



Practicing Palliation for Extinction and Climate Change

Weaving Death Ethics from Story and Practice

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Abstract Even with the advent of climate change, mainstream environmentalism lacks a robust death ethics, that is, ethical theories and practices for attending directly to what is owed to the unjustly dead and dying. This article draws on Indigenous, Afrofuturist, and feminist science fiction narratives and their correlating lived practices to explore how death ethics for those driven extinct by climate change and other environmental injustices can and ought to go beyond affect, symbolism, and abstraction. It puts forward environmental palliation as an alternative framework for grappling with the injustice of extinction as and in publics. Far from a glorified form of euthanasia, palliation is an ethic and a practice geared toward providing good or better deaths for particular entities under specific conditions of injustice. In death, palliation cedes to remembrance, an ethic and practice for keeping the dead alive in memory so that they can be cared for. When done right, these death ethics are inextricably linked with climate justice for the living and those yet-to-be.

Keywords death ethics, extinction, climate justice, intergenerational ethics, science fiction

Robust Death Ethics for Climate Change

When it comes to the dead and the dying, environmentalism has long been preoccupied with either preempting or bemoaning death and other irreversible environmental harms. With the conservation paradigm geared primarily toward pausing (via the preservation of so-called wilderness) or rewinding (via restoration-as-reversal) the ecological clock, the question of what is owed directly to the unjustly dead and dying is undertheorized and underpracticed in mainstream environmental discourse.¹ Climate change and intersecting environmental injustices are making it increasingly difficult for even the environmentally privileged to ignore the rising death toll. Public memorials to extinction, such as the Mass Extinction Monitoring Observatory and Remembrance Day

1. Kareiva and Marvier, "What Is Conservation Science?"; Light, "Death of Restoration?"; Gibson, "Climate Justice."

for Lost Species, are increasingly being proposed and implemented.² At the same time, the emotional dimensions of extinction and climate change—*anxiety, fear, guilt, and grief*, or we might say “*guilty grief*,” given the tendency to center the emotions of those most responsible for climate injustice—are receiving unprecedented attention by scholars and activists alike.³ Though some are honest about focusing on the affective dimensions of environmental privilege, elsewhere frequent slippage occurs between *guilty grief* and the grief we are all supposedly meant to feel in the face of such tragedy. Partnered with a narrow understanding of extinction as complete species death, the universalizing conceptions of the “*they*” who are dying and the “*we*” who are grieving ironically narrow the subjects and publics of extinction.⁴ As a result, even as the so-called Age of Extinction dawns, mainstream environmental discourses lack robust death ethics, that is, ethical theories and practices for attending directly to what is owed to the unjustly dead and dying.

This article draws on Indigenous, Afrofuturist, and feminist science fiction narratives and their correlating lived practices to explore how death ethics for those driven extinct by anthropogenic climate change and other environmental injustices can and ought to go beyond affect and symbolic memorials. To do so I rely upon an interspecies conception of publics and a pluralistic understanding of extinction studies that declines to draw sharp ethical distinctions between losses on local, regional, and global levels as well as between species and populations lost to death versus climate migration. I put forward palliative ethics as an alternative framework for grappling with the injustice of extinction, broadly construed, as and in publics. I define environmental palliation as the ethic and practice of providing good or better deaths for particular entities under specific circumstances of injustice. Far from being a form of glorified euthanasia, the practice of palliation highlights the complexities of facilitating or even choosing death as well as the importance of understanding such determinations within their eco-political contexts. Easing suffering can be an important part of this work, but much more is often required. Here it is not my intention to settle some larger question about what it means to have a good death under any and all conditions. In addition to not striking me as a particularly fruitful endeavor, none of the narratives or practitioners I engage with are attempting to formulate an answer to this query. What these texts do emphasize, however, is that palliation is the very least that the dying or departing deserve.

Moreover, the bounds and demands of environmental justice do not terminate with or in death. Death does not dissolve our relationships with nor obligations to our ecological partners, particularly when those deaths result from environmental injustice.⁵ Palliation for the dying must therefore be followed up by ethical praxis for and with the dead

2. Jørgensen, “After None.”

3. Asma, “Green Guilt”; Fredericks, “Online Confessions of Eco-Guilt.”

4. Mitchell, “Beyond Biodiversity and Species.”

5. Gibson, “Climate Justice.”

that goes beyond affective responses and symbolic memorials, that is, memorials that are geographically, temporally, relationally, or politically isolated or detached. In death, palliation cedes to remembrance. Overlapping significantly with palliation conceptually and in practice, remembrance too works toward ensuring good and better deaths under conditions of injustice. Resisting the temporal and spatial isolation of the memory and mourning work common within mainstream climate ethics, remembrance is an ongoing communal ethic for keeping the dead alive in memory so that they can be cared for. The alternative—to actively or passively forget these beings and the unjust conditions of their deaths—is moral failure. How we remember those who die or depart as the result of environmental injustice matters deeply under such conditions, both to the dead as well as to the living and those yet-to-be. Like the living, the dead are among those beings who shape and are shaped by us. They are “among the beings from whom we learn, for whom we act, and with whom we create and maintain community” and, therefore, to whom justice is owed.⁶ Collectively, the texts I work with demonstrate that death ethics and justice can be practiced by and for a wide variety of beings on scales ranging from species and ecosystems down to individuals, from the recently dead to distant ancestors. The notion of publics here is expansive, at once multispecies and multitemporal.

Indeed, palliation and death ethics more broadly need to be approached as part of holistically intergenerational climate justice. Neither a fatalistic approach—death ethics are all we need now—nor one that only considers present day survivors and future generations will suffice. Rather, when done right, palliation and remembrance are inextricably linked with and sometimes even hard to distinguish from environmental ethics for survivors and those yet-to-be. Thus, these death ethics go further not only by insisting that the unjustly dying and dead are owed something themselves but also by claiming that attending to them is part of how communities do right by current and future generations, and vice versa. This communal and political locus makes palliation and remembrance very public sorts of practices, with the capacity to engage not only living publics but dead and future ones as well.

Methods and Texts

Before I can dive in, it is important to briefly introduce the narratives and practices from which I have learned these alternative death ethics and my methods for working with them. I engage a selection of Indigenous, Afrofuturist, and feminist science fiction fantasy narratives that shed light on different facets of the settler-native-slave triad in the times of climate change.⁷ This analytical lens feels particularly salient as a scholar working through Indigenous, Black, and ecological feminisms toward environmental and decolonial justice on Turtle Island. That said, I believe that the insights generated by these texts, individually and collectively, apply beyond North America and settler colonialism.

6. Gibson, “Climate Justice.”

7. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.”

