

On Fungi, Future, and Feminism: An Ecofeminist Analysis of M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines M.R. Carey's fascinating zombie novel, The Girl with All the Gifts. While scholars question whether or not a female-oriented apocalypse narrative can exist, as the genre is essentially rooted in imbalanced gender dynamics of ancient texts, this paper uses an ecofeminist critique to posit that the zombie apocalypse represented by Carey is a challenge toward the patriarchal values running rampant in the genre. This ecofeminist critique, while superficially offering a comforting message about female empowerment, actually offers a serious warning in regards to the insidious patriarchal structures that facilitate apocalypses.

There is a sense in which the zombie-apocalypse genre feels well trodden. Scenes of crumbling cities, makeshift weapons, tenacious survivors, and hoards of rotting undead have journeyed deep into the cultural consciousness of the Western world; and, similar to the myths of ancient Greece, zombie narratives—and indeed apocalypse narratives in a broader sense—are often a conservative holdout in a relatively more progressive culture, particularly in relation to issues of gender. The patterns are old, beginning with some of the earliest apocalyptic texts in the Western world. Mary Wilson Carpenter, in her studies on the Book of Revelation, even asks whether or not a feminist apocalypse is a “textual/sexual impossibility given not only the existence but the canonized status” of Revelation and its patriarchal gender dynamics (111).

However, a new trend has risen in the zombie genre, one in which undead literature has begun to investigate its more conservative habits. One such investigative book is M.R. Carey's 2014 novel, *The Girl with All the Gifts*. Set in a post-apocalyptic world of military bases, wild anarchists, and a zombifying fungal infection, *The Girl with All the Gifts* has all the trappings of any other run-of-the-mill zombie-apocalypse novel. However, Carey's novel, as one cover declares, is “the most original thriller you will read all year,” firmly setting itself apart from other zombie-apocalypse novels; this separation is partly by virtue of its main character: not the stereotypical action hero, but rather a sweet little girl named Melanie who loves reading Greek myths, spending time with her teacher Miss Justineau, and eating human flesh. Melanie is a zombie, a “hungry,” though she doesn't know it at first, and after

the military base she lives on is attacked, she must travel with her beloved teacher Miss Justineau to safety, avoiding the lethal curiosity of the scientist Dr. Caldwell, struggling to control her cravings for flesh, and learning what it means to be a cognizant, human-like hungry in a world of animosity and distrust.

While one must recognize that the zombie genre has challenged these conservative values before (George Romero's hallmark 1968 movie *Night of the Living Dead* depends upon strong metaphors of racial unease and othering), Carey's novel creates an entire world in which conservative—specifically, patriarchal—values are constantly called into question. While this novel's subjects of post-apocalypse, zombie infection, and environmental disaster might at first seem hopelessly disparate in an analytical sense, my investigation reveals a common ground in which these large ideas can take root—ecofeminism. Carey's novel, in a way, is an attempt to craft a zombie narrative that breaks away from the conservative, patriarchal values running rampant in the genre, and it does this by way of a strong ecofeminist critique, ecofeminism here being the idea that the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are connected within patriarchal systems. While the outlook of the ecofeminist critique may not always be optimistic, it effectively serves as a refutation of and a warning against the patriarchal structures that brought the novel's world to the apocalypse.

PROGRESSIVE, CONSERVATIVE, ZOMBIE:

THE UNDEAD BODY POLITICK

To label M.R. Carey's book as an ecofeminist novel is a decision that may find little intellectual sympathy in the present cultural moment, for indeed the term "ecofeminist" itself has fallen out of grace in the eye of third-wave feminism. While the juncture of feminism and environmental studies certainly still continues into the postmodern age, ecofeminism by name has become the subject of much derision. As researcher and activist Greta Gaard claims, "After the charges of gender essentialism—accurately leveled at cultural feminism, a branch of thought in both feminist and ecofeminist theory—most feminists working on the intersections of feminism and the environment thought it better to rename their approach to distinguish it from essentialist feminists and thereby gain a wider audience" (27). It is this "gender essentialism" that vilifies ecofeminism with third-wave, postmodern feminism, as ecofeminism's history of ascribing a universal truth to the female sex—specifically, the idea that women inherently share a closer bond with nature than men—grates heavily against postmodernity's insistence upon subjective truth—specifically,

in feminism's case, the idea that each human being of any sex or gender is an individual with his/her/their own truth, a truth which cannot be covered under umbrella statements like "women inherently do this" or "men inherently do that."

