was coming on. Slower and wider, but coming. *It* had trampled on most of *its* supporting wall and lowered *its* front by spreading” (163, emphases mine). Scholar Mawuena Logan explains the role of the trickster divinity Legba, the West African and Voodoo god of the crossroads, as the inhabitant of spaces of liminality. He “disrupts in order to reconstruct, to set the record straight” (181), and as the storm disrupts the boundaries between what is human and what is not human, Legba, and

therefore Voodoo spirituality, might be present and vigilant around Janie's community when the hurricane arrives.

"The wind and water," in fact, "had given life to lots of things that folks think of as dead and given death to so much that had been living things" (Hurston 160). This blurring of the boundary between life and death might be the work of Legba, and we can see in it the deconstructive power of the hurricane as highlighted by scholar Sarah Ford. Ford, like Logan, notices a necessary deconstruction in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, before a Legba-informed reconstruction can happen. Interestingly, while both scholars notice the call for deconstruction and reconstruction in Hurston's novel, neither highlights the similarity of Janie's ecological imagination to Voodoo and Legba-informed thought.

The binary oppositions that the hurricane blurs, in fact, were never Janie's to begin with. Since her youth in Nanny's house, Janie has blurred binaries between human and nonhuman nature. She saw herself as "a bee" and Joe Starks as "a bloom" (32), she saw a mule as a man (56), buzzards as people (61), and marriage as a flower (11). The hurricane's reconstructive power, thus, does not act *on* Janie's ecological imagination, rather, it acts *within* it, making it visible to the wider community, who had not been privy to it. Like Janie's own Voodoo understanding of the pear tree and the bees, and her compassionate view of Matt Bonner's mule, the hurricane and the lake become personified and demonstrate their powerful agency to the entire community.

While Janie had always seen human beings and nonhuman nature as intertwined, it is the hurricane which brings this understanding to her entire community when "the monstropolous beast had left his bed. The two hundred miles an hour wind had loosed his chains ... The pursuing waters growled and shouted ahead, "Yes, Ah'm comin'!", and those who could fled on"

(161-62). For Janie, listening to words spoken by nonhuman natural elements is nothing new: she had heard seeds talking to each other (25) and she had had revelations from trees and bees and pollen (11).

Despite its blurring of the lines between humans and nonhuman nature, and life and death, however, the hurricane seems unable to eliminate all binaries. Joseph R. Urgo, in his essay “The Tune is in the Unity of the Thing”: Power and Vulnerability in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” claims that there exists a common subjectivity in the storm which brings unity to all human communities and between humans and nonhuman beings as well. Yet Hurston holds a different view of subjectivity during the storm. As Janie and Tea Cake look “for a place to rest and catch [their] breath ... they reached the bridge at Six Mile Bend and thought to rest. But it was crowded. White people had preempted that point of elevation and there was no more room” (164). Hurston immediately follows this description with a starkly opposing view of the interactions between beings during the storm. “They passed a dead man in a sitting position on a hummock, entirely surrounded by wild animals and snakes. Common danger made common friends. Nothing sought conquest over the other” (164). It is this second moment that Urgo is thinking about when he makes his claim about unity, but the description of the white people’s preemption of the elevated ground cannot escape scrutiny. Hurston’s account remains historical compared to Urgo’s ahistorical one. During the Okeechobee Hurricane, in fact, the death toll was disproportionately tilted towards the Black community. Thus, although the lines between human and nonhuman nature, predator and prey, life and death are blurred, boundaries of race still endure. Despite the “common danger,” in fact, white people still “sought conquest” over Black people as they rush to occupy the safest place to be found in miles (164). Hurston thus seems to argue there is an uncrossable boundary between what the hurricane can blur and what it cannot.

Because the white people prevent Janie and Tea Cake from resting on the high ground, the couple finds themselves swept around by wind and water until Janie “plunged downward into the water” (165). Worried about her, Tea Cake advises her to grab hold of a cow swimming in the water. The result of Janie’s movements in an animal-human hybrid that several scholars have found interesting. As Janie, the cow, and the dog that was standing on top of it, all form a bundle of beings floating in water, Janie is mistaken for a “gator” by the cow, “the dog stood up and growled like a lion,” and “Tea Cake split the water like an otter” (166). The creation of animal-human hybrids is what Cherene Sherrard-Johnson argues is the result of Hurston’s hurricane. Not only is this formation in the water a hybrid between species during the hurricane, but the subsequent bite that the dog inflicts upon Tea Cake and the disease that is spread from it “is emblematic of how Hurston’s animals embody multiple overlapping and transnational folks resonances” (Sherrard-Johnson 191). The transnational nature of the dog is brought up by Janie once the storm calms down as she “wonder[s] where he come from” (Hurston 167). The answer to Janie’s question is given by Sherrard-Johnson, who analyzes the diasporic aspect of the dog: “hurricanes begin as tropical depressions off the African coast; fueled by warm waters, they pick up speed in the Caribbean before making landfall. The diasporic dog arrives riding the shoulders of a swimming cow. Together they are one of the many cross-species assemblages wrought by the hurricane” (191).

Although the hurricane externalizes these “cross-species assemblages,” they had been present in Janie’s ecological imagination long before 1928. Her Voodoo-informed beliefs had created a world in which human and nonhuman nature were always closely intertwined, through trees and roots as symbols of people and people’s lives (11, 29), through Matt Bonner’s mule having masculine pronouns (56), and through the idea of marriage as flower, tree, and bloom

(11, 32, 106). Voodoo, like the Okeechobee Hurricane, originated from West Africa and was mediated by the Caribbean. As Sherrard-Johnson highlights in the above-mentioned passage, in 1928, the hurricane followed a similar path, which also corresponds to the journey of the Middle Passage. By paralleling both the journey of trauma and the journey of the spiritual tradition that informs Janie's ecological imagination, the Okeechobee Hurricane in Hurston's novel represents both trauma and the spiritual strength that actively counteracts such trauma.

The Hurricane's ability to uproot houses (162) and trees from the soil is a further parallel between it and the trauma of the Middle Passage. As Nanny had said in the second chapter, "colored folks is branches without roots" (16), an uprootedness caused by the trauma of slavery and colonialism. By also uprooting trees in its wake, Hurston's Okeechobee Hurricane is a carrier of the trauma of uprooting that African diasporic communities have suffered.

While the colonial trauma which followed forced uprooting carried forward across generations and affected Leafy's future through racialized misogyny in nature – thus highlighting the harmful hierarchical binaries that placed Black women and nonhuman nature on the same level – Janie's Voodoo-informed ecological imagination combats such hierarchy by blurring the lines between humans and non-human nature and rendering them even. The Okeechobee Hurricane in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* similarly represents the coexistence of trauma and anticolonial practice, and as a Legba-like entity, it disrupts to reconstruct. By coming from West Africa over the Atlantic, the hurricane is charged with both tradition and trauma, and its effects on the Floridian communities are varied.

The storm destroys the dikes, levees, and houses designed and wanted by the white authorities, challenging, in its Voodoo disruption of binaries, the alleged superiority of anthropogenic technology that Tea Cake and others in the community upheld. Although

historically the Hurricane killed a disproportionate amount of Black people, in Hurston's novel, "the city of Palm Beach, symbol of progressive human dominion over nature, as well as a site of extreme racial segregation, is decimated by the hurricane, while the more adaptable and fluid community of the muck survives the ravages more or less intact" (42-3). Those able to survive the hurricane, thus, are not the people who enforced the human-nonhuman binary in the Everglades.

Among the people in the Everglades, however, some, like Tea Cake, had believed the white construction of binaries. Tea Cake, in fact, although he survives the hurricane, becomes ill with rabies and dies soon after the storm. The hurricane and the white people's occupation of high ground are the causes of his death, a fatal combination that derives from his refusal of the constructive force of the storm. When the Hurricane comes to the muck and brings both trauma and the possibility of reconstruction, Tea Cake embraces the former while Janie embraces the latter. Tea Cake is only able to experience the traumatic aspect of the hurricane, ending up reflecting, in fact, the white community's racist animalistic views after being bitten by the rabid dog. Tea Cake, with his comments on the Seminoles and his trust in white people, must be sacrificed.

Janie's final act towards Tea Cake therefore becomes a moment in which, infused with Voodoo ecological imagination, she kills the parts of the Hurricane charged with trauma. In his final days, in fact, Tea Cake inhabits the trauma of racial animalistic similes that had harmed Leafy and generations of people within the African diaspora. In order to embrace the liberating aspects of the Hurricane as a Legba-like entity, Janie has to eliminate the remains of the trauma it also carries.

6. CONCLUSION

After the death of her third husband, Janie returns to Eatonville, where she had lived for years with Joe Starks. Returning to Eatonville, Janie says, she is “satisfied tuh be heah. Ah done been tuh de horizon and back and now Ah kin set heah in mah house and live by comparisons” (191). The experience in the Everglades, thus, was a reaching for the horizon, which followed her from the beginning of the narration and her life as Nanny’s granddaughter. The horizon curls up in bed with her at the end of the novel, as she “pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes” (193).

In inserting the Okeechobee Hurricane in her novel, Zora Neale Hurston is not only denouncing the racist response that the white Floridian and American communities had to the storm and its death toll, but also bringing to light the environmental racism at the origins of such a destructive natural disaster. Environmental racism goes hand in hand with white society’s ecological imagination, or, as Kimberly N. Ruffin defines it, “environmental thinking” (164). “Environmental discussions in the past,” she says, “have been predicated on oppressive conceptions of humanity and the false idea that humans are not natural” (164). In her book on Black ecocriticism, Ruffin advocates for the substitution of environmentalism with ecological thinking. She writes:

When we think ecologically, we can appreciate the magnitude of our own fragility and recognize that people experience humanity in innumerable ways: as poor, rich, women, men, lesbian, transgender, gay, differently abled, positively and negatively racialized. Ecological thinking gets us closer to a human-sensitive outlook that recognizes these differences and that also includes the needs of nonhuman nature. (164-65)

It is environmentalism's failure to recognize "our own fragility" that makes Tea Cake remain on the muck as the hurricane arrives. Janie's Voodoo-informed ecological imagination, on the other hand, sees human beings and nonhuman beings as equally fragile and strong, and it is this understanding that Hurston believes the hurricane can bring, all the way from the coast of West Africa, through the Caribbean, to the Everglades.

Chapter Two: The Great Frost and Thaw of 1609, Nature Writing as Empire, and a History of
Climate Change in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

During the reign of King James I of England, Britain experienced one of the coldest winters it had ever witnessed. In 1609, as recorded by chronicle Edmund Howes, the River Thames froze over in London:

From Sunday, the tenth of January, untill the fifteenth of the same, the frost grew so extreme, as the ice became firme, and removed not, and then all sorts of men, women, and children, went boldly upon the ice in most parts; some shot at prickes, others bowled and danced, with other variable pastimes; by reason of which concourse of people were many that set up boothes and standings upon the ice, as fruit-sellers, victuallers, that sold beere and wine, showemakers, and a barber's tent, etc. (481)

One of the extreme cold temperature events registered in those years, the frost of 1609 was part of the climatic changes of the Little Ice Age, a period of low temperatures in the North Atlantic region spanning from the 14th to the 19th centuries. In Britain, the extreme weather event damaged crops and caused deaths among the human and animal populations. The tragic effects that the Great Frost had on the countryside, however, did not stop the people of London from celebrating the strangeness of such extreme cold temperatures by establishing one of the first “frost fairs.” It is this aspect of the Great Frost – its ability to couple death and agricultural damage with the hilarity of frost fairs on the River Thames – that Virginia Woolf explicitly describes in her 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography*.

In the first chapter of Woolf's novel, as Queen Elizabeth I has died and King James I has succeeded her, Orlando, a young English nobleman, is about to be married to Euphrosyne, a

noblewoman of Irish blood known around the court. Before their engagement can reach a conclusion, however, the Great Frost hits England. During one of the frost fairs organized by the King, Orlando meets and immediately falls in love with Sasha, a Russian princess. His dreams of a future with Sasha, however, come to an end as the Great Frost melts into the Great Thaw and the ambassadorial ships that had been stuck on the frozen Thames can finally depart again, taking Sasha with them.