Robust death ethics are not just absent from mainstream environmentalism in these contexts but more broadly as well. This means that to learn about these ethics and practices we need to look elsewhere for inspiration and examples. Science fiction fantasy is where I first encountered death ethics being approached expansively and with an eye toward justice. Likewise, science fiction has a lengthy track record of exploring more-than-linear temporalities—for example, time travel, temporal paradox, multiverse temporalities, oracular visions, communication across time, and so on. Are the narratives I work with here the only examples of these alternative death ethics and temporalities? Certainly not. Though, as we shall see, this temporal-ethical convergence is far from accidental. Are they representative of all Indigenous, Afrofuturist, and feminist science fiction fantasy? No, they do not speak for their genre as a whole. Neither do they espouse identical ethics, politics, or temporalities. Embodying the kind of incommensurability that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang would regard as inevitable and productive,⁸ these narratives and their authors spring from and inhabit very different worlds. For this project, I have sought to interweave narratives (and practices) that can give voice to this pluriversity without producing cacophony.⁹

At the heart of it, I regard these narratives to be doing invaluable moral and political work. What do I mean by that? Through their powers of imaginative description or redescription, these science fiction fantasy stories and worlds offer necessary warnings and critiques of dominant environmental practices and ethics. They also articulate and advance liberatory futurities. Instead of employing apocalyptic tropes, whether comically or tragically, these narratives construct apocalyptic and postapocalyptic worlds¹⁰ that “imaginatively mirror” our own without either throwing in the towel or reducing the scope of ethical action to pulling back from the brink or recreating the past in the future.¹¹ Rather than a new or unprecedented phenomenon, eco-social apocalypse is re-described as old, repeated, cyclical, or ongoing. In this way the texts I discuss here are disruptive to the lifeways at the heart of climate change, the Anthropocene hypothesis, and the colonizing temporalities that underlie both.¹² Thus, these narratives “do moral work” in part by articulating ethical judgments and arguments about what we owe to those wronged by and/or lost to climate change and other environmental world endings.¹³ This work is political for how, among other things, it frames these harms, deaths, and losses as unjust, death ethics as belonging to justice, and desired environmental futures as necessarily transformative. Science fiction fantasy’s ways of making sense of the world take form in public. That they, like nonfictional philosophical texts, are

8. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.”

9. Reiter, *Constructing the Pluriverse*.

10. Hereafter referred to collectively as “(post)apocalyptic.”

11. Little, *Feminist Philosophy and Science Fiction*, 16.

12. As I argue in greater depth elsewhere. See Gibson and Whyte, “Philosophies of Science Fiction.”

13. Christian, “Race for Theory”; Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction*; Lindemann, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, 36; Nash, *Feminist Narrative Ethics*.

subject to interpretation only deepens this public, intersubjective quality. The primary fictional texts I engage in this article are Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Naomi Novik's *Uprooted*, and N. K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy (*The Fifth Season*, *The Obelisk Gate*, and *The Stone Sky*). Considered in a supplementary capacity are Elizabeth Hand's *Icarus Descending*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*.

Of course, for me to claim that certain science fiction fantasy texts do more than imagine environmental ethics or justice for the dead and the dying without mentioning which practices they may be describing or reimagining would be exceedingly odd as well as politically problematic. Just because the kinds of death ethics depicted in these narratives are scarce within mainstream environmentalism does not mean that no one has been or is currently invested in environmental palliation and remembrance. The lived practices I rely upon grow out of and respond to the same world endings and injustices explored through the narratives I am interested in. Specifically, in this article I engage with the work of orator Lee Maracle, biologist-author Robin Kimmerer, author-activist Terry Tempest Williams, coastal Inupiaq communities with bowhead whales, and Orca whale Tahlequah and her human interlocutors. Like my primary narrative texts, these practices unfold from the knowledge that many and much has/have been lost but that the futurities available are more expansive than generally believed. These instances of environmental ethics for the dead and dying are or belong to endeavors to cope with and overcome environmental injustice that has compounded and mutated over generations. Such practitioners often possess and wield both deep outrage and deep empathy. They skillfully provide care to more than the living and the more than human. Some operate from a place of exploring what can be done when restoration fails or is found to be beyond reach. In some cases, the dying and dead are front and center. For others, the dead are among the varied agents and recipients of intergenerational healing and transformation. As such, they develop and embody strategies for attending to and surviving apocalypse that do not discount the dead and the dying or reduce them to abstractions. In addition to providing context for the descriptions, critiques, warnings, and reimaginings generated by science fiction fantasy, these lived practices serve as an invaluable contrast, highlighting where life, art, and theory diverge. Together, the narratives and practices I engage with form a rich discourse of intergenerational environmental justice from and for a wide range of publics.¹⁴

Weaving Palliation from Story and Practice

Lee Maracle explains, "Before we can remember, we need to be able to recognize value."¹⁵ The initial work that the narratives and practices I work with here undertake

14. For a more detailed discussion of the methodology employed here and its rationale, see Gibson, "Stories We Tell."

15. Maracle, *Memory Serves*, 52.

is redescriptive. They recognize that deaths have occurred or are occurring and that they ought to be regarded in context as tragic, wrongful, or unjust. Whether by positive or negative example, these texts make abundantly clear that we ought to be attending to the dead and dying of more beings and in more public ways than are widely accepted and practiced. Indeed, alongside their redescriptions of the dead and dying in the past and present, they demonstrate that what we do in the face of such death, loss, and suffering matters deeply. In what follows, I build upon these redescriptions of death and dying to dig deeper into the ethical and political work that I suggest these texts collectively argue must accompany them. My analysis, here and elsewhere,¹⁶ is organized through the dual lenses of palliation for the dying and remembrance for the dead. In this article, palliation is the focal point. There is, however, a stickiness inherent to parsing these death ethics that is not unlike working with spun sugar; eventually you just have to accept the mess as part of your methodology. After all, these are overlapping ethics, theoretically and practically. Remembrance and mourning can—and often do—begin prior to death, and a death may be eased long after the moment of someone’s physical passing.

This stickiness is further complicated by the temporal dynamics offered by these narratives and practices. “There is no time differentiation in the conjuring of memory,” Maracle writes, “Future is a remembered thing the very moment I give voice inside my mind to my imagined participation in tomorrow.”¹⁷ Across many of the texts I work with there is sense that investing in the future will bring back or echo the past. Indeed, these more expansive temporalities may give us reason to hope that memory work could, under the right circumstances, lead to rebirth. Robin Kimmerer reflects, “Old-growth cultures, like old-growth forests, have not been exterminated. The land holds their memory and the possibility of regeneration.”¹⁸ Rebirth and regeneration of this kind stand in stark contrast to restoration-as-reversal (e.g., de-extinction), relying on non- or more-than-linear temporalities and relationalities and ethics. Kyle Whyte, for example, refers to Anishinaabe temporalities as “spiraling time,” meaning that they unfold as continuous dialogues for “interacting with, responding to and reflecting on the actual or potential actions and viewpoints of [Indigenous peoples] ancestors and descendants.”¹⁹ Working with the dead need not only mean reaching backward if the past is not always behind you.