Gaard recognizes this contention, and she condemns ecofeminism's former gender essentialism, saying that it "[discredits] ecofeminism's diversity of arguments and standpoints"(31) and "[marginalizes] feminism's relevance" (32). However, she also casts doubt upon thought that would condemn ecofeminism to obsolescence, saying that certain types of backlash to ecofeminism is "antifeminist" (41). Essentially, Gaard calls for a revitalization of ecofeminist thought, minus the gender essentialism, because "an intersectional ecological-feminist approach frames" contemporary issues of resource disparity, healthcare access, and many other forms of worldwide inequality "in such a way that people can recognize common cause across boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, nation—and affords a basis for engaged theory, education, and activism" (44).

While such a discussion about ecofeminism might appear to be a digression from inquiries into *The Girl with All the Gifts*, it is through an ecofeminist approach that the book breaks away from the zombie genre's conservatism; therefore, to defend such a theory is to defend the validity of the novel's feminist approach to apocalypse. This paper does not operate under the gender essentialist assumption that all women share a connection to nature that is closer than that between nature and men, an assumption that Gaard firmly disapproves. Rather, this paper operates under the Gaard-approved and third-wave feminist-friendly assertion that, in patriarchies, the oppression of women and the oppression of nature share a common cause—the patriarchal habit of domination. This paper will call such a mentality ecofeminism.

Here, another aside must be made: while the zombie genre has conservative traditions, it would be a mistake to label it as a mouthpiece for any one ideology or political position. While conservative traditions are strong and most obvious, counter-currents do indeed run beneath the surface, as counter-cultures thrive beneath their oppressive mainstreams. This should not be surprising. According to Jeffery Jerome Cohen, a prominent scholar of monster theory, "the monstrous body is pure culture," existing "as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (4). The monster of the zombie is no different, except perhaps for the fact that the monstrous body of the zombie isn't only pure culture; it is an immensely broad reflection of pure culture. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz, in their introduction to *Generation Zombie*, claim that the zombie is

“a privileged object of cultural studies,” one with a “far more flexible metaphoricality” than other monsters of the Western world (12). Throughout its literary career, the zombie has been everything: a Haitian slave created by a witch doctor, a lurching night walker in capitalist America, a disease-stricken cannibal with super strength and speed, etc. The zombie exists in “low culture” forms like comics and in “high culture” forms like the Jane Austen-inspired *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009). The horrifying mob sameness of the zombie hoard in *Night of the Living Dead* can be a critique on communism or on capitalism, depending on the reading. In this vein, Boluk and Lenz affirm such a thematic universality by saying that zombies are used as “vehicles for expressing anxieties surrounding class, race, gender, and sexuality;” in other words, zombies have the honor of being locales of terror for just about everything (12).

The conservative nature of zombie literature becomes most apparent when the genre borrows conventions from its cousin and literary partner-in-crime—the well-loved tradition of post-apocalyptic narratives. The appearance of the zombie regularly, if not implicitly, occurs in tandem with themes of societal collapse and of civilization’s end, and civilization’s end is seldom associated with the type of world that upholds progressive ideals. Specifically, societal collapse often marks a return to patriarchal paradigms that social structures have presumably tamed heretofore. Violence and power are once again the measure of worth. Most importantly in the conversation about ecofeminism, “the problematic position of sex, and particularly of women’s sexuality, is an enduring feature of apocalyptic discourse” (Berger 11). James Berger, in his book *After the End*, even goes so far as to say that “there is an important strand of apocalyptic imagining that seeks to destroy the world expressly in order to eliminate female sexuality” (11). In this sense, Berger’s statements are reminiscent of Carpenter’s: both acknowledge the misogyny present in apocalyptic culture. It is this misogyny that *The Girl with All the Gifts* must face while establishing itself as an ecofeminist piece.

So why is it that zombie culture and post-apocalyptic narratives find so much common ground thematically? The easiest answer is that patterns found in the threat of an imagined, fictional zombie outbreak closely mirror patterns that would appear during a serious apocalyptic scenario. Zombies wreak havoc on the power of governmental systems, causing societal breakdown; zombies create unstable food lines; zombies drive rooted human beings out of their comfortable homes and into urban and natural wildernesses. How different are these zombie-related hazards from the dangers posed by real apocalyptic situations like civil war, foreign invasion, climate change, or epidemic?