While *Orlando* is partly a work of historiography and the Great Frost of 1609 is one of the historical events that Woolf makes her protagonist interact with, the insertion of this extreme weather event in a work by Virginia Woolf cannot simply be a point of historical accuracy and detail. Several Woolf scholars, such as Elsa Högberd and Jane Goldman, have analyzed the interactions between humans and nonhuman nature in Woolf's later works. *Orlando*, however, deserves to be looked at under an ecocritical lens just as much as, if not more than, *The Waves* and *Between the Acts*. With numerous descriptions of the nonhuman natural landscapes Orlando finds himself/herself in, Orlando's own writing of a long poem titled "The Oak Tree," his/her often professed love for nature, and the various metaphors in which weather and climate are entangled throughout the novel, *Orlando* must assign a further meaning to the Great Frost. A novel dedicated to writer, poet, and noblewoman Vita Sackville-West could not help but being a commentary on class, empire, gender norms, nature writing, and the undeniable ties between all four. Scholars like Susan Bazargan, Vara Neverow, Elisa Swinford, Thomas H. Ford, and Peter Adkins have written about natural motifs and symbols in the novel, but not much literary analysis has focused on the Great Frost and Thaw scenes.

In this chapter, by looking at the portrayal of nonhuman nature in *Orlando*, I will attempt to decipher the ecological imaginations present in the novel to understand the role of the 1609

Great Frost and Thaw in the novel's envisioned relationship between humans and nonhuman nature. I will draw on literary analyses offered by Susan Bazargan and Elisa Swinford to analyze the significance of nonhuman nature and nature writing in *Orlando*, and papers by Thomas H. Ford and Peter Adkins to construct my argument on climate and the Great Frost and Thaw. I will also interact with Val Plumwood's arguments on dualism and the gendering of nonhuman nature, Mary Louise Pratt's explanation of the ties between European colonialism and nature writing, Siobhan Down's article on Romani presence in European literature, Susan Neiman's account of eighteenth century shifts in European philosophy around natural disasters, and Raymond Williams's and Alexandra Harris's descriptions of Victorian ecological imaginations. The chapter will begin with an analysis of the ecological imagination of the Renaissance and its influence on Orlando's gendered vision of nature, then explore the ecological imagination the narrator-biographer assigns to the Romani people in Persia and the subsequent possibility of Orlando's sex change. I will merge the argument of Orlando's sex change into a discourse on "unnatural" and "natural" changes and then analyze the climate/cultural changes that appear throughout the novel. As the narrator-biographer lists the British Empire as one of the "natural" cultural changes of the Victorian era, my chapter will then look at nonhuman nature and the imperial project, with an emphasis on nature writing as a tool of empire. The final section of the chapter will tie these analyses to the depiction of the Great Frost and Thaw in the first chapter of the novel to look at the extreme weather event as not only the first instance of cultural-climate change in *Orlando* but also a freezing and thawing of binaries which nonetheless fail to shake Orlando's binary ecological imagination. As both Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* and my earlier argument around Leafy's character in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* underscore, binary ecological imaginations, hand in hand with their separation between the

human and the non-human and their placement of human beings above non-human nature, inescapably reinforce hierarchies in terms of gender, race, class, and nationality. In *Orlando*, although the dichotomy and hierarchy of gender seems to be challenged, the binary opposition of Great Frost with Great Thaw highlights how within English ecological imaginations binary thinking can never really be escaped.

1. ELIZABETHAN ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION AND THE GENDERING OF NONHUMAN NATURE

In the first chapter of the novel, sixteen-year-old Orlando sits down at his desk and begins to write poetry. As the narrator-biographer tells us:

He was describing, as all young poets are for ever describing, nature, and in order to match the shade of green precisely he looked (and here he showed more audacity than most) at the thing itself, which happened to be a laurel bush growing beneath the window. After that, of course, he could write no more. Green in nature is one thing, green in literature another. Nature and letters seem to have a natural antipathy; bring them together and they tear each other to pieces. (5)

Analyzing this scene in her piece titled “Rhythms of Revision and Revisiting: Unpicking the Past in *Orlando*,” Jane de Gay claims that “Orlando at this earlier stage displays an anachronistic Romantic desire to represent nature in an unmediated fashion, against conventions of this time that privileged artifice and rhetoric” (63). As the narrator-biographer of *Orlando* tells us, in fact, Woolf’s protagonist does something which shows “more audacity than most” (5): looking at nonhuman nature directly instead of forsaking its reality for art.

While he finds this aspect of Renaissance nature writing disagreeable, he happily takes on another fundamental characteristic of Elizabethan ecological imagination:

The lover loved and went. And what the poet said in rhyme, the young translated into practice. Girls were roses, and their seasons were short as the flowers'. Plucked they must be before nightfall; for the day was brief and the day was all. Thus, if Orlando followed the leading of the climate, of the poets, of the age itself, and plucked his flower in the window-seat even with the snow on the ground and the Queen vigilant in the corridor, we can scarcely bring ourselves to blame him. He was young; he was boyish; he did but as nature bade him do. (12)

Young, impressionable Orlando, exposed as Woolf herself had been in youth (Fox), to Renaissance poetry, “translated into practice” what the Elizabethan poets wrote in their verse. Thus, their conception of nonhuman nature, their depiction of women, and their prescriptions on the relationship Orlando ought to have with them, are learned by the young nobleman, who becomes blameless in front of the inclinations “of the climate, of the poets, of the age itself.” Like Spenser, Marlowe, Donne, and Shakespeare, Orlando, too, “as nature bade him do,” treats women like flowers.

Commenting on the narrator-biographer’s explanation of the Elizabethan poets’ use of similes equating girls with flowers in his chapter “The Sympathetic Climate of Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*,” Peter Adkins argues that “Woolf presents pastoral ideas of seasonality as establishing patriarchal notions of sexual identity” (151). In other words, the parallel between girls and flowers, repeated in ages following the Elizabethan, reinforces sexist patriarchal views of a sexual temporality in women’s bodies. According to the simile, girls become helpless objects in a garden of sexual choices, ready for men to “pluck” them as people pluck flowers.

Elizabethan nature writing, thus, Adkins claims, is exemplary of “a form of ‘nature worship’ that carries with it a prescription of a binary model of gender and sexuality” (162). In her experiment on the genre of biography, thus, Woolf intermingles the history of English nature writing with the history of gender and sexuality in Britain. It is no coincidence, in fact, that a book so focused on nature writing centers around a protagonist who undergoes a sex change in the middle of the plot.

Nature and gender and sexuality have a long, conjoined history in Britain, and one of Woolf’s main interests in *Orlando* is to bring this history to the forefront perhaps for the first time in the country’s literary tradition. In her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Australian philosopher Val Plumwood explains how Western European philosophy’s dualism – involving divides between mind and body, subject and object, male and female, human and nonhuman – has long been a tool of patriarchy as well as empire. The identification of women’s bodies, emotions, and instincts with nonhuman nature, following the logic of dualism, has led to the justification of the exploitation of both natural resources and women’s bodies. By extending dualistic logic onto marginalized bodies and cultures globally, Western European imperialist societies exported racist and colonial hierarchies that served the imperial project.

The dualism between humans and nonhuman nature, standing at the base of patriarchal colonial ideologies, is thus brought to the forefront by Woolf’s narrator-biographer in the first chapter of *Orlando*, where we find Orlando doing “as nature bade him do” when he interacts with women as if they were flowers (12). The narrator-biographer further suggests that it is “nature” that influences the way Orlando acts towards women, equating “nature” with the customs of the time. This “nature,” the narrator tells us, is equal to “the leading of the climate, of

the poets, of the age itself.” As such, since the climate, the poets, and the ages shift throughout *Orlando*, “nature” is an ever-changing concept instead of a static one.

In the Elizabethan age, with its climate and its poets, “nature” is something antipathetic to literature, as the narrator-biographer tells us when describing Orlando’s initial writing process. Scholar Elise Swinford, in her chapter “Transforming Nature: Orlando as Elegy,” part of Kristin Czarnecki and Carrie Rohman’s *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*, attributes the antipathy that Orlando finds between nonhuman nature and literature to be his “struggle with figuration” (197). Moreover, as Alice Fox suggests in her book *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance*, “when Orlando is sixteen and still a fledgling poet, his failings are the failings of the time” (74). In the paper “Nature’s Diverse Laws: The Double Vision of the Elizabethans,” H. B. Parkes explains these “failings of the time.” Leaving behind the philosophy of the Middle Ages, whereby morality was thought to descend from God and was thus considered “natural” and good, the Elizabethans were faced with a “disharmony between two kinds of knowledge, one of which interpreted nature as the expression of divine reason while the other regarded it as a battle-ground between amoral and destructive forces” (Parkes 403-4). In his book *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance*, Robert Watson suggests that “elite intellectual culture appeared obsessed with getting back to nature” (324), something Orlando is also doing as he looks out the window and admires the laurel bush. Orlando’s desire to look at nonhuman nature the way it is reflects what Watson describes as the hope “to regain unmediated contact with simple reality – which that culture could no longer comfortably identify” (324).

When Orlando recognizes the antipathy between nature and letters, thus, he is criticizing the inability of the Elizabethans to produce meaningful nature writing that would be rooted in

real nonhuman nature instead of signifiers. What the Renaissance poets are teaching him, in fact, with their patriarchal views on women as flowers, is a construction of human and nonhuman nature distant from the source. Once Orlando experiences a different ecological imagination, one that does not equate women with flowers, the cultural dualism of Elizabethan England fades away, leaving the possibility of Orlando's sex change open.

2. THE IMAGINATION ASSIGNED TO WESTERN-CONSTRUCTED "PERSIA:" THE POSSIBILITY OF ORLANDO'S SEX CHANGE

By the end of the second chapter, Orlando has "asked King Charles to send him as Ambassador Extraordinary to Constantinople" (73) and sailed away from the British Isles towards the capital of the Ottoman Empire. In what the narrator-biographer calls "Persia," Orlando encounters an ecological imagination different from the one he had absorbed from the Elizabethan poets at home, surrounded by landscapes new to his eyes. It is in the context of "this wild panorama" (75) that Orlando, after spending the night with Rosina Pepita, "a woman, much muffled, but apparently of the peasant class" (83), and getting married to her, falls into a deep sleep, and wakes up a woman. Susan Bazargan, in her paper "The Uses of the Land: Vita Sackville-West's Pastoral Writings and Virginia Woolf's "Orlando"," argues that the gender change in *Orlando* becomes possible in the "Orient as constructed by the Western imagination, a space of fantasy in which binary notions of gender identity can become blurred" (49).

Once awakened as a woman, "attended by a lean dog, riding a donkey, in company of a gypsy, the Ambassador of Great Britain at the Court of the Sultan left Constantinople" (88-9). For some time, thus, Orlando lives with Romani people in the mountains of loosely defined "Persia." Woolf's choice of Romani people as Orlando's companions is not random. In an article

in *The Guardian*, Siobhan Down breaks down literary depictions of Sinti and Romani people throughout European history. Romani people have predominantly been depicted as thieves and kidnappers, but “late in the 19th century and into the 20th, the literary Gypsy became imbued with the prevailing romanticism” (Down). Victorian aristocrats founded the Gypsy Lore Society whose mission was to learn about Romani people’s culture. The Victorian sentiment towards Romani people carried on into the twentieth century, leading Woolf to insert the “literary Gypsy as rustic noble savage” (Down) into *Orlando*’s plot.

Orlando’s experience with the Romani people is one of idleness, a breath of fresh air from the ambassadorial duties he had to perform in Constantinople: “for some time, however, she was too well pleased with the change to spoil it by thinking. The pleasure of having no documents to seal or sign, no flourishes to make, no calls to pay, was enough ... she washed in streams if she washed at all; no boxes, red, blue, or green, were presented to her” (89). The narrator-biographer paints the life of the Romani people as a nomadic endeavor highly dependent on natural resource availability. They “followed the grass; when it was grazed down, on they moved again” (89), they think of city dwellers as “too feeble and diseased to stand the open air” (89-90), and see nature as a powerful force capable of hurting people. Thus, the characterization of the Romani people in *Orlando* closely resembles the construction of the figure of the “rustic noble savage” mentioned by Down. Woolf’s portrayal of the Romani people, like those of Victorian artists’, uses them as “nostalgic emblems of a vanishing pastorality” (Down). In Woolf’s account, Down explains, the reader can find signs of an assigned cultural primitivism. For example, she describes their language as so simple that the word ‘beautiful’ is not part of their vocabulary and Orlando must come up with the expression “how good to eat” in order to express her feelings towards the Persian landscape.

Woolf's belief in Romani cultural primitivism goes hand in hand with her description of their envisioned relationship between human and nonhuman nature, and therefore the binaries – or lack thereof – that they engage in. It is thus through the cultural primitivism Woolf engages with by assigning this specific ecological imagination to the Romani people that Orlando can free himself/herself from the binary constructions of gender that are reflected in English ecological imagination. In the Romani people, Woolf thus sees the possibility of non-binary gender that are withheld from her protagonist in England. In her construction of Orlando's companions, Woolf shows awareness of the ties between a culture's ecological imaginations and its envisioned gender roles, proposing the simultaneous opening of Elizabethan ecological and cultural imaginations for Orlando's character development.