That being said, there are important reasons for not collapsing palliation and remembrance—not to mention the other dimensions of environmental ethics—into each other, especially if we do not wish to continue to neglect (1) environmental ethics for the dying in favor of ethics for the dead, and (2) death ethics in general in favor of

16. Gibson, “Climate Justice.”

17. Maracle, *Memory Serves*, 7.

18. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 291.

19. Whyte, “Indigenous Science (Fiction),” 229.

environmental ethics for the living and future generations. It is therefore to the unique qualities of palliation that I turn first, before exploring palliation further through palliation's convergences with remembrance as well as with "livelier" ethical and political projects.

Working toward Good and Better Deaths

In both narrative and practice, palliation is framed as that which those dying or departing rarely receive but the very least that they deserve. There is a refusal to neglect one's ecological partners even as they are or may be leaving us. This ethical orientation shines through clearly across memoir, oratory, lived practice, and fiction, often in explicit contrast with more mainstream approaches. "When most people had given up on the Refuge, saying the birds were gone, I was drawn further into its essence. In the same way that when someone is dying many retreat, I chose to stay," Terry Tempest Williams writes of her work in the wetlands at beginning of *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*.²⁰ In this memoir, Williams attends to the loss of Utah's wetlands and her family's multigenerational relationships with the beings who make these habitats their year-round or migratory homes. Front and center is the flooding of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, which is paralleled in the text with her mother's slow demise from breast cancer; indeed, almost all the women in her family were similarly undergoing mastectomies or dying of breast cancer. Williams becomes midwife to these human and more-than-human deaths, which initially appear detached from each other and broader environmental politics and policies. The narrative soon shifts, however, and Williams begins to connect—for herself and the reader—these tragedies to the larger stories of environmental management, changes in climate, and nuclear testing in the Southwest. Ultimately, Williams decides that one legacy she can choose not to inherit from her Mormon foremothers is that of obedient complacency. Especially with her closing essay—"The Clan of One-Breasted Women"—and the acts of protest it reports, Williams puts her body and her pen to work resisting environmental injustices on the lands she and her family call home.²¹

The refusal to abandon one's nonhuman relations is also starkly apparent in the efforts of many Indigenous peoples,²² including those of coastal Inupiaq communities to find new ways to drum for and with bowhead whales. As I am not a member of these communities, I rely here upon the field research of cultural geographer and ethnomusicologist Chie Sakakibara, whose careful analysis of Inupiaq drumming practices prominently features Indigenous voices. Her article "'No Whale, No Music:' Inupiaq Drumming

20. Williams, *Refuge*, 4, 52–53.

21. Though *Refuge* mostly neglects the colonial history of Salt Lake City and the peoples—Goshute and Eastern Shoshone—who have lived in the valley since long before the arrival of the Mormons, Williams's more recent environmental writings work harder to contextualize collaboration and conflict between settler environmentalists/ism and Indigenous peoples.

22. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*; Maracle, *Memory Serves*; Whyte, "Indigenous (Science) Fiction."

and Global Warming,” among others, offers an account of Inupiaq drumming and whaling that resists static and offensive understandings of Indigenous cultures and their capacity to cope with climate change. With whales and whaling located squarely at the center of coastal Inupiaq lifeways, these communities are working hard to maintain as well as reimagine their relationships with migrating whales—and other ecological partners—through adaptive drumming practices and other innovative expressions. Though the reduced prevalence and increased unpredictability of both bowhead whales and arctic sea ice have had severely disruptive and even tragic consequences for both humans and bowheads, Inupiaq communities are finding new ways to drum for and relate to whales that go far beyond standard conservation practices.

This refusal finds expression in feminist science fiction fantasy as well, often in ways that nonfictional narratives and practices cannot. Sometimes, as with *Icarus Descending*, a novel in which the mutant-cyborg rebellion turns out to have been organized to abandon and destroy Earth rather than to take back or heal it, apocalyptic narratives implore us not to abandon the dying by imaginatively mirroring the injustice of doing so on a planetary scale.²³ It is precisely this cycle of abandonment (and the extractive lifeways that “necessitate” it) that Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* is so keen to break.²⁴ Winterson’s environmental parable intentionally resists linear temporality and storytelling. To that dynamic the author adds metaphysical Möbius strips that result in characters from some storylines and worlds ending up in notebooks that characters in other storylines and worlds stumble across on the Tube. Suffice it to say that *The Stone Gods* weaves together the stories of multiple worlds—planetary and otherwise—at the “end” of ecological collapse, each highlighting different dystopic elements and politics. Perhaps even more interestingly, the central characters—a pair of doomed lovers—seem to transcend space-time as well. Eventually, we learn that both the story of the lovers and environmental apocalypse are (probably) repeating across planets and ecosystems. And though Winterson leaves much about the futures of these worlds uncertain, she makes a point of having her protagonists attend closely to the intimacies of dying when others refuse.

Other narratives go further, crafting detailed positive models of palliation both fantastical and realistic. Indeed, some stories construct their entire narrative endgame around the liberation of those suffering in limbo whose only other option is to move fully into death. Set in a postapocalyptic Toronto (a.k.a. “the Burn”) abandoned and cordoned off by the wealthy white elite and the Ontarian government, Nalo Hopkinson’s *Brown Girl in the Ring* follows a young mother (Ti-Jeanne) as she navigates this landscape in the footsteps of her grandmother (Gros-Jeanne), a preeminent healer and spirit worker.²⁵ When the father of Ti-Jeanne’s baby (Tony) is enlisted by the Burn’s most powerful crime boss

23. This is why Hand’s *Icarus Descending* is not one of my primary texts—it offers more in the way of what not to do than it does positive examples of how to attend to the dead and the dying.

24. Winterson, *Stone Gods*.

25. Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*.

and necromancer (Rudy) to harvest a heart suitable for the ailing premier of Ontario, he turns to Ti-Jeanne and her grandmother for help. When their plan to sneak out of the city fails, Tony eventually murders Gros-Jeanne for her heart out of desperation. Ultimately, a grief-stricken but determined Ti-Jeanne chooses to embrace her connection to the spirits in order to confront Rudy, who she has learned is her grandfather and keeper of her undead mother's soul. Ti-Jeanne channels the ancestral guardian of the crossroads (the Prince of the Cemetery) to defeat Rudy by liberating the dead souls he has trapped and enslaved. The novel concludes with the realization that the Ontarian premier's transplant surgery has resulted in more than one kind of change of heart; Gros-Jeanne has taken over the premier's body and has major plans for Toronto's revitalization.