The last threat of this list is perhaps the apocalyptic scenario most closely related to the narrative of zombie outbreak. While Boluk and Lenz profess that “the zombie threat did not always rely on anxiety generated by viral outbreak,” much of the undead literature in the past century has indeed reflected that anxiety (3). This fear becomes most blatant in more modern iterations of the zombie. As Boluk and Lenz say, “While lumbering, Romero-style zombies effectively tapped into mid-twentieth-century contagion paranoia, the apocalyptic terror of the living dead was replaced in films such as *28 Days Later* (2002) and *Resident Evil* (2002) with a more explicitly biological model of viral infection” (6). In other words, zombies that were once mere metaphors for plague became plague themselves, and with this evolution of zombie as supernatural to zombie as natural, the zombie-apocalypse narrative became readily positioned to question its more conservative values. The genre itself was primed for an ideological transformation—or, more thematically appropriate, an ideological mutation. *The Girl with All the Gifts*, with its heavy ecofeminist subtexts, stands inevitably as the culmination of these shifts and the offspring of this mutation.

BIOPUNK: THE ECOFEMINIST CONNECTION

How does a zombie plague begin? How does any apocalyptic plague begin? With human technology so advanced as to stifle the apocalyptic glory of our species’ old microbiological boogeymen, there seems to be only a few options left for the diligent authors of zombie and plague literatures: one, have the plague be an ancient or unfamiliar disease (risen perhaps from the melting permafrost in Siberia) to which our modern human bodies have absolutely no resistance; or two, have the plague be a vicious mutation of one of humanity’s familiar, formerly contained diseases.

It is with this second plague option that the ecofeminist tendencies of zombie literature become most apparent. It should come as no surprise that humanity has long used natural frameworks to inflict harm upon itself, and plague is a well-loved weapon of this tradition: invading Europeans gave smallpox blankets to indigenous peoples in order to weaken their societies, and medieval history shows examples of invading armies hurling severed heads over castle walls in order to inflict disease upon the besieged people. In modern times, however, the ability of humanity to manipulate the natural framework of disease has reached shocking and terrifying levels. With the advent of biotechnology, humanity now has the power to create its final, ultimate microbiological boogeyman: a plague strong and vicious enough to wipe out all human life on the Earth. Why humanity would do this to itself is a matter for philosophy, but it is an incontestable fact that such

apocalyptic power has been created and employed before, as evidenced by the United States' use of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Just as atomic technology became a twentieth-century bogey, so has biotechnology become a twenty-first-century bogey. It just has yet to be used—publicly, at least.

Zombie literature of recent years expertly taps into this anxiety toward biotechnology. In the chapter “9/11 and the Wasted Lives of Posthuman Zombies” in his book *Biopunk Dystopias*, Lars Schmeink claims that

whereas most zombies of the twentieth century were what Kevin Boon has termed either “zombie drones” (the Haitian zombie) or “zombie ghouls” (Romero’s creation), many new millennial zombies such as those discussed here fall into the category of the ‘bio zombie’ . . . who turn into zombies through some biological agent (virus, bacteria, disease, chemical) and are thus a variant of biopunk’s representation of genetics as potentially reality-changing scientific progress. (207)

Biopunk, in the sense that Schmeink uses the term, is a particular type of science fiction that imagines the world reworked under the premise of advances in biotechnology (just as biopunk’s cousin, steampunk, reimagines the world reworked under the premise of advances in Victorian-era steam technology). In the above excerpt, he clearly tracks the progression of the zombie from its more supernatural origins to its modern, scientifically based iteration. His chapter additionally discusses the films *Resident Evil* and *28 Days Later*, both of which have a genetically-engineered virus as the cause of zombiism; the fungal infection in *The Girl with All the Gifts* is also implicitly stated as having been genetically engineered. By labeling the modern zombie as biopunk, Schmeink acknowledges the zombie genre as a vessel for expressing anxieties about modern biotechnology; in essence, the zombie genre has become a troubled rumination on what happens when humanity manipulates nature and produces far-reaching, unintended consequences.

And, according to the ecofeminist premise described previously, where there is the manipulation of nature, there is the manipulation of women. Because of the modern zombie genre’s decision to make zombiism the result of genetically-engineered plagues, it has opened itself to the full range of ecofeminist criticism.