3. “(UN)NATURAL” ATTRIBUTES

The sex change Orlando experiences in Persia, allowed by the loosening of English ecological and cultural imaginations, opens up a discourse on what is considered ‘natural’ and what ‘unnatural.’ Reacting to Orlando's transformation into a woman, in fact, the narrator tells us, many held “that such a change of sex is against nature” (Woolf 88). It is to respond to these allegations, coming from her characters as well as her contemporaries, that Woolf makes nonhuman nature's responses to Orlando's womanhood as unambiguous as possible. One of the first actions Orlando takes upon waking up as a woman is to call “her Seleuchi hound, which had never left her bed all these days” (88), clearly unbothered by her owner's allegedly ‘unnatural’ sex change. Later on, upon Orlando's return to England, we also discover that her elk-hound shows no signs of human sex changes being “against nature” as her dog “threw himself with such ardour upon his mistress that he almost knocked her to the ground” (108).

Since Orlando's sex change also puts into question his/her sexuality throughout the novel, as Orlando meets and falls in love with men and women, the novel further ties Orlando's sexuality with natural phenomena. In a way, the narrator-biographer highlights the 'naturalness' of Orlando's sexuality. Both when he falls in love with Sasha in the first chapter and when she marries Marmaduke in the fifth chapter, Orlando's lovers are tied to Britain by weather events. As Sasha's stay in London had been prolonged because of the Great Frost, Marmaduke's time in England is likewise dependent on the weather, for "the wind had fallen and it was only when the gale blew from the South-west that he could put out to sea" (164). Both lovers, for Orlando, are also tied to nonhuman nature since he/she meets both outdoors and engage in sexual relations with both in the wilderness. The narrator-biographer, thus, not only makes it clear that Orlando's sex change is tied to nature in its recognition, but also links his/her lovers to natural phenomena, making Orlando's sexuality 'natural' as well.

By direct contrast, then, *Orlando* frames Victorian marriage norms as "unnatural." Orlando's return to England as a woman comes with her dispossession of her wealth and her belongings, given her gender and the laws of the Victorian times. Together with this dispossession, Orlando is increasingly pressured to get married, another mandatory condition of women in Victorian England. She sees the signs of this institution everywhere, rings on fingers talking to her and suggesting she should speed up and acquire a husband. Looking at nonhuman nature, however, Orlando wonders what has changed in the world for the institution of marriage to have become so mandatory. She reckons that it "did not seem to be Nature. She looked at the doves and the rabbits and the elkhounds and she could not see that Nature had changed her ways or mended them, since the time of Elizabeth at least. There was no indissoluble alliance among the brutes that she could see" (157). Looking at animals and plants, Orlando confirms that

marriage is a purely human institution, and Victorian at that. Like marriage, moreover, the fashion imposed on women during the Victorian era also does not sit right with Orlando, as “no longer could she stride through the garden with her dogs, or run lightly to the high mound and fling herself beneath the oak tree. Her skirts collected damp leaves and straw” (158). Looking at the constrictions on women during the Victorian era, thus, the narrator-biographer highlights their “unnatural” character, commenting on the public’s perceptions of gender and Victorian norms. Orlando and his/her narrator-biographer can challenge the gender and sexuality binary roles enforced by English society in the Victorian era. When it comes to other binaries, however – between humans and nonhuman nature, between classes, and between Britain and the world – Orlando’s cultural and ecological imagination remains dichotomous throughout the novel.

4. “NATURAL” CULTURAL CHANGES: CLIMATIC CHANGES REFLECTING THE CULTURAL CHANGES BETWEEN AGES

While Orlando, looking at the Victorian era, has some reservations about its gender norms and finds them “unnatural,” there are other cultural changes that the narrator-biographer makes sure to highlight as “natural.” In two fundamental passages in such a time-defying biography, Orlando witnesses great changes in the climate of England. Standing by the window in her house at Greyfriars, “she leant out of her window – all was light, order, and serenity” (144). As midnight sounds, however:

Orlando then for the first time noticed a small cloud gathered behind the dome of St. Paul’s. As the strokes sounded, the cloud increased, and she saw it darken and spread with extraordinary speed. At the same time a light breeze rose and by the time the sixth stroke of midnight had struck the whole of the eastern sky was covered with an irregular

moving darkness, through the sky to the west and north stayed clear as ever ... With the twelfth stroke of midnight, the darkness was complete. A turbulent welter of cloud covered the city. All was darkness; all was doubt; all was confusion. The Eighteenth century was over; the Nineteenth century had begun. (144-5)

The metaphorical use of weather, in this case a “turbulent welter of cloud” to represent the change from one century to the next is characteristic of Woolf’s writing. Alexandra Harris, in her 2015 book *Weatherland: writers and artists under English skies*, claims that Woolf’s interest lies in how “as cultural preoccupations change, we find affinities with different kinds of weather” (14). As the eighteenth century gives way to the nineteenth, thus, the narrator-biographer tells us that “the great cloud” remains looming over London “long enough to have extraordinary consequences upon those who lived beneath its shadow” (Woolf 146).

The consequences Woolf attributes to the darkness have been argued to be one of the first literary recognition of climate change, as the narrator-biographer says: “a *change* seemed to have come over the *climate* of England” (146, emphasizes mine). The nineteenth century, thus, begins with frequent gusts of rain, a discoloring of the sun rays so that “purples, oranges, and reds of a dull sort took the place of the more positive landscapes of the eighteenth century” (146). “But what was worse,” the narrator-biographer tells us, “damp now began to make its way into every house” (146). With a duller sun, constant rain, and the “silent, imperceptible, ubiquitous” damp, “the constitution of England was altered and nobody knew it” (146). With damp favoring the growth of plants, “just as the ivy and the evergreen rioted in the damp earth outside, so did the same fertility show itself within. The life of the average woman was a succession of childbirth” (147), and for the high number of births “thus the British Empire came into existence” (147).

Focusing specifically on the start of chapter five, Adkins says: “Looking in detail at how Woolf presents this crucial moment in the history of the Anthropocene, I suggest that it not only restages a moment of historical climate change but also the nineteenth century’s heightened attention towards climate itself” (149). In the nineteenth century, Adkins explains, studies of solar radiation by French scientist Joseph Fourier brought to the public a new understanding of climate. His observations on differential heating from the sun’s rays eventually led to a modern understanding of the earth’s atmosphere. At the same time, Londoners were experiencing increasing air pollution, and cultural critics such as John Ruskin linked the smokey skies of the English capital to the metaphorical atmosphere of the century, one of “moral gloom” (Ruskin 277).

Harris, too, cites Ruskin and his preoccupation for a concurring climate and moral change. She describes the physical climate of the nineteenth century as such:

The weather was indeed measurably bad. Every summer of the 1870s was abnormally wet, and Ruskin was not alone in feeling despair in 1879 when crops failed to ripen.

Farmers were in a state of crisis with wheat yields ruinously low and livestock disease spreading in the damp conditions. The cloud was exacerbated by smoke: the furnaces of Barrow and Manchester affected the air in the Lake District and all over England. (319)

Thus, when Woolf’s narrator-biographer introduces the darkness and damp of the nineteenth century, she is drawing on Ruskin’s observations and theories on the doubly-signifying ‘atmosphere’ of the Victorian era.

Another instance of a climatic change corresponding to the beginning of a new cultural era in England is to be found just following the birth of Orlando’s first son, in chapter six. Orlando looks out the window onto Park Lane and notices:

It was an odd sort of weather nowadays. The sky itself, she could not help thinking, had changed. It was no longer so thick, so watery, so prismatic now that King Edward – see, there he was, stepping out of his neat brougham to go and visit a certain lady opposite – had succeeded Queen Victoria. The clouds had shrunk to a thin gauze; the sky seemed made of metal, which in hot weather tarnished verdigris, copper colour of orange as metal does in a fog. (194)

Just as it had done at the turn between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Edwardian climate, too, affects human behavior. As Woolf's narrator tells us:

How narrow women had grown lately! They looked like stalks of corn, straight, shining, identical. And men's faces were as bare as the palm of one's hand. The dryness of the atmosphere brought out the colour in everything and seemed to stiffen the muscles of the cheeks. It was harder to cry now. Water was hot in two seconds. Ivy had perished or been scraped off houses. Vegetables were less fertile; families were much smaller. (194)

The atmosphere, thus, not only directly affects the nonhuman natural world, making “vegetables ... less fertile,” but people's bodies, too, making them thinner, stiffening “the muscles of the cheeks” and making it “harder to cry.”

5. LITERARY CHANGES: VICTORIAN NATURE WRITING AS IMPERIAL PROJECT

The climatic changes that Woolf identifies through the four centuries of English history her novel covers are also paralleled by changes in literary currents, specifically when it comes to nature writing. Woolf attributes to the changing climate the change from the Elizabethan age's ecological imagination to Romantic poetry and its novel outlook on nonhuman nature. In his paper called “Ideas of Nature,” Raymond Williams suggests that during the Romantic period

English ecological imagination experienced a shift. In the “green language of Wordsworth and Clare” there was a “sense of nature as a refuge, a refuge from man; a place of healing, a solace, a retreat” (80). Ford expands Williams’s claim by suggesting that the change was deeper, as it entailed the beginning of “the exploitation of nature through new extractive and technoscientific processes – a great ecosocial transformation that has more recently been described as a threshold of the Anthropocene” (174).

As the Victorian era witnessed the rapid industrialization of Britain, a process which was tied to British colonialism and the slave trade in its energy availability, the Romantic poets and artists responded with an understanding of nonhuman nature as refuge against the fumes of the city and its novel industrial processes. It is this industrialization that Ruskin and Harris mention in their writings, and it is what *Orlando*’s narrator-biographer describes as a major climatic change between the late Renaissance and the Victorian period, showcasing an extraordinary prescience: “the darkness was complete. A turbulent welter of cloud covered the city. All was darkness; all was doubt; all was confusion” (145).

With smokes from the furnaces altering the colors of the sky (Woolf 146), the poets and the artists of the Victorian era turned to nonhuman nature with an urgency different from that of the Elizabethans and Jacobean. Thus, poets such as Wordsworth and Blake,

Appalled by the squalor and the mechanized, competitive routine of the cities, as well as by the moral mediocrity of a bourgeois world given over to what Shelley called the principles of “utility” and “calculation,” they turned for spiritual relief to mysticism, to Nature, to Rousseauistic dreams of a simple, primitive and uncorrupted lifestyle, which they sometimes located in an idealized period of history such as the Middle Ages.

(Habib)

Romantic ecological imagination, then, turned its gaze toward earlier stages of human relationships with nonhuman nature and idealized it as an antidote to industrialized reality. In Woolf's novel, this Romantic ecological imagination is not to be found in the chapter that follows the climatic change in England, but earlier in Orlando's travels through Persia. While the fifth chapter focuses on the changed urban landscapes of the Victorian era, the idealized nonhuman nature of Romanticism is something that Orlando encounters in Constantinople and after leaving the city side by side with the Romani people. Looking at "the inhospitable Asian mountains," Orlando "exult[ed] to the depths of his heart in this wild panorama, and gaze[d] and gaze[d] at those passes and far heights planning journeys there alone on foot where only the goat and shepherd had gone before; [felt] a passion of affection for the bright, unseasonable flowers, love[d] the unkempt, pariah dogs beyond even his elk hounds at home" (75). Like the Romantic poets, Orlando is fascinated at landscapes so untouched that "only the goat and shepherd had gone before." A characteristic of Romantic ecological imagination, as well as Orlando's in Persia, is a stark absence of human beings.

In her paper, Bazargan argues that Orlando's love for Persian nonhuman nature and lack of consideration for human beings is Woolf's critique of Vita Sackville-West's nature writing. In Sackville-West's famous books *The Land*, *Passenger to Tehran*, and *Twelve Days* – all referred to in *Orlando* through the journey to Constantinople and Orlando's manuscript, "The Oak Tree" – Woolf found the absence of human beings reprobable. Bazargan draws a parallel, in fact, between Sackville-West's human-less landscapes and Mary Louise Pratt's description of European colonialism as a nature writing project. In *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt denounces the characterization of the European colonizer and "naturalist as Adam alone in his garden ... The landscape is written as uninhabited, unpossessed,

unhistoricized, unoccupied even by the travelers themselves. The activity of describing geography and identifying flora and fauna structures an asocial narrative in which the human presence ... is absolutely marginal” (50).

In *Orlando*, Woolf seemingly draws attention to the faults of Sackville-West’s nature writing by populating the Persian landscapes that her friend and lover had left uninhabited with Orlando’s companions, a group of Romani people. In doing so, however, she inflates them with the Rousseauistic idea of the “rustic noble savage,” as Down explains in her article. By doing so, she makes two different ecological imaginations – that of Orlando and that of the Romani people – meet and clash in the Persian mountains.