Indeed, the work of palliation frequently involves easing the suffering of the dying. Often it is the dying itself that is painful. Williams depicts the physically and emotionally laborious processes of managing her mother's painful death from cancer as well as the suffering of the birds she finds in the wetlands who are beyond rehabilitation. "Death is no longer what I imagined it to be," she writes, "Death is earthy like birth, like sex, full of smells and sounds and bodily fluids. It is a confluence of evanescence and flesh."²⁶ When Ti-Jeanne's affinity with Legbara grants her the disturbing ability to see the manner of people's death, her grandmother urges her not to squander this gift and tells her, "It mean [sic] you could ease people passing, light the way for them. For them to cross over from this world or the next."²⁷ By freeing the souls trapped in her grandfather's bloodthirsty duppy bowl, Ti-Jeanne ends the agonizing servitude of her mother and countless others. That we ought to ease the suffering of the unjustly dying seems a simple enough ethical proposal, in theory if not in practice. It is all too easy, however, to turn away, to treat the dying like any other group "over there." The temporal-ethical displacement of death begins early. These narratives and practitioners refuse that turn, opting instead to "stay with the trouble" of dying.²⁸

Fictional or nonfictional, the context in which this work takes place and the positionality of the practitioner can also prove quite revealing. Like Ti-Jeanne, the protagonist of Naomi Novik's *Uprooted*, Agnieszka, is similarly charged with releasing and easing the suffering of those trapped on the wrong side of death.²⁹ Even so, the contrast here between the positionalities of Ti-Jeanne and Agnieszka is meaningful and worth taking a moment to unpack. It is not immediately clear that the world of *Uprooted* qualifies as either apocalyptic or postapocalyptic. Right up until its climax, the novel appears to be a typical, albeit imaginative and compelling, fairy tale depicting the clash between good and evil in the form of a menacing Wood. After Agnieszka confronts her nemesis

26. Williams, *Refuge*, 219.

27. Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*, 103.

28. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

29. Novik, *Uprooted*.

(the Wood-queen) and loses, however, she undertakes a dangerous journey into the heart of the Wood, uncovering the unjust genesis of its corruption and, ultimately, the impetus for the death ethics that follow.

The world of *Uprooted* centers upon a valley where for ages the sole inhabitants were the Wood-people—those with the ability to live as both trees and humans. When Agnieszka’s ancestors stumbled upon the valley, the Wood-queen had welcomed them, hoping that the two peoples could thrive together. But the newcomers “were afraid. They wanted to live, they wanted to grow stronger, but they didn’t want to change. They learned the wrong things.”³⁰ They turned against the Wood. While her people decided that they would rather not remember anything than remember the wrong things and gave up their human-selves forever, leaving their tree-selves at the mercy of their enemies, the Wood-queen refused to leave her people defenseless and gradually turned the wood and herself to ruin in pursuit of revenge. Upon learning the truth, Agnieszka allies with the Wood-queen, and the story concludes with her taking up the mantle and powers of Baba Yaga³¹ in order to care for the Wood.

Much of this caretaking involves attending to debilitating agony of both the Wood-queen and the trees she has bewitched by sealing humans within their trunks to animate them. Agnieszka learns how to transition a select few—including the Wood-queen—into “dreaming.” Many trees, however, have been too long besieged by the madness of the humans trapped within them. “Drawing the water out of them and giving them to the fire was the gentlest way I’d found to set them free,” Agnieszka determines, “It still felt like killing someone, every time, although I knew it was better than leaving them trapped and lingering. The grey sorrow of it stayed with me afterwards.”³² As a settler, her experience of practicing palliation is appropriately fraught. This kind of example is necessary for thinking through death ethics under settler colonialism. Palliation cannot only be a Black and Indigenous practice. Science fiction fantasy can offer alternatives for working with and relating to the dying when nonfictional settler ethics or practices are scarce.

Palliation is never easy for anyone, and not just because practicing it is a messy, laborious undertaking often fraught with the grief that accompanies untimely loss. In the contexts that I call upon, palliation is being practiced as the result of and under conditions of environmental injustice. This is another reason why death ethics cannot only be practiced by those communities most impacted; that would compound the injustice. Practitioners—both fictional and nonfictional—bear the burden of knowing that those under their care should not have to suffer and ultimately die in this way at this time. Importantly, this knowledge sits differently with practitioners depending upon which

30. Novik, *Uprooted*, 411–12.

31. In Slavic folklore Baba Yaga is known as a powerful witch or death/nature deity who was (and to some extent still is) representative of the Crone aspect of the Goddess. Crones are commonly associated with endings, transformations, and death, as well as numerous other responsibilities that require deep wisdom.

32. Novik, *Uprooted*, 427.

communities they belong to. Thus, in addition to the kinds of affective work that end-of-life care calls for under more ideal circumstances, there is also the recognition and/or experience of moral failure to contend with. Palliation may be the least that the dying deserve, but those who practice palliation in the (post)apocalypse are keenly aware that the dying deserve more than diminished suffering and a good or better death.

The moral failure of palliation is particularly pronounced when death on one's own terms is chosen as the preferred alternative to a worse or living death. This dynamic is certainly present in Agnieszka's work, but it is developed with far more political and emotional nuance in the Afrofuturist narratives of Hopkinson and Jemisin.³³ Building off the legacy of Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, and others,³⁴ Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy is a science fiction tour de force that highlights the intersections of gendered, racialized, colonial, heteronormative, and environmental violence and injustice through the lens of Afrofuturism. These novels take place in a world of tectonic upheaval literally held together by an enslaved class of humans with the ability to work magic on rock and earth. The efforts of these mages or "orogenes," however, is not enough to hold back massive geologic ruptures that the "Evil Earth" manages to unleash every few hundred years, triggering cataclysmic climate changes known as "fifth seasons." As a result, the dominant society has been organized around making oneself and one's community as fit as possible in preparation. The events of the trilogy begin with the deliberate triggering of an unprecedentedly devastating fifth season and a father's murder of his young son who is discovered to be an orogene. The plot of the trilogy follows the boy's mother, Essun, in search of her daughter, Nassun, who has been abducted by her father in the wake of the murder. Unfolding across a vast supercontinent and various decades and millennia, Essun's and Nassun's stories force readers to confront the repeated world endings experienced by enslaved and marginalized persons as well as the question of whether those whose worlds have ended repeatedly have any obligation, given the choice, to keep the larger world from burning. This choice is put before several orogenes throughout the novels, ultimately culminating in Nassun's decision to allow the scattered fragments of humanity to remake the world together. The novels situate climate change as one among many sorts of apocalypses to unfold within and from complex assemblages of oppressive power structures. The world has ended just as surely when a young Essun takes the life of her own child rather than see him become enslaved (as she was) as when the child's father (Alabaster) tears a continent asunder years later. And, so, when Essun discovers that the (sentient) Earth is just another parent whose child (the moon) has been ripped away from them, she fights tooth and nail for a solution that will see them both reunited with their offspring, for a future in which both can flourish.

33. Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*; Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*; Jemisin, *Fifth Season*; Jemisin, *Obeisance Gate*; Jemisin, *Stone Sky*.

34. Octavia Butler and Ursula K. Le Guin have also deeply influenced this project.

Afrofuturism redescribes such deaths, in part, by employing a palliative lens. These redescrptions are rooted in the narratives (e.g., Toni Morrison's *Beloved*) and lived realities of Black parents who chose to end their children's lives rather than risk their enslavement or reenslavement. In another of Hopkinson's novels, *Midnight Robber*, for example, when an (Indigenous) alien enclave is exposed to human discovery, the douen community chooses to cut down the massive "daddy tree" with and upon whom they made their home for generations instead of letting them fall into human hands.³⁵ The Broken Earth trilogy takes up this devastating narrative as one of its central themes through Essun's story.³⁶ This is not to say that these or other Afrofuturist texts are uncomplicatedly representing or "advancing" palliation as such. In fact, the climax of Jemisin's trilogy revolves around Essun's refusal to take the life of her remaining child even if it means the destruction of the world, choosing instead to sacrifice her own (human) life to save Nassun, the Evil Earth, and many others besides. However, it feels dishonest to excise the most tragic instances of palliation from the overall narrative of how these science fiction texts go about redescribing this ethical dimension. The choice to end the lives of those under one's care to preempt further or worse suffering cannot be easily categorized as positive or negative examples of palliation. Rather, this dynamic is an important component of what it means to understand palliation as both a response to and instantiation of unavoidable moral failure. And though a well-established theme of Black literature, its linkage through Afrofuturism to climate change does much to help put the politics of this environmental phenomenon—and its associated death ethics—in perspective.

In general, the idea or practice of "choosing" death highlights a larger tension within the discourse of palliation, especially as it relates to environmental and political transformation. In both the fictional and real worlds there is considerable disagreement regarding how much facilitation of dying and death is appropriate or ethical. While figures like *Icarus Descending's* Metatron—the rebellion leader who builds an "ark" and, when the time is ripe, commands that his followers "harvest what remains of this poison earth and leave it to be burned clean . . . freed from its suffering"—are not to be lauded or emulated, the idea of unearthing and burning out corruption and injustice is readily entertained.³⁷ From Agnieszka's incineration of the bewitched heart-trees to Jemisin's orogene triggered tectonic cataclysm, the message that proactively facilitating endings or deaths may be acceptable—perhaps even necessary—under the right conditions comes through clearly. Sussing out and navigating the complexities of such palliative work—in either narrative or practice—requires eco-politics that are nuanced and contextually informed. In *Midnight Robber*, the human inhabitants of New Half-Way Tree bring with them all sorts of hitchhikers when pushed through the dimensional

35. Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*.

36. Jemisin, *Obelisk Gate*; Jemisin, *Stone Sky*.

37. Hand, *Icarus Descending*, 329, 331.

veil. Some manifest as “invasive” species (e.g., grains, fruits, livestock). Interestingly, however, the douen choose not to eradicate these new lifeforms across the board. Instead, they work to incorporate these beings into native ecosystems and develop relationships with them such that they can leverage more power among the humans.³⁸

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Kimmerer writes, “To most people, an invasive species represents losses in a landscape, the empty spaces to be filled by something else. To those who carry the responsibility of an ancient relationship, the empty niche means empty hands and a hole in the collective heart.”³⁹ At the same time, she considers the contrast between plantain and kudzu, both relative newcomers to Turtle Island. While the plantain has worked with others to equitably integrate and become “naturalized,” kudzu is (thus far) only interested in colonizing. Neither Hopkinson nor Kimmerer outline universal guidelines for dealing with so-called invasive species, focusing instead upon the relational and ecological dynamics that determine tragedy and success under particular circumstances. Both seem keenly aware of the potential for palliation to go too far under the guise of something like past-oriented environmentalism. This is a real risk that we cannot lose sight of it. That there are no easy answers on offer when it comes to facilitating what we might call “adaptive palliation” is another reminder that this will never be a practice that feels uncomplicatedly good (or bad), nor one that always allows us to walk away with our hands clean.

No less tragic are those situations in which the only choice is between a worse and a better death. I conclude this section by highlighting some of the primary themes that occur within this literature when it comes to dying well under (post)apocalyptic conditions. For one, both those receiving and providing palliation reflect that it is important for the dying to feel seen and cared for, as, for example, Agnieszka’s vigil for the heart-trees or the douen’s ritual for the daddy tree demonstrate. Maintaining relationships through and beyond death is likewise regarded as part of dying well. For instance, even though bowhead whales may no longer be capable providing the Inupiaq with their bodies and their songs, some Inupiaq are working to reverse the relationship and give music back to the whales through the drumming that once called them to whalers.⁴⁰ Though this crucial ecological and cultural partner may leave the Inupiaq, the relationship will be maintained in some form. Relatedly, another component of palliation is receiving assurance that your ecological partners and loved ones will be well cared for even or especially when, as may be the case with the bowheads, you will have no descendants to carry on your work.

Perhaps the most common theme among various practitioners and narratives is that dying well requires the acknowledgment of death from those offering or providing palliation. Williams’s struggle to do just this is deeply illustrative: “I have refused to

38. Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*.

39. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

40. Sakakibara, “No Whale, No Music.”

believe that Mother will die. And by denying her cancer, even her death, I deny her life. Denial stops us from listening. I cannot hear what Mother is saying. I can only hear what I want. . . . We had wanted everything back to its original shape. We had wanted a cure for Mother for ourselves, so we could get on with our lives. What we had forgotten was that she was living hers.”⁴¹ Williams’s mother reminds her that “to keep hoping for life in the midst of letting go is to rob [her] of the moment [she is] in.”⁴² Only after Williams acknowledges that her mother is in fact dying can she fully become midwife to her death. At the same time, in Williams’s writing and elsewhere there is a pronounced tension between the responsibility to acknowledge dying and the danger of giving up too soon. Feeling this pull is also an integral part of practicing palliation, especially for the unjustly dying and departing; this is one tension that cannot and should not be resolved.