Under this context, it is easy to read ecofeminism into any zombie literature that uses genetically engineered plagues to explain the appearance of the zombie itself. Such a reading, however, doesn’t necessarily make any particular novel an ecofeminist text. What, then, sets *The Girl with All the Gifts* apart from other works within the genre? Essentially, it is not merely its conductivity for ecofeminist criticism that makes it an ecofeminist piece;

rather, it is the text's use of these ecofeminist themes that sets the book up for such a conversation.

LET'S DESTROY THE WORLD, OR HAPPY ECOFEMINISM

Post-apocalyptic literature, including that of zombie apocalypse, has a longstanding custom of being demonstratively punitive; that is, writers of the genre often make examples of their imagined humanity by depicting the terror and sorrow that could be unleashed if a particular immoral societal bugaboo is allowed to snowball. “The study of the post apocalypse,” Berger says, “is a study of what disappears and what remains, and of how the remainder has been transformed” (7). Authors can make large statements about morality by choosing who or what survives the apocalypse. For example, in the Book of Revelation, what disappears is all that Christianity deems evil, and what remains are the beloved people of God; and this remainder has been transformed into perfect humanity, united forever in bliss with the Creator. While the Book of Revelation gathers a wide variation of opinions to itself, in one line of thinking, God destroys the world because humanity has become too evil to permit its further propagation; by this refinement through holy wrath, the text clearly shows what it perceives as evil and what it perceives as good.

So too can *The Girl with All the Gifts* be read as such a moral winnowing. For the beginning portion of the book, the action happens at a military base called Hotel Echo, where scientists are conducting experiments on highly-functioning child zombies—zombies here being called “hungries”—in order to find a cure that will save the human population. Melanie is one of these child hungries, living out her life in a predictable pattern of nights spent alone in her cell, her weekly feedings, and her daily classes, one of which is taught by her favorite teacher, who she loves with near-adoration—Miss Justineau. One eventful day, Dr. Caldwell, the lead scientist at the base, takes Melanie into her laboratory and intends to dissect her; while Miss Justineau is making an attempt to rescue Melanie from Dr. Caldwell, a group of anarchists called “junkers” attacks the military base, using hungries as a siege weapon. Melanie, Miss Justineau, Dr. Caldwell, experienced soldier Sergeant Parks, and young soldier Private Gallagher all survive the attack and start toward Beacon, a large military base where they hope to find safety. But to find safety, they must cross a wasteland of junkers and hungries. Under this plot framework, Carey begins to insert criticism on the militarized world that humanity has created for itself, a world that, while nominally necessary for survival, has not functioned in the wisest or the most humane ways. At first,

the critiques come very subtly. For example, while journeying through the wasteland, Sergeant Parks contemplates some of the ways in which authorities tried to contain the zombie during the early days of societal collapse:

In the first days and weeks after the Breakdown, the UK government, like a whole lot of others, thought they could contain the infection by locking down the civilian population. Not surprisingly, this didn't stop people running like rats when they saw what was happening. Thousands, maybe millions, tried to get out of London along the north-south arteries, the A1 and the M1. The authorities responded ruthlessly, first with military roadblocks and then with targeted airstrikes. (Carey 167)

While this is a fairly bleak recollection, Sergeant Parks' reflections don't offer much judgment; these, for him, seem to be sad but necessary measures the government took in an effort to contain the worst of the zombie plague. Not every character possesses the same mentality toward these actions, however; later in the novel, Miss Justineau, who has spent much of the novel defending Melanie's personhood to the rest of the survival party, unashamedly offers her opinions on the government's past actions:

They're moving now through a burn shadow, another artifact of the Breakdown. Before the government fell apart entirely, it passed a whole series of badly thought-out emergency orders, one of which involved chemical incendiaries sprayed from helicopter gunships to create cauterised [sic] zones that were guaranteed free from hungries. Uninfected civilians were warned in advance by sirens and looped messages, but a lot of them died anyway, because they weren't free to move when the choppers flew in. The hungries, though, they ran ahead of the flame-throwers like roaches when the light goes on . . . It's more than twenty years on, and still nothing grows here, not even the hardest and most bad-ass of weeds. Nature's way of saying she's not stupid enough to be caught like that twice over . . . Parks hears [Melanie] asking Justineau what happened here. Justineau makes heavy weather of the question, even though it's an easy one. *We couldn't kill the hungries, so we killed ourselves. That was always our favourite [sic] party trick.* (Carey 239-240)

This passage, while long, offers much insight into how ecofeminist themes are being handled in Carey's novel. For one, Miss Justineau is completely disapproving of the violence that the military used in the early days of societal collapse; to her, it seems to be an extension of the suspicious, hateful tendencies that characterized human relationships on the societal level before the Breakdown. This militarized world is something she completely damns. Interestingly enough, it is not only the human that this militarized world has

destroyed in this passage: the violence has also destroyed wide swaths of nature, so that even weeds are no longer able to grow in these sites of destruction. While nature and humanity are often seen as separate entities, this passage delineates clear connections between the abolition of one and the abolition of the other.