While Orlando is in awe of the beauty of the landscape and wants to find words to describe it, the Romani people in *Orlando* see nature as a powerful force, able to inflict pain and suffering to those who are at its mercy. The close coexistence with nonhuman natural elements that Woolf assigns to the Romani people, thus, prompts them to see nature without the idyllic characteristics that the increasingly urban English aristocracy assigns to it during the Romantic period. Orlando, too, being part of the English nobility, finds solace and beauty in the nonhuman natural world, an ecological imagination which greatly differs from that of his companions in Persia. Encountering nonhuman nature in Persia, Orlando sits down for long periods of time admiring the landscapes. Upon observing her behavior, the man who had escorted Orlando out of Constantinople

had the deepest suspicion that her God was Nature. One day he found her in tears.

Interpreting this to mean that her God had punished her, he told her that he was not surprised. He showed her the fingers of his left hand, withered by the frost; he showed

her his right foot, crushed where a rock had fallen. This, he said, was what her God did to men. (91)

While Orlando is in tears from the marvels of nonhuman nature, her companion's ecological imagination brings him to interpret the tears as the result of a punishment from nature. To back up his understanding of nonhuman nature as cruel, he has sores and wounds from his own encounters with nonhuman nature. Orlando, however, maintains her English-born ecological imagination or, as the narrator-biographer calls it, "the English disease, a love of Nature" (90):

She had fallen into the clutches of the vilest and cruellest among all the Gods, which is Nature. Now were they far wrong. The English disease, a love of Nature, was inborn in her, and here, where Nature was so much larger and more powerful than in England, she fell into its hands as she had never done before. The malady is too well known, and has been, alas, too often described to need describing afresh, save very briefly. There were mountains; there were valleys; there were streams. She climbed the mountains; roamed the valleys; sat on the banks of the streams. She likened the hills to ramparts, to the breasts of doves, and the flanks of kine. She compared the flowers to enamel and the turf to Turkey rugs worn thin. Trees were withered hags, and sheep were grey boulders. Everything, in fact, was something else. (90)

In this passage, the narrator-biographer renders explicit what Orlando's ecological imagination entails. For her, nonhuman nature is a tool for meaning making, a never-ending symbol and simile. She "likened," she "compared," until "everything, in fact, was something else" (90). It is Orlando's desire to describe nature and render it a literary subject, finally, which creates friction between her and her hosts, eventually making her miss England and its landscapes, until she decides to board a ship leading her back home. Upon encountering a different ecological

imagination, Orlando, a guest of the Romani people she meets, does not welcome it. Instead, she maintains her English ecological imagination that wants to liken nonhuman nature to things far away. With an unchangeable ecological imagination, Orlando returns to England to write her immutable nature writing long poem, “The Oak Tree.”

6. “THE OAK TREE” AND COLONIALISM IN *ORLANDO*

Orlando opens on a scene which immediately makes evident the presence of British colonialism in the novel. Young nobleman Orlando, at this point sixteen years old, is playing in his attic with the severed head of an Arab man. “Orlando’s father, or perhaps his grandfather,” the narrator-biographer tells us, “had struck it from the shoulders of a vast Pagan who had started up under the moon in the barbarian fields of Africa: and now it swung, gently, perpetually, in the breeze which never ceased blowing through the attic rooms of the gigantic house of the lord who had slain him” (3). The contrast between the air of carelessness around Orlando’s games and the violence of beheading – which has made such games possible – becomes even more salient when the luxury of English nobility enters the picture. Placing this scene at the very beginning of her book, Woolf is signaling to us the centrality of empire in the novel.

Immediately following the image of “the gigantic house of the lord,” the narrator-biographer highlights the connection between nonhuman nature and colonialism: “Orlando’s fathers had ridden in the fields of asphodel, and stony fields, and fields watered by strange rivers, and they had struck many heads of many colours off many shoulders, and brought them back to hang from the rafters” (3). The anaphora of the word “fields” leads to Orlando’s forefathers’ racialized violence against “many heads of many colours,” linking nonhuman nature with imperial violence from the first scene of *Orlando*. Immediately following the scene in the attic,

we see young Orlando sitting down at his desk and writing poetry. At sixteen, Orlando cannot yet follow his forefathers on the battlefields of the nascent British Empire, but he can sit down at his desk and begin to write naturalist poetry which, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter through Pratt's parallel between European colonialism and nature writing, is another tool of empire.

Throughout the climatic changes that Orlando experiences throughout his/her long life, his/her own ecological imagination, represented by his/her long poem "The Oak Tree" remains constant. As Adkins suggests, Orlando's long poem is "a reflection of a poetic tradition that resists change and innovation" (152). Its naturalistic title and subject matter highlight the particular focus of Woolf's novel on the history of nature writing in Britain.

In the second chapter, we see Orlando, late at night, picking up a thin document called "The Oak Tree" and preparing himself to write only to immediately pause. The pause Orlando takes is, the narrator-biographer tells us, one of "extreme significance in his history" (46). He is thinking of Sasha, the Russian princess who has abandoned him at the end of the first chapter, but the pause is even more significant considering that Orlando only picks up "The Oak Tree" again towards the end of the Victorian era: "At this moment, but only just in time to save the book from extinction, Orlando pushed away her chair, stretched her arms, dropped her pen, came to the window, and exclaimed, "Done!" (177-8). Finally, a manuscript that had been a "thin document" in the Elizabethan age comes to completion in the Victorian era. To complement the poem's longevity, Orlando brings it to Nicholas Greene, "who had lampooned her and many other in the time of Queen Elizabeth ... [and] was, in short, the most influential critic of the Victorian age" (181). Greene's judgement of Orlando's poem, however, is now far from the lampooning he had subjected her to:

But now his verdict was very different from what it had been then. It reminded him, he said as he turned over the pages, of Addison's *Cato*. It compared favourably with Thompson's *Seasons*. There was no trace in it, he was thankful to say, of the modern spirit. It was composed with a regard to truth, to nature, to the dictates of the human heart, which was rare indeed, in these days of unscrupulous eccentricity. It must, of course, be published instantly. (183)

Since the narrator has told us that not much has been modified in Orlando's poem, we know that the public and the critic must have changed themselves for "The Oak Tree" to be received differently during the Victorian Era. It being a poem about nonhuman nature, we can suppose that the difference between the Renaissance and the times of Queen Victoria rests in poets' representations of nonhuman nature. The changes that the expectations of nature writing have experienced, in fact, are evident in the public's and critics' reception of "The Oak Tree," a poem that has remained virtually unchanged in its nature writing since the Elizabethan Age. Yet what Nicholas Greene – whose name already suggests a link with nature writing – had deemed unworthy of publication in the Elizabethan age has, without much revision on Orlando's part, become publishable by Victorian standards of nature writing.

Once her manuscript is done, we see that "for the first time in her life, she turned with violence against nature. Elk-hounds and rose bushes were about her in profusion. But elk-hounds and rose bushes can none of them read" (178). Later, after the poem's publication, Orlando walks up to the oak tree from her youth, and "flinging herself on the ground, she felt the bones of the tree running out like ribs from a spine this way and that beneath her" (212). She goes there ceremonially, as the narrator-biographer says: "She had a little speech on the tip of her tongue which she meant to speak over the book as she buried it. (It was a copy of the first edition, signed

by author and artist.) “I bury this as a tribute,” she was going to have said, “a return to the land of what the land has given me” (212-3).

Visiting her boyhood home and the oak tree Orlando the boy had sat underneath many a time, Orlando wishes to give back the book, a product, to the land, its inspiration. In its materiality, the book would be decomposed in the soil and its paper would be returned to the cycle of nutrients that its pages had come from. When considering what the book had symbolized, what it contained, however, Orlando pauses and cannot go on with this burial ceremony. She thinks of the praise and fame that had come out of her manuscript, and what she had wanted to accomplish by writing “The Oak Tree:”

What has praise and fame to do with poetry? ... Was not writing poetry a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice? ... What could have been more secret, she thought, more slow, and like the intercourse of lovers, than the stammering answer she had made all these years to the old crooning song of the woods, and the farms and the brown horses standing at the gate, neck to neck, and the smithy and the kitchen and the fields, so laboriously bearing wheat, turnips, grass, and the garden blowing irises and fritillaries? So she let her book lie unburied and dishevelled on the ground, and watched the vast view. (213)

Writing “The Oak Tree” had been a conversation she had had with nonhuman nature “all these years,” from his boyhood in the countryside, to his travels to Persia, to her return in England, through the changes of the eras. For Orlando, the dialogue with nonhuman nature is “like the intercourse of lovers,” which we also see in the passage where she trips on some roots and murmurs: “I have found my mate ... it is the moor. I am nature’s bride” (161). She views nonhuman nature as a whole system connecting horses to wheat fields to the kitchen, vegetables,

grass, and flowers in the garden, connecting an oak tree to a poem. Thus, in the above passage, she understands that burying the manuscript is not the answer to nature's voices: Orlando's dialogue with nonhuman nature must continue.

As the Victorian era ends and the Edwardian begins, Orlando finds herself thinking back to Sasha and the Great Frost of 1609, just as this thesis will now turn its gaze to the extreme weather event that Woolf chose to include in her plot. What does it do to *Orlando's* characters? Why does Woolf choose to portray the Great Frost and the Great Thaw of 1609, and how do they dialogue with the rest of the book?

7. THE GREAT FROST AND THAW IN *ORLANDO*: FREEZING AND THAWING BINARIES OF CLASS AND NATIONHOOD

As previously mentioned in this chapter, Woolf's depiction of the Great Frost and Thaw of 1609 is partly a point of historical accuracy. Writing in the first half of the twentieth century, Woolf was not aware of the scientific causes of such extreme weather in the early 1600s, but a paper published in 2019 by Alexander Koch and colleagues for *Quaternary Science Reviews*, found that the effects of European colonialism in the Americas are closely linked with the extreme low temperatures registered in Europe in the first decade of the seventeenth century.

The paper explains how the arrival of European colonizers in South, Central, and North America beginning in the XV century, who perpetrated the genocide of 55 million Indigenous people, led to land use changes. With the decrease of Indigenous land practices following the genocide, many hectares of land were slowly returned to vegetation through ecological succession, which led to an increase in carbon sequestration across the Americas. With a spike in the amount of carbon sequestered compared to previous centuries, the concentration of carbon

dioxide in the atmosphere decreased, causing the average temperatures of the Earth's atmosphere to lower, with the lowest points being in the early 1600s. Koch's paper highlights the necessary entanglement of European colonial and imperial practices with the Great Frost of 1609, a year which corresponds to one of the absolute minima of average temperatures. Considering the centrality of British colonialism in *Orlando*, Woolf's decision to include the Great Frost and Thaw of 1609 – an extreme weather period closely linked to colonialism – in the plot of her novel becomes even more interesting.

The Great Frost enters the novel's plot as Orlando is thinking about marrying Euphrosyne, one of the three women he was writing sonnets about in his youth. The narrator-biographer explains, preparations were being made for the marriage of Orlando and Euphrosyne “when, with the suddenness and severity that then marked the English climate, came the Great Frost” (16). For Orlando, the frost immediately interrupts marriage preparations, but the extreme weather event, the narrator tells us, affected the entire country:

The Great Frost was, historians tell us, the most severe that has ever visited these islands. Birds froze in mid-air and fell like stones to the ground ... The mortality among sheep and cattle was enormous. Corpses froze and could not be drawn from the sheets. It was no uncommon sight to come upon a whole herd of swine frozen immovable upon the road. The fields were full of shepherds, ploughmen, teams of horses, and little bird-scaring boys all struck stark in the act of the moment. (16)

Woolf's depiction of the Great Frost in *Orlando* takes inspiration from Thomas Dekker's descriptions of the winters of 1608-09 (Fox). Of particular relevance to *Orlando* itself is Dekker's depiction of the frost fair on the river Thames, a historical occurrence found in various sources from the time and represented, as we have seen, in *Orlando*. As the narrator-biographer

writes, “while the country people suffered the extremity of want, and the trade of the country was at a standstill, London enjoyed a carnival of the utmost brilliancy” (17). Without caring for his most vulnerable citizens, King James I “directed that the river, which was frozen to a depth of twenty feet and more for six or seven miles on either side, should be swept, decorated and given all the semblance of a park or pleasure ground” (17). In times of extreme weather events, the English upper class can thus indulge in an entertaining fair which makes use of the wonderment of such an extreme cold for its own end. The lower classes, farmers and shepherds and tradespeople, instead, carry the burden of the Great Frost, as their sustenance is interrupted, and no royal wealth can help carry them through the period of extreme weather. In the third chapter, when Orlando meets the Romani people, a reminder of the effect of frost on those who have no means to fight against it or rejoice in its wonders comes from But Rustum el Sadi, who “showed her the fingers of his left hand, withered by the frost” (91).