Relationship to Remembrance and Transformation

The work of honoring and caring for the recently dead often begins by tending to their remains, a task that, insofar as it pertains to the sense of a good or better death, belongs to palliation as well. Unable to walk past a dead swan she finds on the shores of Salt Lake, Williams takes time for the deceased.

Its body lay contorted on the beach like an abandoned lover. . . . I knelt beside the bird, took off my deerskin gloves, and began smoothing feathers. I lifted both wings out from under its belly and spread them on the sand. Untangling the long neck which was wrapped around itself was more difficult, but finally I was able to straighten it, resting the swan’s chin flat against the shore. The small dark eyes had sunk behind the yellow lores. It was a whistling swan. I looked for two black stones, found them, and placed them over the eyes like coins. They held. Using my own saliva as my mother and grandmother had done to wash my face, I washed the swan’s black bill and feet until they shone like patent leather.⁴³

Such scenes are extremely common across the narratives and practices I engage.

The Inupiaq, to cite another example, accept responsibility for retrieving and cleaning the bodies of decomposing bowhead whales trapped beneath the ice even though they are counted toward the annual quota set by the International Whaling Commission despite being inedible.⁴⁴ One need only look to the public actions of orca mother Tahlequah to appreciate how impactful practicing death ethics with or for the bodies of the deceased can be when undertaken in such a way as to dare others to forget. Tahlequah’s seventeen-day-long public mourning of her dead calf was coupled with the support she garnered from her pod, local researchers, and many human onlookers internationally.

41. Williams, *Refuge*, 68, 75–76.

42. Williams, *Refuge*, 161.

43. Williams, *Refuge*, 121–22.

44. Sakakibara, “No Whale, No Music.”

Tahlequah is one of seventy-five southern-resident orcas in the Pacific Northwest, a community that has lost close to two-thirds of its calves in recent years.⁴⁵ After the death of her infant less than an hour after birth, Tahlequah repeatedly raised the calf to the surface with her rostrum (as new orca mothers commonly do), eventually choosing to balance the body on her head or fin. Every time her child slipped into the water, Tahlequah would take several deep breaths and dive deep to retrieve the body. Lagging behind her pod, the other orcas took turns swimming alongside Tahlequah and, after the first week, carrying the calf so that she could occasionally hunt. Researchers familiar with this pod kept their own around-the-clock vigil keeping other boats away and remarking, “We are respectfully monitoring from a distance, we are committed, we are here to help her through this.”⁴⁶ To many with and without cetacean expertise it was clear that Tahlequah was a mother calling public and human attention to her loss, with one researcher even commenting, “Maybe this is her protest. I told the governor it was going to happen. More and more will happen. We are losing them. . . . The whales are not going to stand for it.”⁴⁷ Tahlequah and her pod continued the vigil for over two weeks, sparking new debate about marine stewardship in the region.

When physical remains are absent, de-emphasized, or represented through land, the focus shifts to memory work or, as I mostly refer to this ethical dimension and practice, remembrance. In addition to bolstering certain elements of palliation such as the caretaking of relationships, remembrance is what the unjustly dead are owed. Though remembrance manifests in a variety of ways depending upon who is practicing it, for whom, and in what contexts, the importance of remembering well in the (post)apocalypse is evident in and through science fiction narratives and lived practices alike. The dead are kept alive or “held” in memory so that they can be honored and well cared for. The alternative—to actively or passively forget these beings and the unjust conditions of their deaths—is regarded as an egregious moral failure. And while the narratives and texts that I work with have much to say about this work, an in-depth analysis of remembrance will have to wait for another day. The remainder of this section considers the commonalities between palliation and remembrance and how they build toward a public death ethics together.

To begin with, both ethics go beyond the affective. This is not to discount the important work being done with ecological grief.⁴⁸ Though solastalgia—the place-based distress caused by environmental change—manifests in many of the texts I draw upon, it is often overlooked within environmental literatures that tend to focus on guilty grief. Also described as “a form of homesickness while still in place, and as a type of grief

45. Mapes, “Southern-Resident Killer Whales.”

46. Mapes, “Southern-Resident Killer Whales.”

47. Mapes, “Southern-Resident Killer Whales.”

48. Askland and Bunn, “Lived Experiences of Environmental Change”; Cunsolo and Ellis, “Ecological Grief.”

over the loss of a healthy place or a thriving ecosystem,” solastalgia manifests particularly strongly for the Indigenous practitioners and authors whose work informs my own (e.g., Leslie Marmon Silko, Robin Kimmerer, Lee Maracle, and the Inupiaq).⁴⁹ Importantly, scholars who specialize in solastalgia do not view it as giving in to inaction. Rather, ecological grief can be catalyzing and collectively “may coalesce into a strengthened sense of love and commitment to the places, ecosystems and species that inspire, nurture and sustain us.”⁵⁰ Solastalgia by itself, however, does not capture the imperative of action and justice readily apparent in the death ethics captured or motivated by the narratives and lived practices considered here. Rather, I—and the texts I rely upon—understand palliation and remembrance as practices with affective dimensions rather than as emotional or psychological states or orientations. This literature challenges forms of environmentalism that either (a) dismiss the theoretical or practical relevance of affect or (b) center the emotions of the privileged in lieu of action. At the same time, these texts draw attention to how linking environmental ethics for the dead and the dying too firmly to the affective dimensions of loss risks limiting who can be part of this work, given that genuine mourning—through or after death—may require certain intimacies and relationalities not widely available.⁵¹

For in the end, not only are palliation and remembrance practices, they are situated, expert practices. Palliative work requires carefully cultivated knowledge of how best to ease the suffering of and provide good or better deaths for particular beings, entities, or communities. Remembrance, too, depends upon knowing who the dead were in life. Raw, untethered knowledge is not enough, however, for death ethics practitioners must hone their skills. When discussing Ti-Jeanne’s gift, Gros-Jeanne explains, “It mean [sic] you could ease people passing, light the way for them. For them to cross over from this world or the next. But I go have to train you.”⁵² Indeed, those skilled in remembrance and palliation are often tasked with using their hard-won expertise to help others in their communities to practice or support the work; for example, Agnieszka’s efforts to involve both the forest-dwellers and human villagers in palliation and rehabilitation of the heart-trees.⁵³ Guiding others—as demonstrated by the scientists familiar with Tahlequah—to understand the eco-political contexts in which these deaths occur is a crucial aspect of this process. For these experts are not trained to relate to palliative and

49. Cunsolo and Ellis, “Ecological Grief.”

50. Cunsolo and Ellis, “Ecological Grief.”

51. Mitchell, “Beyond Biodiversity and Species”; Gibson, “Climate Justice.” A key limiting factor here is that the knowledge needed to practice palliation and remembrance well is produced by engaging attentively and equitably with one’s ecological partners. The lack of such engagement, however, is a prominent characteristic of the forms of life driving global climate change and mass extinction. Any call for palliative environmental care and remembrance must therefore grapple with this deficit. For death ethics to be truly working toward climate justice, their practice must neither exclude nor unjustly burden those individuals or communities disproportionately vulnerable to or harmed by global climate change.

52. Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*, 103.

53. Novik, *Uprooted*.

remembrance work abstractly but as practices for known beings in particular places, by those with situated perspectives, and for particular publics.⁵⁴ This need not mean that these ethics or practitioners remain or become isolated. Those attending to the dead and the dying in the time of climate change—and other environmental (post)apocalypses—may be situated on different lands and attending to various overlapping or divergent ecological partners, but they can and, at times, do choose to converge their perspectives and expertise.

It helps that collaboration is already built into the ethical weft and warp of these death ethics. Palliation and remembrance are intimate practices that demand to be practiced with another or others rather than as something done for them without their input or consent. As dialogic interspecies ethics for navigating the after- and end-of-life, palliation and remembrance must be attentive not only to individuals and species but their ecological partners and their larger significance.⁵⁵ In fact, the Inupiaq have adapted their drumming practices to maintain their relationships to bowheads (via palliation) even as the answers articulated by the whales and their environs are increasingly to deny the harvest. As Inupiaq elder George Ahmaogak Sr. explains,

Human-whale spirituality will be changing. If our contact with the whale is kept influenced by global warming, our spirituality will soon start eroding. Now we must think, feel, and see like a whale to retain our relation. Feeling about the whale and oneness with the animal keep us [both humans and whales] alive, and this can be continued with the re-recognition of our traditional events like drum music.⁵⁶

Both palliation and remembrance are *relational* ethics;⁵⁷ in addition to being practiced *with* another or others, these are approaches that acknowledge not only our relationality but our *relationships* as the subject of ethics. The tangible, relational quality of death ethics is especially important for extinct beings, regarding whom environmentalism has an even greater tendency to represent abstractly or symbolically, for example, as mascots, martyrs, names to recite, species identities and norms, cautionary tales, and so on.

Beyond the standard implications of such an ethics (e.g., interdependence, embodied, situated, reciprocity, dialogue), under conditions of environmental injustice, relational interspecies ethics for the dead and the dying function to highlight not only which relations to cherish and maintain but also those to be disavowed. “A discussion between a Salish Wolf rememberer and a Salish Frog rememberer, as well as between

54. Maracle, *Memory Serves*.

55. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

56. Sakakibara, ““No Whale, No Music,”” 299.

57. See, e.g., Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*; Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking*; Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Doan and Sherwin, “Relational Solidarity and Climate Change.” Relational ethics/autonomy is also a major theme within feminist bioethics, especially with regard to nursing and end of life care; see, e.g., Baylis, Kenny, and Sherwin, “Relational Account of Public Health Ethics”; Schicktanz et al., “Dying Well in Nursing Homes.”

them and the wolves and frogs they are related to,” remarks Maracle, “reveals that the relation among swamps, insects, humans and health is critical from a historical perspective in order to understand the decline of swamp life on the West Coast and its relationship to the decline of public and environmental health and human and salmon suicide.”⁵⁸ In their own ways, practitioners of both palliation and remembrance work to publicly bear witness to the dying and the dead *and* the injustice of their deaths. *Uprooted*'s Agnieszka narrates,

I stood clear and kindled [the heart-tree] with a word. Then I sat heavily and wiped my hands on the grass as well as I could, and pulled my knees up to my chest. The walkers folded their legs neatly and sat around me. The tree didn't thrash or shriek, already more than half gone; it went up quickly and burned without much smoke. Flakes of ash fell on the damp ground and melted into it like early snowflakes. They landed on my bare arms sometimes, not big enough to burn, just tiny sparks. I didn't back away. We were the only mourners the tree and its dreamers had left.⁵⁹

Back among the human valley-folk, Agnieszka works to reimagine—for herself and others—the Wood as something other than a malicious threat and the Wood-queen's actions as other than evil, a shift which requires the community to rethink their role in the conflict and relationship to the land. Here and elsewhere, bearing witness to the dying and dead builds upon the acknowledgment of death, adding a prophetic dimension. In other words, when practiced openly by those with sufficient expertise, palliation and remembrance are authoritative, inspired declarations for how the living should relate to the dead and each other. Given the conditions under which they are practiced, however, palliation and remembrance are not merely suggestive guides but imperatives for the present and the future. Across the texts I work with, the message is clear—attending to the dead and the dying are crucial aspects of *survival* in the (post)apocalypse for those who still live.

Narratives and practitioners alike intentionally link palliation and remembrance to the ethics of healing and transformation. Williams reflects at the beginning of her memoir, “Perhaps, I am telling this story in an attempt to heal myself, to confront what I do not know, to create a path for myself with the idea that ‘memory is the only way home.’ I have been in retreat. This story is my return.”⁶⁰ Essun's story arc across the entire *Broken Earth* trilogy exemplifies a fantastical version of just such a journey.⁶¹ After Essun sacrifices her human life, readers learn that every piece of trilogy's narration has been the story of Essun's life told back to her as she metamorphosizes so that she can process her losses and remember her world upon reawakening. This kind of processing through and beyond death is one of the ways that individuals and communities care for

58. Maracle, *Memory Serves*, 62.

59. Novik, *Uprooted*, 426

60. Williams, *Refuge*, 1, 4.

61. Jemisin, *Fifth Season*; Jemisin, *Obelisk Gate*; Jemisin, *Stone Sky*.

themselves in the aftermath of tragedy, trauma, and injustice. These ethics and practices help survivors heal from loss so that they have the emotional, practical, and spiritual resources to do what is necessary moving forward.

By situating deaths and departures within the larger eco-political contexts and traumas to which they belong, palliation and remembrance also aid in determining the trajectory of this forward motion. Maracle explains,

To re-member is, first, directional. Indigenous people commit to memory those aspects of those events that suit the direction we are moving in or the direction we want to move in if a shift is occurring. . . . We are called upon to remember the past and redetermine our direction. If we had a difficult past we are expected to let go of the governing feelings of that past and remember the losses created by the difficulty so that we may create a different path. In the process we become intimate with both the difficulty and ourselves in the context of this difficulty. . . . Some deep part of our memory knows the future depends on us and what we choose to remember.⁶²

Awakened to her new existence equipped with the memories—hers and others’—of who she was and how the Evil Earth came to be, Essun hits the ground running. Jemisin concludes the Broken Earth trilogy with the following dialogue:

Hoa: What do you want?

Essun: I want the world to be better.

H: Then let’s go make it better.

E: Just like that?

H: It might take some time.