Further ecofeminist themes are developed when Carey chooses to gender nature as female. The feminization of nature is something that ecofeminists have long found problematic, as Cynthia Belmont details in her article, “Ecofeminism and the Natural Disaster Heroine”: “Disaster films often envision nature as female, as a mother—in this case, not a loving one who deserves our love in return, but rather an alienated adversary in a battle of good and evil” (358). As such, disaster narratives in which nature is considered female can be interpreted as metaphors in which the female is hated, feared, and ultimately mastered. The most shockingly misogynistic disaster-narrative metaphor that Belmont describes is that of the destruction of the Earth-threatening asteroid (which is at one point gendered as female) in *Armageddon* (1998):

The asteroid is drilled and implanted with a phallic nuclear warhead (which is at one point mounted by a crew member who spent his last night on Earth in a strip joint and who says, upon being disciplined, “I just wanted to feel the power between my legs”), and the drilling scenes are characterized by passionate resistance on the part of the asteroid. In one scene, the men are struggling to bore into a composite of iron and a recalcitrant mystery-metal never seen on Earth; the asteroid protests by roaring angrily, howling like an animal in pain, shooting hot gas at them through vents as they plunge nearer the core, and showering them with flying debris once they reach it. The drillers’ victory is sweetened by the asteroid’s putting up a good fight. (360)

This scene—while easily characterized as noble on a literal level—is, when taken in the context of the asteroid as feminine, an alarming metaphor of rape. And what’s more, “nature is a ‘bitch’ because she is angry at us for attempting to master her” (Belmont 359).

The Girl with All the Gifts, while it seems to originally play into these misogynistic trends offered by the traditional natural-disaster narrative (for the zombie-plague narrative is essentially a natural-disaster narrative), turns the trope on its head. The militarized world, which rests upon that patriarchal habit of domination, and the zombie plague, which comes under the jurisdiction of feminized nature, are at war, and the female is winning. Not only is feminized nature slowly destroying the military complex; it is also pointing out the fundamental flaws of this patriarchal system by showing how quickly it turns to massacring

the innocent as soon as pressure is applied.

In this vein, the end of *The Girl with All the Gifts* is the most telling development in this particular ecofeminist reading. Upon having found a group of intelligent hungries like herself and having learned that these intelligent hungries were second generation, produced by the mating of first generation hungries, Melanie convinces Sergeant Parks to set the seedpods of the zombie fungus ablaze. The seedpods, which can only release their spores under the heat of flame, erupt, and humanity, in the sense of *Homo sapiens sapiens*, ends. Mother Nature wins.

Melanie's justification for this decision is telling: by releasing the fungus, she has sacrificed the current generation of humanity for the next generation—the intelligent hungries who will be produced by their zombified parents. This, in a paradoxical way, was the only way to save humanity. In her own words:

If you keep shooting [the hungries] and cutting them up into pieces and throwing them into pits, nobody will be left to make a new world. Your people and the junker people will keep killing each other, and you'll both kill the hungries wherever you find them, and in the end the world will be empty. This way is better . . . the children will grow up, and they won't be the old kind of people but they won't be hungries . . . They'll be the next people. The ones who make everything okay again. (399)

Melanie ushers in the next wave of humanity, and she has high hopes for a more peaceful, utopian world. The only way humanity has hope, in the end, is by abandoning patriarchal systems of militarized violence and by allowing feminized nature to win and have her way. We can further see the ecofeminist implications of this circumstance in the final scene of the novel: Miss Justineau, the only survivor from old humanity, comes before a classroom of formerly feral, intelligent child hungries—which Melanie has rounded up and which she now leads—and begins to teach the children the alphabet. With such an ending, *The Girl with All the Gifts* potentially marks itself as an incredibly empowering ecofeminist piece: women destroy the world's violent patriarchal structures, and women recreate the world's structures anew.