Caught in between the remnants of Medieval thought and the age of the Enlightenment, the people of the English countryside did not have much help in understanding such brutal weather event. As the narrator-biographer says, in fact, “the Church could give little help in the matter” (16). The narrator’s insertion of religious powerlessness during the Great Frost, following the suffering it caused to the lower classes, is in some way a predecessor for the philosophical shift that a century and a half later, after the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, sent shock waves across Europe. Susan Neiman, in her book *Evil in Modern Thought: an Alternative History of Philosophy*, proposes that before the Lisbon Earthquake natural disasters were thought to be a sign from God that sins needed to be repented. Since European intellectuals could not find faults that needed atonement in the people of Lisbon, the 1755 earthquake must have had a different cause. With emerging philosophy which argued that “earthquakes work according to

general laws” (Neiman 245), European intellectuals began to shift their philosophical convictions from confidence in a world in which “God’s goodness was manifest in the system of order and harmony” (242) to a world which is regulated by physical laws, the interpretation of which greatly preoccupied Enlightenment thinkers. In a way, the Great Frost, with its inability to be explained or mitigated by the Church (Woolf 16), might have kickstarted the idea that natural disasters were not acts of God but rather worked according to physical laws. Woolf, a reader of scientists’ works and an acquaintance to various prominent physicists and naturalists (Henry), might have been alluding to this philosophical shift in the first chapter of *Orlando*.

While those affected by the brutal force of the frost could not find answers or relief in religion anymore, young nobleman Orlando is worried about falling in love on the frozen Thames. During a dance on the river, Orlando sees “a figure, which, whether boy’s or woman’s, for the loose tunic and trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex, filled him with the highest curiosity” (18).

Following the teachings of the Renaissance poets, “he called her a melon, a pineapple, an olive tree, an emerald, and a fox in the snow” (18). Her eyes, like pearls, “looked as if they had been fished from the bottom of the sea” (19). And his happiness, too, is written in images of nonhuman nature, as he “longed to hurl himself through the summer air; to crush acorns beneath his feet; to toss his arms with the beech trees and the oaks” (19). Despite the landscapes being frozen, thus, Orlando’s ecological imagination remains constant and coherent with that of the Elizabethan writers of his time. Women are like fruits, trees, and animals; happiness is as simple as being in nature.

Falling in love with Princess Sasha, for Orlando, is an emotion able to make the ice thaw and bring springtime, “for as he looked the thickness of his blood melted; the ice turned to wine

in his veins; he heard the waters flowing and the birds singing; spring broke over the hard wintry landscape ... he dived in deep water; he saw the flower of danger growing in a crevice” (20).

This passage makes of weather a metaphor, with love able to melt ice, make waters flow, make birds sing, and bring springtime. The narrator repeats this metaphor again as Orlando and the princess skate on the frozen river: “she was like the spring and green grass and rushing waters” (30). As the princess and Orlando make love on the frozen Thames, they “would marvel that the ice did not melt with their heat, and pity the poor old woman who had no such natural means of thawing it, but must hack at it with a chopper of cold steel” (23). These metaphors of climate and seasons highlight the role of the Great Frost and Thaw in *Orlando* as more than a historical fact.

Orlando and the princess, inebriated by the love and heat that they feel could melt the ice, make a promise to elope together, and they plan to meet up in the night to ride away. As he is waiting for his lover, however, Orlando finds himself standing in the rain, but “the dry frost had lasted so long that it took him a minute to realise that these were raindrops falling” (34).

Immediately the rain takes over Orlando’s senses, as he is drenched and the rain’s “streaming and droning” are so loud that he cannot hear anything else (34). The soundscape of the Great Thaw, which is beginning, includes “huge noises as of the tearing and rending of oak trees ... also wild cries and terrible inhuman groanings” (35).

The fact that this torrential rain eradicates oak trees, one of Orlando’s beloved tree species, is of particular significance. Before the arrival of the Great Frost, we had witnessed Orlando writing his long poem “The Oak Tree.” Adkins sees in the eradication of oaks that the Great Thaw causes a suggestion of literary change, a change particularly in nature writing. Although the Great Thaw tears away oak trees, Adkins argues, “Orlando remains committed to his/her own oak tree, emblematic of a conservative attachment to a pastoral aesthetic of nature”

(153). Adkins's argument seems to suggest the intention, on Woolf's part, to use the Great Thaw, a historical extreme weather event, as a signifier for a change in literary customs which Orlando resists with his/her poem. Given Woolf's use of climatic changes throughout the novel as symbols of cultural shifts between centuries, it is possible that this first instance of climate change also stands in for the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the period that would then flow into the Enlightenment. As the narrator describes:

Now a sight of the most extraordinary nature met his eyes. Where, for three months and more, there had been solid ice of such thickness that it seemed permanent as stone, and a whole gay city had been stood on its pavement, was now a race of turbulent yellow waters. The river had gained its freedom in the night. It was as if a sulphur spring (to which view many philosophers inclined) had risen from the volcanic regions beneath and burst the ice asunder with such vehemence that it swept the huge and massy fragments furiously apart. The mere look of the water was enough to turn one giddy. All was riot and confusion. (35)

Aside from the historiography element of the extreme weather event, given Woolf's use of historical climate to symbolize changes in the literary and social culture of England, the Great Thaw seems to be the way Woolf characterizes the end of the Renaissance, a period of "solid ice of such thickness that it seemed permanent as stone" (35). The values, the customs, and the culture of the Elizabethans, thus, were for England a time of stillness and apparent permanency, Woolf seems to tell us. Given my previous discussion of Elizabethan dichotomies and the identification of women with nonhuman nature, Woolf's Great Frost appears to set various binaries in stone, quite literally freezing the lower classes under the Thames while the royal family enjoys a banquet above them. With the church unable to help bring relief in the midst of

such freezing destruction, the Frost highlights the solidity of the binary between the Middle Ages and their belief in divine order and the empirical understanding of the world that begins to form during the Renaissance. The Frost, moreover, highlights the difference between life and death, a binary that the passage from frost to thaw also is deeply implicated in.

With the thaw, these binaries seem to be challenged, as it breaks the same “solid ice of such thickness that it seemed permanent as stone” (35) that had held the binary between classes in place. To contrast the ice even further, the Great Thaw “had risen from the volcanic regions beneath” (35), a detail which juxtaposes ice with volcanic magma, therefore seemingly melting the strictures that had been frozen in the Elizabethan era.

The fact that the thaw, of complete opposite nature to the frost, is employed by Woolf to signify this invitation to loosen binaries, however, is emblematic of the novel’s only partial loosening of dichotomies. While gender roles and sexualities can achieve fluidity and escape the binary they are forced into by the customs of the time, in fact, dichotomies between classes, nations, and human and nonhuman nature are never loosened throughout the novel. In a way, Orlando’s sex change itself, though seemingly a breaking of binaries, fits within a colonial binary that looks at other ecological imaginations as more “primitive” and thus able to allow Orlando to become a woman. With the Great Frost and the Great Thaw, thus, Woolf plays with the possibility and impossibility of the loosening of binaries that the entire novel is interested in.

As the first instance of climatic change in the book, the Great Frost and Thaw of 1609 underscore how no matter the cultural changes English society experiences, there are fundamental binaries that their ecological imagination will always maintain frozen. Thus, despite Orlando’s initial desire to look at nonhuman nature directly and without mediation, English ecological imagination continues to force him/her into a binary that invites her to declare herself

nature's bride, that renders it impossible for her to see Persian landscapes as what they are, and that prevents him to shake his poetic vision of the world despite the Great Thaw's eradication of oak trees.

8. CONCLUSION

Similarly to Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the focus of the first chapter of my thesis, Woolf's *Orlando* presents various ecological imaginations as English society changes through the course of four centuries. From the Elizabethan gendered nature to the Romani people's Western-constructed ecological imagination, from the Victorian urge to get closer to nonhuman nature to Orlando's own dialogue with nonhuman nature through his/her long poem, Woolf's 1928 novel highlights the connection between a society's or an individual's envisioned relationship with nonhuman nature and their literary and cultural products.

Throughout the novel, Woolf is further interested in the relationship between changing weather and the history of English ecological imaginations from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. It is despite the climatic changes that he/she lives through that Orlando maintains his/her own pastoral ecological imagination, a symptom of engrained colonial and imperialist nature writing that remains unaltered from the moment in which as a young nobleman he plays with "a Moor's head" (3) to the day she declares to have found her "mate ... it is the moor. I am nature's bride" (161). The same ecological imagination that allowed his ancestors to sail abroad and behead people remains in Orlando to encourage her to envision a dialogue with nonhuman nature, become married to it, own it, and thereby give in to the customs of the Victorian time during which the union happen. Compared to Hurston's Janie Crawford, who forms and

maintains her own Voodoo-informed ecological imagination despite her communities' beliefs, Orlando cannot melt the binaries he/she is placed within by English ecological imagination.

The insertion of the Great Frost and Thaw of 1609 in *Orlando*, thus, is far from only being a point of historical accuracy in Woolf's experimental biography. In employing an extreme weather event to simultaneously hint at a loosening of binaries while preventing that from happening, *Orlando* summarizes its plot in just a few pages. While the novel often comes close to challenging binaries of gender and sexuality, it only does so within the context of larger dichotomies which it never actually goes against. Remaining within English colonial ecological imagination throughout climatic, cultural, and literary changes, Orlando is frozen within a dualistic vision which, against all odds, cannot melt with the Great Thaw.

Chapter Three: The Geopolitics of the 1970 Bhola Cyclone in Arif Anwar's *The Storm*

While my previous two chapters dealt with significant historical extreme weather events – the 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane and the Great Frost of 1609 – this last chapter focuses on the deadliest cyclone in recorded history. The Bhola Cyclone, or the Great Cyclone of 1970, arrived in the coast of Bangladesh, which was then East Pakistan, on November 12th, 1970, causing the death of between 300,000 and 500,000 people (Britannica). Originating from a Pacific storm that had travelled past Malaysia in early November, on November 8th, 1970, the Bhola Cyclone began to form in the central part of the Bay of Bengal, off the coast of India. The system then travelled north while increasing its strength until it reached the coast of Bangladesh and began interacting with an abnormal lunar high tide. Because of the morphology of the Bangladeshi territory, as Kerry A. Emanuel explains in his 2005 book *Divine Wind: The History and Science of Hurricanes*, “storms striking near the time of high tide – especially during periods of astronomically high tides – produce devastating floods. When the waters arrive, there is no place to run” (221).

In November 1970, thus, an above-average tide event coupled with winds that reached 140 mph upon making landfall created a storm surge of over 20 feet which flooded about a quarter of Bangladesh's land and wreaked havoc over 65 per cent of the country's fishing industry, at the time the main source of livelihood (Emanuel 224). On top of claiming hundreds of thousands of human lives and ravaging the fishing industry, the cyclone “drowned several hundred thousand head of cattle, engulfed more than a million acres of rice paddies, wheat fields, and tea plantations, demolished more than 40,000 buildings, and rendered more than a million survivors homeless” (Longshore 146). The response of the government, which at the time was in

West Pakistan, was deemed greatly insufficient, leading Bangladesh to declare independence from West Pakistan five months after the Cyclone struck, kickstarting a 10-month-long civil war that resulted in the formation of the country of Bangladesh (Emanuel 224).

In his 2018 novel, *The Storm*, Bangladeshi author Arif Anwar narrates the impact of the Bhola Cyclone on his hometown, Chittagong, the administrative city of the Chittagong district of Bangladesh, and on a myriad of fictional characters whose stories are intertwined throughout the book. Anwar's novel, divided into three sections each narrating the stories centering around nine main characters, brings together lives from around the Bay of Bengal – from Calcutta to Burma to Chittagong –, eventually expanding to the United States with the protagonist, Shahryar, moving to Washington D.C. to attend university. Spanning six decades from 1942 to 2004, the novel tells the story of Shahryar's adoptive parents' journey from Calcutta to Chittagong during Partition, his biological parents' lives in Chittagong amid tensions between the Muslim and Hindu populations, and Shahryar's own journey away from his country and then back, to discover the stories that had been hidden from him all his life.