E: I don’t think I’m very patient.

Don’t be patient. Don’t ever be. This is the way a new world begins.

H: Neither am I. . . . So let’s get to it.⁶³

Indigenous, Afrofuturist, or otherwise, how could palliative and remembrance practices that fully bear witness to the unjustly dying and dead not demand different environmental trajectories? Indeed, the texts that I engage situate environmental death ethics and environmental justice for the living and those yet-to-be as complementary dimensions of transformative eco-politics, not separate endeavors. When done right, palliation and remembrance are key components of intergenerational environmental praxis. This dynamic shines clearly in Ti-Jeanne’s journey in *Brown Girl in the Ring*.⁶⁴ In her quest to overcome necromantic and economic exploitation, Ti-Jeanne must become familiar not only with Legbara (i.e., the Prince of the Cemetery) but with his

62. Maracle, *Memory Serves*, 2, 8, 17.

63. Jemisin, *Stone Sky*, 398. The trilogy opens with, “Let’s start with the end of the world, why don’t we? Get it over and move on to more interesting things” (Jemisin, *Fifth Season*).

64. Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring*.

life-driven aspect Eshu, guardian of the crossroads. Even after she succeeds, Legbara/Eshu does not let Ti-Jeanne off the hook, sending the sick to her door thereby setting her on Gros-Jeanne's path of healing. In so doing, Hopkinson encourages readers to attend to crossroads not simply as finite intangible moments of crisis but as ecological phenomena—terrain that living and dying beings must navigate together through daily practice. In the nonfictional world, Inupiaq drummers demonstrate how seamless the work of palliation, remembrance, and transformation can be when previous interspecies musical and cultural practices are reworked for adapting to environmental transformation.⁶⁵

The climax of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* depends upon the realization of this holism.⁶⁶ Exploring healing and loss through nonlinear, place-based temporality, Silko's narrative unfolds as both a depiction and manifestation of ceremony for generations of Laguna Pueblo and their long-standing ecological relations, the dead and the dying included. Against a landscape as rife with Indigenous survivance as with the scars of colonialism (e.g., mine tailings, the Trinity test site for the first atom bomb, sexual violence, psychological and spiritual trauma, drought), the protagonist—a “battle fatigued” WWII veteran and Laguna “halfbreed” named Tayo—struggles to practice and accept healing across numerous temporal vectors. The successful completion of his journey depends heavily upon Tayo's ability to mourn the dead, serve their memories, and find ways for them to live on through him, much of which he is only able to accomplish by carefully reestablishing relationships with the land. The novel frames the antagonistic forces Tayo is up against through the ironic metaphor of white people's creation via Indigenous witches' attempts to one-up each other's depravity, thereby highlighting the linkages between colonialism and environmental injustice without erasing, essentializing, or hypervictimizing Indigenous peoples.⁶⁷ The climax of this conflict arrives as a temporal nexus—with multiple viable timelines—wherein, despite being lured near the Trinity Site and greatly tempted to continue its violent legacy, Tayo must repudiate the logics of witchcraft and colonialism in order to complete the ceremony he has been working toward. By resisting the trap to become “another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud,” and cede the story to the destroyers, Tayo succeeds in restoring himself, his people and home, and, in effect, the fate of the world.⁶⁸ Arriving at the point of convergence, Tayo “cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distance and time.”⁶⁹ If not for the fact that mainstream environmentalism and environmental

65. Sakakibara, “No Whale, No Music.”

66. Silko, *Ceremony*.

67. Vizenor, *Survivance*.

68. Silko, *Ceremony*, 235.

69. Silko, *Ceremony*, 229.

ethics have long neglected the dead and the dying, there would be little reason to analyze palliation and remembrance separately.⁷⁰

Toward Holistic Intergenerational Ethics

Ultimately, environmental palliation and remembrance productively trouble traditional intergenerational ethics and the notions of time, publics, and personhood that sustain them. I say “productively” for how they open up so many doors for the theory and practice of extinction ethics, death ethics, and environmental ethics in general. The question then becomes: where might we go from here? One path forward would be to follow the observation that death ethics and environmental justice for the living and future generations are not separate endeavors to its logical conclusion—that the dead, the dying, the living, and those yet-to-be are not only distinct generations of beings along a linear sequence but coexistent facets of every being.⁷¹ Put another way, for intergenerational ethics to be truly holistic they would need to not only recognize the fundamental interconnectedness of generations to each other but also how those generations manifest simultaneously in us.⁷² Using this framework, were I to relate to you ethically there is a sense in which I would regard you as a living, prior, and former being all at once. One of these dimensions may be emphasized over the others for any number of reasons, but they are still parts of an indivisible whole. Thus, when approached holistically in this sense, the historical failure of mainstream environmentalism to develop a robust death ethics neglects not only those who, along one temporal axis, have died before us but those facets of the living and those yet-to-be who will one day be dead.

What would be gained by reorienting intergenerational ethics and justice in such a way? For one, a holistic approach would allow environmental ethics to attend centrally to grief and death without becoming fatalistic. This is not an “all we need is death ethics” kind of approach. The dead would be part of any intergenerational ethics. Their integral presence in our ethics and politics would not be a mark of dystopia or apocalypse in and of itself. Such holism could also aid us in better relating across generations by lessening the adversarial mentality that is so prominent within the existing discourse. We would have many more options for framing these conversations than “us in the present” versus “them in the future.” This reorientation runs parallel to relational ethics across nontemporal dimensions. Lessening the “us versus them” dynamic of intergenerational justice would also enable environmental ethics to better attend to multiplicity and heterogeneity within generations, including across species. A relational approach,

70. Gibson, “Climate Justice.”

71. Gibson, “Holographic Ethics for Intergenerational Justice.”

72. My sense of holism here is inspired by the work of epistemologist Manulani Aluli Meyer, who puts forth the “trilogy” of knowing via body, mind, and spirit “not . . . as a linear sequence, rather as an event happening simultaneously and holographically” (94). Using quantum mechanics’ inseparable wholes and the metaphor of the holograph (i.e., a three-dimensional photograph every part of which contains all the information possessed by the whole), Meyer explores the fundamental interconnectedness of embodiment, environment, and knowing across space/time.

holistic intergenerational ethics would encourage us to connect to actual ancestors and descendants, broadly construed, rather than hypothetical generations. Lastly, for now, holistic intergenerational ethics would help environmental ethics attend to liminal spaces and beings more fully, in particular the dying and the soon-to-be. Extinction ethics and studies cannot afford to make the same mistake as so much of intergenerational climate discourse by reaching forward without looking “backward” and inward as well. With palliation for the dying and the dead, this article has only begun to scratch the surface of what holistic intergenerational ethics for extinction could be.

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