However, while it would be easy and pleasant to end the ecofeminist conversation on an empowering note, such a discussion does not take all angles into account, particularly where the main character, Melanie, is involved. Apart from being the protagonist, Melanie is arguably the most interesting person in the entire novel—an object of attraction and disgust, of affection and terror. And, sadly, once the character of Melanie is fully analyzed, the ecofeminist reading becomes less of an inspiration and more of a horror story.

**THE WORLD HAS ALREADY ENDED,
OR PESSIMISTIC ECOFEMINISM**

The study of Melanie's character best begins with a discussion about James Berger's conception of how time works in post-apocalyptic narratives. According to Berger, the genre is a place where "[t]emporal sequence becomes confused" (6). He goes on to say that "[a]pocalyptic writing takes us after the end, shows the signs prefiguring the end, the moment of obliteration, and the aftermath. The writer and the reader must be in both places at once, imagining the post-apocalyptic world and then paradoxically 'remembering the world as it was, as it is'" (6). A great example of this temporality bending, Berger claims, is the *Terminator* movie series, in which "[e]very action before the apocalypse is simultaneously an action after the apocalypse" (6). When John Connor's father embarks on a mission from the future to save Sarah Connor, he makes love to her and conceives John Connor, without whom the human race is doomed. Such a situation clearly shows the dependency that the post-apocalypse has on the pre-apocalypse.

Berger's argument about the temporality of the post-apocalypse goes further, however: "The narrative logic of apocalyptic writing is that post-apocalypse precede [sic] the apocalypse. This is also the logic of prophecy. The events envisioned have already occurred, have as good as occurred. Once the prophecy is uttered, all the rest is post-apocalypse" (6). What this means in relation to this paper is that in many apocalyptic narratives the prophecy of the apocalypse, in a way, is the beginning of the post-apocalypse, for once the prophecy is uttered, the world is effectively destroyed. The prophecy sets the world on a certain trajectory, and though the actual death wrought by the apocalyptic event in question has not yet occurred, humanity is as hopeless as it will be after the apocalypse: the same panic, pain, and despondency exist on both sides of doomsday.

In perfect relation to Berger's theories are the writings of Rebekah Sheldon in her book *The Child to Come*. In the book, Sheldon claims that "the future is the provenance of the child," and that the child is "freighted with expectations and anxieties about the future" after having been "tethered to a future that can no longer be taken for granted" (3). Most tellingly, Sheldon calls the child a societal resource and analyzes the "figurative and literal uses to which we put her in an age riven between unprecedented technoscientific control and equally unprecedented ecological disaster" (2-3). Essentially, Sheldon emphasizes the massive symbolic currency that the image of the child possesses in discussions about science, the environment, and the future.

For an ecofeminist reading of Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*, both Berger and

Sheldon's theories are indispensable. If the child represents anxiety over the environmental conditions of the future, as Sheldon says, then in some ways the child is a prophecy. And if the prophecy has been spoken, then according to Berger, the events that the prophecy foretells have already occurred. This has far-reaching implications for *The Girl with All the Gifts*, in particular in the character of Melanie, a child zombie: she is a subconscious reflection of environmental dread, a prophecy of doom for humanity's future. With this in mind, the character of Melanie becomes a central point of interest for an ecofeminist critique of *The Girl with All the Gifts*.

It is hard to think of a way in which Melanie could be a more appropriate symbolic manifestation of environmental dread. While the earlier ecofeminist analysis of the text compared the zombie plague to feminized nature, there is another way of approaching the plague analytically—as a feminized nature invaded by patriarchal systems and manipulated for their own benefit. After all, this zombie plague was genetically engineered, and ecofeminist theory posits that the domination over nature is an extension of the patriarchal habits of domination existing in modern society. What, then, is the decision of Melanie in the end? What is the victory of nature over humanity? Instead of an empowering dissolution of patriarchal structures and establishment of female community, the victory of nature represents the sweeping power of these patriarchal structures: Melanie, who is infected by a patriarchally manipulated plague, unleashes the patriarchally manipulated plague onto the world, dooming the original, feminized nature—of which humanity is often unwillingly and unknowingly a part—to deep, permanent change. And this permanent change, while being presented hopefully on Melanie's part, is ambiguous at best. Yes, the second-generation hungries will continue humanity, but innumerable human lives have been lost because of it. And yes, the second-generation hungries will continue humanity, but what will the nature of this continuation be? Will these hungries reproduce? If so, what will the population eat, now that there are no more humans? Melanie eats wild animal flesh, but can there possibly be enough animal flesh to go around? Will these undead denizens be immortal? Immortality is, after all, a mixed bag.