The Storm follows the main protagonist, Shahryar, as he reconstructs the tale of his families, the one that birthed him and the one that, unbeknownst to him until the age of twenty-eight, had adopted him and raised him as their own. With a present-day plot that looks at Shahryar and his daughter Anna in Washington D.C. in 2004, the book intermingles the story of other characters which all converge into one. The stories include the one of Honufa, Shahryar's birth mother, as she prepares for the Bhola Cyclone of 1970 in Chittagong, Bangladesh, and thinks back on her life in the village, the education she received from the zamindar Rahim, her marriage with Jamir, the fisherman, her conversion to Islam, and the suffered choices she had made following it. Jamir, Honufa's husband, is also a main character in the novel, as he goes to

work on a boat and confronts his colleagues who try to drown him after finding a letter written by Honufa in which she explains how she had blackmailed his boss with information from his past regarding the arrival of the zamindar, Rahim. The zamindar is himself a central character, and the reader follows his journey from Calcutta, where he gets kidnapped by a mob right before Partition, which turns out to be a scheme by the fishermen in Chittagong to get him to relocate to East Pakistan. His story continues as he moves to Chittagong, meets young Honufa, and teaches her how to read and write. Rahim's wife, Zahira, is also the protagonist of one of the storylines, where she rescues her husband from the mob. Two further characters complete the pre-cyclone plot: Claire and Ichiro. Claire, an English nurse in Burma during World War II, escapes to Chittagong as the Japanese move their attack into the country. A Japanese soldier himself, Ichiro moves from Japan to Burma, where he encounters a Buddhist monk who changes the trajectory of his friend Tadashi's life, and finally to East Pakistan, where his plane crashes and where he gets captured by the British and enters Claire's care. Claire's and Ichiro's storylines intercept that of Jamir as the English nurse takes Ichiro's future to heart and decides to help him escape imprisonment. Begging Jamir's father, Hashim the boatman, to transport Ichiro into Burma, Claire sentences him to death as he is killed in front of his son once he returns to Chittagong. The stories, then, converge as the storm hits Bangladesh, and Honufa and Jamir perish. Surviving the storm but orphaned, Shahryar gets adopted by Rahim and Zahira, who raise him as their own and only reveal the truth to him as he briefly returns home from his graduate program in D.C. to tend to his sick father. While he was in the U.S., however, Shahryar had met and fallen in love with Valerie, a student in his same university, and as he leaves for Bangladesh and discovers the truth about his life, she finds out that she is pregnant with Anna. The 2004 storyline, finally, follows Shar's difficult journey navigating American law as he tries to remain in the country to be near

his daughter. Eventually, Shahryar must return home to Chittagong because of an immigration fraud he gets unfortunately entangled in. Throughout the novel, the Bholia Cyclone maintains a central role, with the storylines, the memories, and the book's structure returning to it over and over again.

In Anwar's novel, the political and the human factors of the 1970 cyclone are brought to the forefront with the consequences of British colonialism, Partition, and Japanese influence on Southeast Asia during World War II all forming part of the book's narrative frame. While being interviewed about the novel and its usage of the storm as plot device, Anwar himself said:

As for storms as metaphor, I was thinking about natural disasters, specifically their cruel equity. How they equalize us in a fell swoop regardless of creed, color, or class. I thought a storm had potential as a literary device. I was interested in how the circularity defines its movements. I [liked] the idea of a calm center, or an "eye" of the novel, a quiet middle isolated from the turmoil of the historical sections. An example is Honufa, who begins and closes out the book. We have a 360 [degree] perspective of her life: the events that led to her decisions that day on the beach and the legacy of that decision 30 years into the future. I found that structure powerful. (DiGirolomo)

Given the novel's recent publication, there is little to no literary criticism with *The Storm* as its focus. Contrary to how I have proceeded with my previous two chapters, I will not be guided in my writing of this chapter by literary scholars. Instead, I will use close and far reading techniques, secondary sources on Bangla literature from Bangladesh and West Bengal which influenced Anwar's writing (DiGirolomo), as well as scientific and historical papers and articles on the Great Cyclone of 1970. My chapter begins with a synopsis of storms in Bangla literature to obtain a background on Anwar's influences. Then, I will analyze the historical political

aspects surrounding the Bhola Cyclone and the reflection of these in the novel itself. Continuing along the lines of what Anwar himself declared about the storm as a literary device, I will then analyze the storm as a symbol for the characters' lives, and then conclude the chapter by analyzing the storm as a natural and physical event. From the author's own words and from literary analysis of the text, thus, I will argue that the geography of the intertwined stories in Anwar's novel reflects the geography and geopolitics of the 1970 Bhola Cyclone, while the three books that make up the novel frame human existence as a parallel to a cyclone's rhythm and force.

1. KAL-BAISAKHI: STORMS IN BANGLA LITERATURE

Translating to 'fateful thing' happening in the month of Baisakh (Roy & Chatterji 481), Kal-Baisakhi are late afternoon thunderstorms that bring relief from the high heat of the day. Following the scorching temperatures of the month of Chaitra, the last of the Bangla year, the arrival of the Kal-baisakhi is a welcome start of the year. As written by Sariful Islam in an article on the Daily Sun:

As soon as the month of Baishakh arrives in nature with its rain and storm, its maiden presence not only brings back life to nature, but this change also restores enthusiasm among people, revitalizing and replenishing their minds. Perhaps owing to this harmonious change in nature and human life, the month Baishakh has touched the minds of many Bengali poets so deeply ... This is a symbol of freshness and new strength of life ... Its forceful rain and mighty storm wash away the dry leaves and dying things, purging nature of all its impurities. In the same way, in this month humans should also make a

fresh start in their life, forgetting all the failures, sorrows, fears, loss, and old superstitions of the past year. (Islam)

Bengali poet and Nobel Prize in Literature winner Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem titled “Esho Hey Baisakh,” reflecting these same sentiments about the storms brought by the month of Baishakh. In his poem, he welcomes the new month and invites people to let go of the “dying, filthy and saddening things of the last year” (Islam) just as he himself wants to do. In his poem, moreover, Baishakh has the power to cast away tiredness and a “fog of illusions by blowing its mighty conch shell” (Islam). Baisakh is also, for Tagore, a month of extreme beauty in the nonhuman natural world. In the green of the new leaves and the smell of new flowers, Tagore finds calmness and healing.

The national poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam, also portrayed this first month of the Bengali year in various poems. As in Tagore’s verses, Nazrul also sees the Kal-baisakhi as a force of positive change, a door between the old and the new. In his poem “Prabartaker Ghurchakay,” Nazrul, like Anwar, highlights the cyclical nature of the months, praising the freshness of new beginnings. In some poems, Nazrul also recognizes the unpredictable nature of these storms, whose unexpected absence is capable of bringing drought and therefore famine. In a parallel that is echoed by Anwar’s similes in *The Storm* – such as “she follows the narrow path that to her looks like the part of a Hindu woman’s hair” (10) –, Nazrul “compares the river of such a desolate Baishakh with an old woman going to a pilgrimage” (Islam). Most importantly, however, some of Nazrul’s poems draw a parallel between Kal-baisakhi and political revolution, creating the foundation for Anwar to see the Bhola Cyclone of 1970 as a symbol of political turmoil. A revolutionary against British colonialism in India during his lifetime, Nazrul in his

poems invited his fellow countrymen “to draw inspirations from [the Kal-baisakhi] and demolish the prisons and break off the locks that captivate [them]” (Islam).

From the Bengali literary tradition, Anwar learns the cultural importance of these natural weather events, whose force begs to embrace newness while casting away old sorrows, and whose beauty, almost paradoxically, is able to bring calmness. From the national poet of Bangladesh Kazi Nazrul Islam, most importantly, Anwar borrows the idea of storms as symbols of political turmoil, an idea to which the Bhola Cyclone, with its historical connections to the Partition of India and the Bangladeshi Civil War, easily lends itself.

2. THE STORM AS POLITICAL TURMOIL

Hitting the coast of what was then East Pakistan in November 1970, the Bhola Cyclone happened at a time “of political turmoil in East Pakistan” (Emanuel 222). As Kerry Emanuel writes in *Divine Wind*:

An election that had been scheduled for October was postponed until December 7, owing to the disruptions caused by heavy flooding the previous summer. Pakistan was then a single nation, consisting of West Pakistan (today simply referred to as Pakistan) and East Pakistan, but there was a growing separatist movement in the east, driven mostly by younger people with socialist leanings, belonging to the Awami League, the National Awami Party, and other organizations. It was in this setting that calamity struck. (222-3)

The roots of the 1970 political turmoil reach back into the history of Bangladesh, a land where rivers and religions have crossed and overflowed. Before the year 1200, the region that is now Bangladesh was home to several kingdoms and empires, whose dominant religions were Buddhism and Hinduism. In the thirteenth century, the region became gradually incorporated

into the Delhi Sultanate, slowly establishing the Bengal Sultanate, which made Islam the dominant religion. The Bengal Sultanate then became part of the Mughal Empire which ruled the country until the eighteenth century, maintaining Islam as the primary religion. In 1757, the British East India Company gained control of the region, which they maintained throughout World War One and Two – during which what is now Bangladesh was threatened by Japanese invasion from Burma – until India’s independence in 1947 and the subsequent Partition.

After the Partition of India in 1947, following almost two centuries of British colonialism, West and East Pakistan became a separate nation where a Muslim majority would dwell. Separated by 995 miles of Indian land, these two parts of the same country were not peacefully coexisting. The government and people of West Pakistan wanted Urdu to be the official language of the whole country, despite the prevalence of Bengali in East Pakistan. This led to increasing discontent and political turmoil in East Pakistan, causing the surge of the Awami League, which, as Emanuel explains in the excerpt above, was at the head of a “growing separatist movement in the east” (222). By November 1970, the possibility of the separation of East Pakistan from its western counterpart was imminent, and it is then that an exceptional high tide event coincided with a cyclone to bring the most destructive extreme weather event of the region. This happens as political relationships between India, West Pakistan, and East Pakistan are turbulent, a fact which adds uncertainty and chaos to the powerful storm. As Shahryar himself explains to Valerie in the novel: “Indian ships had warning that Tropical Storm Nora was developing into a typhoon and headed to the coast of East Pakistan – as Bangladesh was called back then. But the relationship between India and Pakistan was so bad that the warnings were not passed on, or maybe they were and ignored” (141). The uncommunicated and unexpected arrival of the cyclone, thus, rendered its effects all the more destructive.

After the catastrophic consequences of the Bhola Cyclone of November 1970, which, as Emanuel, Longshore, and Anwar wrote, caused the death of about half a million people and left a quarter of East Pakistan underwater, damaging the agriculture and fishing industries and destroying houses and buildings, “aid began to flow in from many nations, including India and China, but the central government, residing in West Pakistan, did next to nothing” (Emanuel 224). In his novel, Anwar makes Shahryar comment on this neglect:

The West Pakistanis dominated the East back then, and even in the aftermath of the typhoon, with hundreds of thousands of corpses and livestock rotting in the sun, they took slow, grudging relief measures. They even turned down assistance from India, which we could have used badly. Many scholars think that is what planted the seed for the Bangladesh War of Liberation that happened five months later. (141)

In the already tumultuous political state that East Pakistan was in before the cyclone, the neglect that the government of West Pakistan showed towards its eastern counterpart led to growing resentment, and “four months later, in March 1971, East Pakistan declared its independence from the west” (224). This led to the start of a ten-month long civil war between East Pakistan and West Pakistan, and at the end of it the east gained independence and became the country of Bangladesh.

It is significant to note how, although discontent was growing before the Bhola Cyclone hit the country, the extreme weather event played a major role in Bangladesh’s struggle for independence, almost as the poet Nazrul predicted decades prior to it. In writing such a geopolitically aware book with its center being the Bhola Cyclone, Arif Anwar was commenting on the symbolism of the storm as a political force, as Nazrul had. Through the characters’ storylines, in fact, Anwar is tracing the geographical and political journey of the Bhola Cyclone.

In *The Storm*, the narratives that converge into the Bangladeshi city of Chittagong, Anwar's birthplace, originate from regions around the Bay of Bengal. While Honufa's and Jamir's plots are local to Chittagong, the people they come into contact with begin their journeys in Calcutta or in Burma, which they have reached coming further away, from Japan, and from England. The actors on the scene, therefore, are representative of countries and empires that historically played a significant role in pre-Bhola Cyclone Bangladesh.

To start from the oldest influence, Claire's storyline as an English military nurse stationed in Burma in 1942 highlights the long-lasting British presence in Southeast Asia. In the 1940s, contingencies of the British Army are stationed in Burma to hold against the Japanese invasion coming from the East, of which Ichiro's storyline highlights the presence in the plot. Since the early 1800s, Burma, now Myanmar, had been under British rule with the Indian subcontinent, and with Japanese occupation during WW2, British military forces fought to maintain the country under their own control, until it eventually gained independence in 1948.

After WW2 and Burmese Independence, Claire's husband, Dr. Theodore Drake, the reader then learns, has moved to Calcutta and has "left the military to join private service in India, an unusual choice for an officer" (Anwar 36). The company Drake is the managing director of is where Rahim Choudhury, a Muslim Indian in Calcutta and the protagonist of one of the novel's storylines, works in 1946 just at the brink of Partition. At the eve of 1947 Drake's Britannia Biscuits, whose name once again underscores the influence of the British Empire over the Indian Subcontinent, is divesting and selling off to an Indian buyer (37). Rahim and his wife Zahira's storylines, moreover, follow the history of Partition and the move of Muslim Indians to East Pakistan after the departure of the British.

The two converging movements with Chittagong, Bangladesh, as their epicenter parallel the geographical move of the Bhola Cyclone from the Pacific to the central Bay of Bengal, and finally to the coast of Bangladesh. The storm, in fact, had originated from a Pacific tropical storm and developed into a depression in the central Bay of Bengal on November 8th, 1970, thus mirroring the movement of the Japanese Army during WW2, and therefore Ichiro's storyline in *The Storm*, as well as Claire's storyline, thus underscoring British presence. The latter is further highlighted by the intersection of Rahim's storyline with Drake's in Calcutta, parallel to the movement of the cyclone from the central Bay of Bengal up towards Calcutta and then Bangladesh.

In the novel's storm, thus, various geopolitical elements are embedded in the trajectory of the storylines, drawing a parallel between the Bhola Cyclone and the legacy of British colonialism, Japanese military threats, and the Partition of 1947, much as Nazrul would in his poetry.

3. THE STORM AS LIFETIMES: 360 PERSPECTIVES AND CYCLICAL JOURNEYS

In his interview with Kate DiGirolomo, Arif Anwar also mentions his fascination with storms as circular symbols and literary devices. In particular, he mentions Honufa, the character who starts the first book and ends the third one, saying that "we have a 360 [degree] perspective of her life: the events that led to her decisions that day on the beach and the legacy of that decision 30 years into the future" (DiGirolomo). The novel begins on the morning of the day the Bhola Cyclone hits Chittagong in November 1970. Honufa wakes up and attends to the household chores before noticing that the village is preparing for a big storm. She returns home and finds her son awake and playing with chickens, stopping to consider her son's name, "chosen from a book that the

village zamindar read to her when she herself was a child, a book of stories within stories nested like mirrors facing one another, going on until you lost yourself utterly” (7). As the reader later learns that her son is Shahryar, the metaphor of “stories within stories nested like mirrors facing one another” becomes the first mirror within a mirror, paralleling the circularity of the storm.

In fact, although the novel does start with Honufa, it actually begins with Shar’s recollection of Honufa’s eyes. “In his dreams her eyes are always green ... he knows now that Honufa’s eyes were gray. The gray of cats and sunless mornings. The gray of the writhing sea” (3). To complete the circularity of the novel, in fact, the last sentence of the epilogue reads: ““Hello, Shahryar,” they say” (303). Upon the death of Honufa and Jamir in the Bhola Cyclone, Rahim and Zahira, the village zamindar and his wife, take in little Shahryar and raise him as their own. Since we are told that Shahryar’s name had been “chosen from a book that the village zamindar read to her when she herself was a child” (7), the circularity of Honufa’s and Shahryar’s lifetimes is underscored further.

A further parallel that is drawn in *The Storm* is the one between the character’s plot lines and the Bhola Cyclone. By converging in Chittagong through the intersection of historical and personal reasons, the characters mimic the storm’s journey from the Pacific Ocean to the Bay of Bengal and finally, with intense force, in Chittagong. Thus, Anwar is commenting on the storm-like essence of people’s lifetimes, especially in their communality. In fact, the storylines intermingle and converge, but none of them is complete on its own. The novel might be considered to center Shahryar’s narrative, but even his story is not complete on its own, as made evident by his mysterious recurring nightmares that begin to make sense once he returns home and Rahim and Zahira tell him about his birth parents.

But, Anwar argues through his text, even the story of Honufa and Jamir is not complete without the story of Ichiro, the Japanese soldier both have seen in their childhood and who has brought disastrous consequences to Jamir, whose father died for helping him. And Ichiro's storyline is further incomplete without Claire's, who also completes Jamir's, whose plot in turn is not finished without returning to Rahim and Zahira's. Beginning the disassembling of these plots and completing their assembling is the Bhola Cyclone itself, which separates Shahryar from his mother in the very first chapter and brings him to Rahim and Zahira in the post-cyclone epilogue. The storm-like structure of these mirroring stories within stories is furthermore highlighted by the division of the novel into three books titled "Gathering," "Eye," and "Surging."

3.1 Gathering, Eye, Surging

The life cycle of hurricanes begins in a low-pressure area where winds converge, or "gather," forming a system called "tropical disturbance." If the winds pick up speed and the system forms a circulation center, it becomes known as a "tropical depression." According to ever-increasing wind speed, then, the system may become a "tropical storm" and, finally, a "hurricane" ("Hurricane Life Cycle"). The first book of *The Storm*, called "Gathering," refers to these first moments of hurricane formation, where winds converge. Like the winds, in fact, the characters' storylines converge in the first book from India, Britain, Japan, Burma, the United States, and Bangladesh, to open the narrative and foretell the plot's development.

The second book, "Eye," as Anwar himself declared in his interview with DiGirolomo, is a calm center, "a quiet middle isolated from the turmoil of the historical sections" (DiGirolomo). In hurricane systems, the eye is a part characterized by rain-free skies placed in the center of the

system (“Glossary – E”). In the eye of *The Storm*, the storyline centers Shahryar and Valerie as they navigate their relationship in Washington D.C.. Compared to the tumultuous times lived by Shahryar in his childhood, characterized by death and uncertainty, his first years in the United States are a relatively calm time. He is a student, he is getting to know people, and he starts his relationship with Valerie which, from his perspective, is going so smoothly as to prompt him to propose. As “Eye” comes to an end, the storm winds are picking up speed, with Valerie’s pregnancy being revealed and the immigration attorney’s scam starting to unravel, leading to the final book, “Surging.”

The surge of a hurricane is the further rising of the water that is caused by the push of the winds generated by the hurricane (“Hurricane Structure”). The surge usually causes extreme flooding, especially when, as the Bhola Cyclone of 1970 did, it interacts with a high tide event. The winds are strongest on the “right side of the storm,” which varies its location based on the movement of the hurricane (“Storm Surge Overview”). Since the Bhola Cyclone moved to the north, its right side was at the east of the storm, thus causing extreme flooding on the coast of Bangladesh, where the storm surge happened. In *The Storm*, the book titled “Surging” is, in fact, like the surge of the Bhola Cyclone, set in Bangladesh. While the previous books had entailed a more varied geography, in which “Gathering” did mirror a gathering of stories from various places, and “Eye” focused on Shahryar’s time in Washington D.C., “Surging” is more static yet the least static of them all, with the Bhola Cyclone taking center stage in the last section of the book.

4. THE STORM AS NATURAL EVENT

In the first chapter of Anwar's novel, as Honufa hears that her village is preparing to welcome the storm, she reasons that "this will not be the first storm she has had to prepare for – such is life on the bay" (5). Bangladesh, in fact, is located in, as Emanuel explains, "the region around the mouth of the Ganges River [which] is among the most calamity prone in the world" (221):

Consisting of low-lying marshy land and innumerable islands, the coastal plain is highly susceptible to flooding ... owing to the very gentle average slope of the terrain, large areas of land are flooded by relatively small increases in sea level. To make matters worse, the shape of the Bay of Bengal and the gentle shoaling of the waters offshore are conducive to exceptionally large storm surges. (221)

The exceptional nature of the Great Cyclone of 1970, as explained earlier in my thesis, was caused by the interaction of the extreme weather event with an abnormal high tide, as the above quote states. In Anwar's novel, as Shahryar and Valerie are getting to know each other, Shahryar says:

Our country has a love-hate relationship with water. Bangladesh is flat, just a few meters above sea level, and we have all these incredibly wide, long rivers that dive toward our country from the springboard of the Himalayas, bringing the rich alluvial soil that makes Bangladesh so fertile that it can sustain a hundred million people, the same rivers that flood every summer with the monsoon rains and displace millions. But the storms are much worse in terms of death tolls. They lash our southern coast every year. The damage is unthinkable sometimes. The storm in November 1970 killed a half million people overnight because no one was warned. (141)

The familiarity that the communities living around the Bay of Bengal have with storms is highlighted not only by Honufa's encounter with the villagers preparing to face the storm, but also, at various points throughout the novel, by the insertion of hurricane lanterns in the houses, cities, and villages. Yet the destructive and unexpected force of the Bhola Cyclone took even seasoned communities by surprise. The combination of land geography, high tide, wind systems, and political frictions brought disaster to a land so dependent on water for its livelihood.

Resting at the delta of major rivers such as the Brahmaputra, the Ganges, and the Meghna, Bangladesh has been deeply shaped by their waters. Not only do these rivers inundate agricultural terrains bringing fertile silt deposits, but the 447-mile-long coastline also provides a fundamental source of livelihood. Because of the country's geography, however, both agriculture and fishing are favored and disfavored at the same time. The duality of water systems for Bangladeshi people is underscored by Shahryar and his speech to Valerie. He tells her about the rivers that make "Bangladesh so fertile that it can sustain a hundred million people," but that are "the same rivers that flood every summer with the monsoon rains and displace millions" (141).

As Emanuel explains in his book, "inhabitants trying to eke out a living by fishing and farming frequently confront freshwater floods from the Ganges and saltwater storm surges from the tropical cyclones that roar in from the Bay of Bengal, mostly in spring and fall" (221). Life and death in this riverine country, thus, are closely tied to its waters. In Anwar's novel we see some characters' livelihoods, like Jamir's, being dependent on the sea. Honufa, the character we get a 360 perspective on according to Anwar, "was born Rakhi Jaladas, literally – Rakhi the Slave to Water ... A Jaladas could never aspire to be anything other than fisherfolk" (277). After she converts to Islam and marries Jamir, Honufa is disowned by her family so much so that "when those from outside the village inquired after their daughter Rakhi, they were informed that

she had died in a storm” (278). Honufa’s fate, thus, in life and in death, had been predestined to be tied to the sea.

Eating at a sushi restaurant with his daughter Anna, Shahryar’s “thoughts flash to Jamir, whose fate was so tied to that of the sea” (96). Jamir’s father, Hashim, who was killed by an English officer, wanted his son to “receive schooling, so that [he] could avoid having [his] fate tied to the water” (163-4). Despite this desire and the fear of the sea that was born in Jamir after his father died by the beach, Jamir has to become a fisherman to sustain himself and Hashim remains in the waters as “the Boatman,” a figure that the families of Chittagong take as a sign that a big storm is coming. The lives and deaths of Jamir and Hashim, like many Bangladeshi fishermen, remain tied to the sea as Jamir, too, perishes in the Bhola Cyclone and his son, Shahryar, conducts his graduate research on fisheries in Bangladesh twenty-three years later.

4.1 The Storm and the Fury of the Elements

Though the entire novel has the Bhola Cyclone as its thematic and structural center, it is finally in the last section of the “Surging” book that the storm is raging. We find Honufa walking to the hut as “the wind is now strong enough to sweep her off her feet” (274). She needs to make quick decisions and find high ground before “the tidal waves arrive. She has moments to decide, for the storm has arrived and brought the ocean as its dancing partner” (274). Even during the storm, nonhuman nature continues to be personified – here with the dancing partner image – as it was in the first few chapters of the novel. The birds of Chittagong, like the buzzards around Lake Okeechobee in Hurston’s novel, are “gone to whatever mysterious sanctuaries they seek out in times like these, the skies hold only the storm’s dead fury” (274). As Honufa ties herself to a tree to escape the storm surge,

The storm roars. For hours it rages. It does not tire. It does not relent. It does not show mercy. Trees standing since before her birth give way, snapping and crashing to the ground with a force that shakes her. She has seen many storms over the years and knows that this is only a taste of its fury, that there will be a calm when the eye of the storm arrives, which can be a trap for the unwary, the storm's cunning trick ... Sand is driven into her skin. Her eyes are bloodshot from the spray of salt water – her lips parched and raw. Her palms and chest are bloody from scraping against the tree's bark. (284)

Accustomed to these storms, she knows what to expect from its life cycle, yet the Great Cyclone's force alters her body, carving her skin and her lips, hurting her eyes, her palms, and her chest. As it changes her body, the storm also changes the landscape of Chittagong:

After endless hours of darkness, water and wind, there comes silence and light. She forces her eyes open. The eye of the storm has arrived. But she is in a different land. She is tied to the tree still, but nothing around her is the same. Seawater spumes beneath her, seething in the storm's leftover rage. Nothing remains of her house but for a few bamboo stumps like the teeth in a crone's mouth. She turns a stiffening neck to the horizon. The sky is a corpse-yellow. The monstrous winds have faded to wisps. (285)

Looking at the altered landscape, Honufa thinks that “more than anything, the storm feels like spun time, accelerating everything around her to their inevitable future states – houses turned to bamboo stubs, boats smashed to kindling, rice paddies drowned and salted; lofty trees made to prostrate into the sand” (286). The fury of the storm, thus, is a time-warping experience, making gradual changes converge into a few hours. As landscape changes converge with the storm, so do different understandings of the relationship between human beings and nonhuman nature.