This pessimistic narrative about patriarchally modified nature finds a parallel in the behaviors of women throughout the novel. The most obvious example of this comes from Dr. Caldwell, a female scientist who wants to kill Melanie and run experiments on her in order to find a cure for the zombie plague. To make Dr. Caldwell a female emphasizes two very important points: one, that men and patriarchy are not synonyms; and two, that women can be carriers of patriarchal habits just as easily as men. With this in mind, it is important once

more to turn attention back to the character of Melanie. In the beginning of the novel, the girl writes a story that expresses her willingness to fight and kill monsters to save Miss Justineau if the need arose; while fighting and killing monsters to save a loved one is admirable in a way, there are heavy patriarchal subtexts in such a narrative.

Such subtexts carry through to the end of the novel, where Melanie has become the leader of the group of second-generation hungries; she becomes this leader not through generosity or diplomacy, but rather through killing these hungries' former leader and scaring the rest of them into submission. Were these actions necessary? Perhaps, but that does not make them any less violent. Melanie has established her leadership through the same patriarchal habit of domination. Like Melanie brings the patriarchally manipulated zombie plague into the new world, so too does she carry certain habits of patriarchy with her, therefore casting the end's inspiring female leadership into serious doubt: perhaps the female leadership will resume patriarchal habits; it just won't be called patriarchy. Perhaps the evils of the old system will merely get a female paint job and continue on as usual.

What is Melanie, then, as a representative of cultural anxiety? As a character, she is lovable, but as a symbol, she is horrific. She is Berger's prophecy of post-apocalypse, and that prophecy is one which proclaims that humanity and nature both have already become too affected by unhealthy patriarchal habits to ever live in a world without them. She is Sheldon's future child, and that future is one with irreparable scarring inflicted by the manipulation of nature and by the forces of violence. Melanie is inconceivably durable radioactive waste. Melanie is the suspicion and fear that insists upon human competition instead of human cooperation. While Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* seems at first to have created an inspiring vision of a more progressive apocalypse, the experiment becomes a pessimistic rumination on whether or not such an apocalypse could potentially occur. However, even these pessimistic ruminations are important conversations in the novel's ecofeminist critique, as they serve as negative examples of our potential future world and offer a startling wake-up call.

THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS: AN ECOFEMINIST CALL TO ACTION

To repeat a quote by Greta Gaard: "An intersectional ecological-feminist approach frames" contemporary issues of resource disparity, healthcare access, and many other forms of worldwide inequality "in such a way that people can recognize common cause across boundaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, nation—and affords a basis

for engaged theory, education, and activism” (44).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a unified theory in any field of study. This is ridiculously true for the humanities. Finding connections between large ideas like race, class, gender, sexuality, species, age, ability, and nation would daunt even the most eager of scholars. The theory of ecofeminism, however, claims to perform this task. In the way Marxism posits that inequalities are an issue of class, ecofeminism claims that inequalities are an issue of patriarchy. There are certain groups that would label such mentality as so-called “feminazism.” Why denounce men as the cause of all the world’s problems?

However, patriarchy is not men, and men are not patriarchy, and this is not a blame game. Ecofeminism only finds a pattern of oppression, and ecofeminism “affords a basis for engaged theory, education, and activism” (Gaard 44). This is good news. But it comes with a heavy sense of responsibility: if such a unified theory about inequality exists, then scholars and activists must begin to use that theory for change.

And change is vital, as illustrated by *The Girl with All the Gifts*. While Carey’s novel begins as an experiment to create a more progressive apocalypse, its story is essentially a demonstration of how patriarchal constructs collapse in on themselves again, and again, and again, harming and killing human beings with every structural tremor. This is demonstrated through the character of Melanie, who represents a dire prophecy about what could happen to humanity if such constructs are not abolished. Under ecofeminist analysis, which superficially offers inspiration while really offering unease, the text becomes a severe warning about the dangers of the patriarchal habits of domination over both nature and women. For if the threats posed to modern civilization are to be overcome, they will not be overcome by domination. Rather, they will be overcome by collaboration: males working with females, and humanity working with nature.

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