4.2 Converging Ecological Imaginations: Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians in the Bay of Bengal

The Muslim fishermen of Honufa and Jamir's village, the Hindu people who also populate Chittagong and whose faith Honufa abandoned to marry Jamir, the Christian beliefs of Ichiro and Claire, and the Muslim belonging that prompts Rahim and Zahira to leave Calcutta after Partition and settle in Chittagong all reflect different ecological imaginations that, like the storm, converge in Bangladesh.

Throughout the novel, nonhuman nature appears as livelihood, as an omen, as food, as companion, as sculptor of bodies, as time teller, as resting place, as an aid to humans, as reminders of home and a past life, as simile, and as protection, but the ways in which the different characters envision its relationship to themselves vary like the cultures and religions these characters belong to. For example, before getting abducted, Rahim's conversation with his driver Motaleb relates his thoughts on Partition, bringing into view a worry about coexistence:

Rahim laughs. "I marvel, Motaleb, that two people so different can share a land, live together and die. We Muslims believe in the One God, unseen and unquestionable — whose appearance we're not even permitted to imagine, much less draw; the Hindus believe in millions, all shapes and sizes and colors. We can't go a day without meat, while their Brahmins won't touch even onions and garlic. Our God gives us dominion over all life on Earth, while they hold cows and monkeys as sacred." (41)

The last sentence Rahim speaks to Motaleb highlights the diverging ecological imaginations that Muslims and Hindus hold while living in the same country: the former having "dominion over all life on Earth," as given by Allah, the latter holding "cows and monkeys as sacred" as part of their religious ecological imagination. Dating back to the VII century, Muslim presence in the

Indian Subcontinent is significant and had historical implications in August 1947, when the territory was divided according to religious majorities, having Hindu India on one side and Muslim Pakistan on the other – or rather on the other *two sides*. In Islamic ecological imagination, the natural world is linked to the divine world, meaning that “the objects of the natural world and the Qur’ānic verses are metaphysically on a par with each other” (Haq 147). The natural world, furthermore, exists “to nourish, support, and sustain the process of life – all of life, and in particular human life” (147). According to Haq, in the genesis story that is written in the Qur’ān, the earth is created by Allah for human beings before Adam and Eve disobey his commands. Contrary to the Christian genesis, thus, the natural world of the earth is not a punishment, but rather essential part of the human experience, and as such, nonhuman nature is not a disgrace (147). Fundamental in the genesis story is the status of human beings as stewards on the land on behalf of Allah, compared to the Judeo-Christian genesis which places humans on the earth after banishment from Eden.

Thought by many scholars to be the world’s oldest religion, Hinduism is the dominant religion in India, with significant populations in Pakistan and Bangladesh. More properly a family of religions, Hinduism includes various views on the relationship between human beings and nonhuman nature. In Rahim’s words to Motaleb, he is focusing on the Hindu traditions that believe in the continuity of life and the existence of the soul in all living creatures, which leads many Hinduists to follow vegetarian diets and “their Brahmins won’t touch even onions and garlic” (Anwar 41). In some Hindu traditions, natural places are moreover important as “the loci of revelation” (Sherma 465). For Krishna, for example, the Yamuna River and the landscapes around the village of Vṛndāvana were revelatory places in his childhood and adolescence on earth (465). Likewise, early Vedas “express awareness of human interdependence with, and awe

in face of, the abundance, majesty, and power of natural phenomena” (465). The entire ecosphere is often incorporated in Hindu practice through symbolic earth, air, fire, and water, or through direct interactions with natural elements such as rivers and trees (465).

When Ichiro and Tadashi meet Julian, the Buddhist monk, he adds the Buddhist ecological imagination into the microcosm of the novel, mirroring its historical presence in the macrocosm of the Bay of Bengal. As he draws the Sanskrit symbol of Aum into the ground, he explains:

The beginning and the end of the universe, the fixed axis upon which it turns as well as the void that pervades. It is composed of four syllables, four parts: Think of a fish jumping up from a hidden lake, miles below the earth. Think of the creature’s face breaking the water, the brief shining moment in which it is suspended in the air, its return to the lake, and of course the water that surrounds it. (115)

The image of the fish in a lake hidden underneath the earth’s surface is, as this quotation explains, central to Buddhist philosophy, as all sentient beings hold equal wisdom to human beings. In a piece published in the journal *Conservation Biology* in 2011, His Holiness Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the seventeenth Karmapa of Tibetan Buddhism, explains:

The emphasis on biological diversity, including ecosystems – in particular, the understanding that animate and inanimate beings are parts of a whole – resonates closely with Buddhism’s emphasis on interdependence. The essence of Buddhism lies in the union of compassion and emptiness: the deeply felt dedication to alleviate the suffering of all living beings and the understanding that everything is devoid of self- nature. These two halves of a philosophical whole speak particularly to the goals of the environmental movement. (1094)

Contrasting with the Buddhist beliefs of interdependence that Ichiro and Tadashi encounter in Burma – and which Zahira and Rahim find in Calcutta four years later – *The Storm* also introduces the ecological imagination of the British. It is the same Ichiro, in fact, who thinks about British ecological imagination as he listens to Claire recount her memories of home back in England. As the two of them talk in his war prisoner’s cell, he reasons:

That is what lies behind the British frenzy for building monuments on strange shores, he thinks, laying train tracks that span a thousand miles, binding the land with roads and highways as though subduing a wild creature. They were both island nations, frantic to leave their blue prisons – to leave marks on lands that do not want them. (182)

In his conversation with Claire, Ichiro is drawing a parallel between her country’s ecological imagination and his own, both guilty of leaving “marks on lands that do not want them.” What characterizes the British ecological imagination, for Ichiro, is their constant aim, in their colonies, of “binding the land with roads and highways as though subduing a wild creature.” Claire and Ichiro both come from a Christian tradition, but only Claire’s country has Christianity as an official religion. Christian ecological imagination, as Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer argues in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, is based on the Genesis story of Eve in the Garden of Eden: “that mother of men was made to wander in the wilderness and earn her bread by the sweat of her brow, not by filling her mouth with the sweet juicy fruits that bend the branches low. In order to eat, she was instructed to subdue the wilderness” (7). Upon exporting their ecological imagination through colonialism, therefore, the British left “marks on lands that do not want them,” by “binding the land with roads and highways as though subduing a wild creature” (182).

As a formerly colonized territory, Bengal bears the signs of a non-Indigenous, invasive ecological imagination, which is reflected in *The Storm* by the character of Claire and how her actions and those of her con-nationals lead to the death of Jamir's father, Hashim. A fisherman in Chittagong and his son, Hashim and Jamir first met Claire when they took her on a boat tour. She remembers about the fisherman when she is looking for an escape for her former patient, and she begs Hashim to take him, despite the man's assurance that a big storm is coming and that this request would put his life on the line (202). Because of British control over Chittagong, in the end, Hashim does die, but not from the storm, which he carefully navigates with a lifetime of experience. Instead, it is a British officer that takes Hashim's life, angered that he should have helped a war prisoner escape. After surviving an extreme weather event, Jamir's father falls at the hands of a British man, who "walked away slowly, with a complete lack of guilt or fear. He was in no hurry because he had done nothing wrong" (262). Historically, the legacy of British colonialism affected Bangladesh after the 1970 Bhola Cyclone through the political consequences of the existence of West and East Pakistan under the same government. The establishment of the government in Karachi, in fact, led to a neglect of the post-disaster relief and aid that East Pakistan needed in 1970. In Anwar's novel, thus, this is reflected by the intermingling stories of Claire and Hashim, resulting in the latter, a Bengali Muslim, paying for the insistence of the former, an English Christian.

One final ecological imagination that bears importance in *The Storm* is the one that allows animals to be omens. Notable from the first page is the appearance of a "house-crow. Its black wings are flared, rising from a charcoal body. The curving bill half-open, as though it intends to call out" (3), a bad omen which occurs at various instances throughout the novel. As stated on the Encyclopedia Britannica, "Bangladesh is inhabited by hundreds of species of birds.

Common house crows are found everywhere, and their cries are detested by many people of Bangladesh, who regard crows as a bad omen” (Husain & Tinker).

Before her husband gets kidnapped in Calcutta, Zahira notices that “a bird sits on the railing. At the far end. Massive and fearless. Black feathers. Claws and eyes. It studies her with an immortal patience ... this is no timid gray-hooded crow but a great dar kaak. Carrion crow. Raven” (Anwar 55). She sees “a large raven” again as she looks for her husband with Motaleb the next day (216). Before the Japanese launch an attack on Burma and Claire gets separated from Myint, “as the women cook, a particularly large [magpie] boldly hops down the length of a branch that comes within touching distance of the kitchen window. It fixes Claire with an amber-eyed regard” (74). With the conversation that Claire and Myint engage in upon seeing it, it becomes clear how different religious traditions see them as diametrically opposite symbols. For Claire, a Christian, magpies symbolize evil, while Myint, who is probably a Buddhist, discourages Claire from throwing a potato at it, saying “they are spirit birds, nats” (74). Regardless of their religious symbolism, however, birds and other animals in Anwar’s novel all represent bad omens, as the magpie appears before the Japanese do, just two pages later. In Ichiro’s chapter, also, a buffalo “snorts and turns a massive head toward them, eyes glinting in the moonlight” (107), right before Tadashi’s death. Finally, in Shahryar and Anna’s storyline, “a raccoon, back arched and wary, steps out of a driveway across the street, and upon spotting them, retreats into the dark” (161). A bad omen of the scam that Shar is about to embark on with the immigration attorney, the raccoon is a connection between Shar’s experience in the States and his homeland.

Existing in the midst of all the religious traditions that the novel and the land it is set on contain, the belief in birds as bad omens is an indigenous and pagan practice which Christian and

Islamic authorities have tried to keep at bay (Ahmad & Alom). Despite these efforts from recognized religions, however, wildlife as omens represents the most persistent ecological imagination in Anwar's novel, touching Muslims, Hindus, and Christians equally.

5. CONCLUSION

Arif Anwar's *The Storm* looks at the Bhola Cyclone as a convergence of nonhuman natural force, political turmoil and civil war, historical political powers and influences, and a metaphor for the cycle of human lives. In three books, Anwar operates like the storm, opening and closing doors, introducing and changing landscapes until they become unrecognizable. And like the storm, his novel gathers stories from the Bay of Bengal and beyond, gives them a moment of rest, and then with full force makes them run towards the end.

With Bengali literary traditions to inspire his inclusion of the Bhola Cyclone in the plot of his novel, Anwar envisions the Bhola Cyclone as a symbol of political turmoil and revolution born out of centuries of religious dynasties and foreign colonialism. Like the winds of the storm, he imagines characters to represent empires and historical moments, bringing them together to wreak havoc upon the landscapes of Bangladesh, transforming villages, lands, and people's bodies. Anwar's metaphor goes forward, seeing in human lives a reflection of the cyclical nature of tropical storms, and engaging his characters in mirrors within mirrors until the communality of lifetimes becomes clear, as the Bhola Cyclone reminded the communities it affected.

Like Hurston's and Woolf's novels, *The Storm* gathers a plethora of ecological imaginations, but while *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Orlando* centered around their protagonists' specific understanding of the relationship between humans and nonhuman nature, Anwar's novel, instead of focusing on a single protagonist, gathers various ecological

imaginations, highlighting their historical coexistence in the Bay of Bengal. The fact that this is the most recently published novel out of the three I have chosen to write about in this thesis suggests that it is possible that such communal essence envisioned for an extreme weather event derives from the historical period of Anwar's writing. While Woolf and Hurston wrote in the first half of the twentieth century, while a scientific understanding of climate change was beginning to form but was still far away from our contemporary grasp, Anwar's writing falls into the scope of climate change and climate change literature.

Nonetheless, with or without an understanding of climate change, fiction authors have incorporated extreme weather events in their novels for centuries. Whether to signify the coexistence of trauma and liberation from it, as Hurston's novel argued, or to stand as a microcosm of a novel's larger struggle with the loosening and strengthening of binaries, as was the case for *Orlando*, all depictions of extreme weather are imbued in an author's ecological imagination. As the literary world will witness more and more books with climate change as their focus, it will be important to critically analyze the envisioned relationship between humans and nonhuman nature that authors will continue to put forward, since within our understanding of nonhuman nature and our role within or without it lie dichotomies and hierarchies that inform our cultural beliefs beyond our engagement with the nonhuman world.

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